

WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS.

The Poet Traveler at Famous Gretna Green.

A Place, Folk and History Weirly Fascinating Alone from Their Woebegone, Vicious and Outrageous Character--Origin, Rise and Decay of This Once Notorious Court of Hymen--The First "Bishop of Gretna" and His Uncanny Successors--Gretna Marriages Still in Vogue--A Grotesque Ceremony.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE RECORD-UNION. Copyright, 1893. GRETNA, Scotland, September 7, 1893. Tramping in many portions of every shire of Scotland, where I have not found beauty or grandeur in scenery there has always been winsome antiquarian, historic or personal interest. Only one spot has proven prouder, squalid and forlorn to such a degree that its very beggarliness is startling, its venality ferocious and its miserable folk and history so uncanny and infamous that place, folk and history are weirdly fascinating.

In what may be termed the scandalous romantic literature of Britain, no other place has occupied such a prominent and even world-wide notoriety. It has for nearly 150 years trailed through every form of romance and story; infested every manner of newspaper travesty; burdened every page of popular ballad and rhyme; intruded itself into noble as well as low society; stalked across the stage in tragedy and comedy; engaged the pen of as great a poet and dramatist as John Keats; his well-known elegy to David Laing, the closing lines of which are--

"I had I command that should'st have gone thy ways In change and pair--and in Perle Chant! and it has even entered without reverence the presence of grave chancellors to pursue its course of dishonor and dispute in the highest courts of three kingdoms. In fact, in the entire English-speaking world the name of Gretna Green and the notion of Gretna Green marriages are as familiar to all classes as is the commonest nursery rhyme.

Yet either in America or in Britain who can give the origin of the commonest nursery rhyme, what originally really made the place famous or infamous, the conditions continuing its notoriety, whether these conditions have been removed, or when Gretna Green itself has really placed with geographical limitations, or an interesting myth growing out of the vagaries and whimsies of mortal literature. Illustrative of this is the indignant assertion made to me a short time since by a most eminent clergyman of Glasgow that Gretna Green marriages were abolished by a half century ago, and that probably not an hundred couples were ever married at Gretna as alleged by popular tradition! On the contrary, nearer 10,000 couples have been married at Gretna Green--Gretna Green marriages of the olden sort, with very slight modification, are constantly being "solemnized" at the present time, and, as a matter of fact, there is record of not fewer than 171,717 marriages subsequent to the passage of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's infamous Marriage Act, but the circumstances of this affair were so interesting and so widely heralded that Gretna Green at once became Hymen's metropolitan.

This first marriage was of John Edgar, St. Mary's Parish, and Jean Scott of the Parish of Hetherel, both of the adjoining English parishes. Curiously enough, it has been ascertained that these two, instead of coming by coach-and-four over the post route from Carlisle, escaped their opposing relatives by being carried away by the English mail stage, which was driven by Joseph Paisley, who, for this sort of thing, became the most notorious man of his time in Scotland, as well as the most execrated single individual known to the English social annals.

At this time Gretna, perhaps a half mile from the Sark along the highway towards Glasgow, comprised no more than a few half-timbered houses. There were simply a few rude buildings clustered about an old thatched kirk and the older farmstead of "Debatable Hill." There were also the little manse residence the kirk and a vile little shop in which the fellow Paisley--not blacksmith as the English literature has it--sold tea, tobacco and snuff as well as smuggled whisky to the "muckle right sort."

The exploiting of the Lord Chief Justice's marriage, Paisley's defiance of English and Scotch authorities and his cunning in securing the highest Scottish legal advice, enabling him to settle the form of procedure for such a union, were largely responsible for the fact that Gretna Green was transformed into a commodious inn. This hastily proving inadequate for accommodation, Sir William Maxwell, the Scotch law agent in England, who was by no means averse to the extraordinary opportunities offered by evading English law. Paisley became the self-constituted "Bishop of Gretna," and the name of the inn was transformed into a commodious inn.

There has never been in Scotland, nor is there to-day, any bar to this form of marriage save that of public sentiment, the penitential character of which is a large proportion of the clergy, ever sturdy withstood the enactment of laws by the Scottish Parliament, which might have closed the place to all intents and purposes. Strictest conditions of registration have always been imposed, and Scottish law has always prescribed certain ceremonial for celebration of regular marriages, such as the publication of bands and the officiating

by a clergyman. But the "irregular" marriage by witnessed civil contract has never been successfully assailed, and has maintained its footing, but on a slight modification. Through deference to English appeals for a check upon the "Gretna" and "Coldstream" marriages of English folk, the border village of Coldstream in Scotland once possessed almost as unenviable a reputation as Gretna--in 1854, by permission of Scottish representatives, an Act was passed by the British Parliament imposing the condition upon Scottish civil contract marriages that one of the contracting parties shall have been a resident of Scotland for twenty-one days immediately preceding such marriage.

In other words, any civil contract marriage in Scotland for hundreds of years past and in the past century has been precisely the same as they always were, with the exception of subsequent registration, and the holding of a brief residence of one of the contracting parties, and within the past twenty-three years the present "Bishop of Gretna" has carried on his morning of record, and chief runaway English men and women, or nearly one-tenth of the entire number so married at Gretna since its first "irregular" marriage ceremony as it was a hundred years ago, though the line of record is not in a straight line, but almost as much resorted to at present for "irregular" marriage ceremony as it was a hundred years ago, though the line of record is not in a straight line, but almost as much resorted to at present for "irregular" marriage ceremony as it was a hundred years ago.

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general recklessness and extravagance on every hand where marriage fees from runaway English common folk, gentry and nobles, and a few of the hundred guineas, as they did, with any amount of the "yellow stuff" for brides of witnesses, hand-men and satraps who lived at Gretna. The "Bishop" the rude cottages or swarmed like harpies about the then noisy stayblards.

The present hereditary line of "Bishops of Gretna" traces its descent to the death of Joseph Paisley, who, a mass of fat and corruption, "went his ways" in 1814. He was a terrible drinker of cognac, and his advancing age, with his plump cheeks and girthed waist, made him a delegate his office to other and younger hands in the person of one David Laing, an Ulster Irish pack-peddler. His wife was, however, an intelligent and besides, he possessed so hard a character and lists that none disputed the legitimacy of the succession. He died in 1827.

The third "Bishop" was his son, Simon Laing, who fattened upon the increasing traffic until 1856, when something of a change was given Gretna Green marriages by the introduction of a new regulation, requiring one of the contracting parties to have Scottish residence for twenty-one days immediately preceding marriage.

The fourth and present "Bishop of Gretna" is William Laing, her Majesty's postman at Springfield and Gretna, a little bit of a man, very fat, and, in fact, a shrewd, shrewd and cunning, uniting all the bibulous profligacy of his predecessors, with an appalling cunning of the lowest order.

"For a moment, Monsieur," he said, "I have been thinking of the turkey you mentioned." "The turkey?" said the Cure, "but you are a little late."

"I am a little late," said the Cure, "but you are a little late." "The turkey?" said the Cure, "but you are a little late." "The turkey?" said the Cure, "but you are a little late."

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"A hamper for M. le Cure." "Bien, be good enough to open it, Suzanne." Suzanne did as she was told. M. le Cure, in soutane, sat at his desk, awaiting this new revelation. He had great faith in the unseen--as regarded parcels.

"Monsieur, what is this?" She repeated the turkey from the hamper, and was holding it up for admiration by the legs. The turkey could not but hang its head. If it was the moment of Suzanne's triumph, it was also the moment of the turkey's humiliation.

"It is a very good bird," said the Cure, "but you are a little late." "The turkey?" said the Cure, "but you are a little late." "The turkey?" said the Cure, "but you are a little late."

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Then, in sheer absence of mind, he took up his fork and began pricking the turkey with the prongs. Now, man, is it not a pity M. le Cure is so ignorant? I defy you to have a fork in your hands for more than a few seconds without the fork finding its way to your mouth; you are not a saint, you are a man; therefore, the hand moves mechanically. So it was with the Cure.

"It was very wrong of you, Suzanne," he repeated. "I have committed a sin." Suzanne noticed that the wrong-doing had been transferred to the past tense.

"The fork returned mechanically to the breast of the turkey." "At all once there was a bang at the front door. Suzanne went to open it. Presently she returned, her face flushed with indignation."

"It is Monsieur! she exclaimed. Monsieur was the Bishop. The Cure started up. Suzanne noticed that the noise was not in the dist with the fork; so much progress had been made during her brief absence.

"You have shown Monsieur into the room. He has just returned there at once." He paused and then added, "Approach, Suzanne, you had better keep the door of this room shut while I am with you." He had hardly opened it, and was on his way to the study, when Suzanne exclaimed, "Monsieur, M. le Cure, will you not take your seat?"

"The Bishop was gracious and courteously dismissed a disturbed curate. "I have just heard," he said, "of a very sad case, and I thought as I was passing your room, I might see if it were of it at once. There is no time to be lost."

"I am at the command of Monsieur," answered the Cure dolefully. "It is a very sad case," said the Bishop, and his family, who have just come into your parish, Rue de la Chapelle, No. 5. He has fallen from a ladder, and grave news are entertained.

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