TO A LADY DOCTOR.

AN AFFECTION OF THE HEART.

From Punch.

Yes, Doctor, your physic I've taken,
That surely should conquer my ills;
The bottle was solemnly shaken,
I dote on those dear little pills.
I've followed your rules as to diet,
I don't know the taste of a tart;
But, though I've kept carefully quiet,
The pain's at my heart.

Of course you've done good; convalescence
Seems dawning. And yet, it is true,
I fancy the light of your presence
Does more than your physic can do.
I'm well when you're here, but, believe me,
Each day when fate dooms us to part
Some strangest sensations to grieve me—
That must be the heart.

Your knowledge is truly stupendous,
Each dainty prescription I see,
I read "*Haustus statim sumendus,*"
What wonder you took the M. D!
I hang on each word that you utter
With sage Æsculapian art,
But feel in a terrible flutter.—
It comes from the heart.

Have you ever felt the emotion
That stethoscope ne'er could reveal?
If so, you'll perchance have a notion
Of all that I've felt, and still feel.
Oh, say, could you ever endure me?
Dear Doctor, you blush and you stare
There's only one thing that can cure me—
Take me—and my heart!

THE WHISPER IN THE WOOD.

1845.

Ronald Morris and his young wife are sitting in the snug parlor of an inn at the little town of Oakhampton on the confines of Dartmoor. The season is autumn, and the time evening. Lamp and firelight combine with the homely surroundings of the remote hostelry in giving a sense of cheery comfort. He—young, broad-shouldered, strong of limb and firm of countenance, blue-eyed and brown-haired—is poring over a map. She, rather younger, pale-faced but pretty, dark-haired and with eyes to match, and with a delicate yet well-rounded figure—she is idly glancing through the pages of a book. Presently he speaks, half to himself:

'Yes. I must have a look at that place; it promises well as a background for a story. I have often heard of it.'

She, somewhat apathetically, inquires:

'Some expedition you are contemplating?'

'Yes, across the moor: I cannot quite make out how far it is, but I trace the way, and it must be within an easy walk, six or seven miles; yes, I thought of going to-morrow, if you will not be very much bored, dear little woman, by being left alone for a few hours.'

'Oh, no, I shall manage to amuse myself; besides, it is necessary you should see what you want. It was to get some local color, as you call it, that we came down to these wilds, and there is no reason because we are out on our honeymoon that you should not do some work.'

'You are the most sensible little wife, I believe, Sophy, that man was ever blessed with,' he says, looking up at her with admiring affection, 'and I was never so happy in my life?'

A knock at the room-door precedes the entrance of the landlord with two or three letters.

'The Lunnon post, zur, just in,' he says in his strong Devonshire dialect.

'Ah, of course; you do not get your London letters here until very late,' responds Ronald, taking the missives. 'I suppose when the railway is open to Plymouth it will make some difference to this part to the world.'

'I should zay t'ud be likely tu. Not as I zee it'll be o' much use tu we in this place: we han't much doin' with Lunnon, though I make no doubt it'll be a rare chance for gentlemen like you that go jumping the country;' and after a few more words the man civilly retires.

Suddenly Ronald utters an exclamation of surprise, startling his wife from the placidity with which she is regarding him whilst he is looking over his letters.

'My word!' he goes on; 'the poor old gentleman died suddenly the day before yesterday! Bless my heart! I am very grieved. How strange that it should have happened just now, so soon after all his kindness to me—to us.'

'What—not your uncle?' exclaims the wife.

'Yes, indeed it is; here is the letter announcing the fact from Baston, his lawyer. I shall have to go to town. This is what he says, Sophy:

'"It is with the deepest regret I have to inform you of the sudden death of your uncle, Mr. Matthew Morris. He was found dead in his bed, and it will therefore be necessary for you, as his sole executor and legatee, to come to town and produce his will, that we may take out letters of administration; prove the will at Doctors' Commons, you understand, and so establish your right, etc. This would have been requisite in any case, but it is the more imperative since, through Mr. Morris's eccentric views, he insisted on intrusting his will to your keeping."

'Ah! I never told you, Sophy, I think, all about that,' says the reader, breaking off. 'Strange old boy! You know how good and kind he has been to me, and how, but for him, we could not have married for years; and you remember I told you that the day before our wedding he made his will in my favor, leaving me nearly everything. But I did not tell you of his funny fancy about the document. He drew it himself on a sheet of note-paper, and brought it with him the day on which he met me at Baston's office (the day before we were married). Well, then, when the lawyer pronounced the will to be thoroughly legal, and said that it only required signing and witnessing, he signed it then and there in the presence of Baston and one of his clerks; and when they had duly signed it, each being in the presence of the other, etc., as the legal formula goes, he took the paper, and handing it to me, said: "There, Ronny, my boy; as this concerns you, and nobody but you, I desire that you should keep possession of it." Then, with some good-humored joke at the lawyer's expense, he insisted that I should put the will in my pocket. "Baston may keep a copy of it," added my uncle, "if it is of any interest to him, but you must keep the original, and mind you do not lose it, that's all."

'Well, Sophy, I did put it in my pocket, and having no bankers or strong box in which to deposit it, I brought it away with me, and here it is still at this moment, in a little flat tin case, with a copy of our marriage certificate, and one or two more valuables, here in my breast-pocket,' and Ronald Morris strikes the breast of his rough shooting-coat as he speaks—'the safest place in the world, if one has not a banker. But, upon my word, it is really very sad,' he proceeds after a pause; 'I never thought I should be called on to produce it so soon. Why, it is not a fortnight ago since he gave it to me, poor old fellow!' and, as the excitement of the explanation he has given subsides, his blue eyes moisten. His quiet little wife rises, and putting her arms round his neck, kisses and pats his cheek with a sweet and tender, if silent consolation.

Soon he is talking volubly again, discussing family affairs, and laying plans for the future.

'This puts us beyond the reach of sixpenny anxieties,' he says, 'but I shall not give up my pen. I could not bear to live an idle life, and what's more, I shall not give up my expedition to-morrow. I must have a look at that queer place before I leave these parts. If we start for town the first thing the day after to-morrow, it will be quite soon enough, and we can get to Exeter in time to catch the night mail the same evening. You will not mind travelling by night, Sophy, I am sure since it will give me to-morrow out on this wild and strangely fascinating moorland.'

To-morrow came, and Ronald Morris started on the expedition he had in his mind. His little wife, not from lack of interest in his purpose or his doings, but from a characteristic inexactitude as to details, failed already to understand (even if she ever asked the question) the precise spot he was bound for.

So Ronald started, and, as he strolled away up and on to the bleak and solitary moor, she stood for a moment or two at the gate on the road, off which he turned, watching him. In a little while he looked back, held up his stick as a salute, and she in reply waved her little hand after her easy, gentle fashion. Thrice this action was repeated on both sides; then she saw his figure small and clear against the sky line on the steep hill ridge, and then he disappeared—disappeared from her eyes forever.

Lost on the moor! The days and weeks of helpless, desperate, and, at last, hopeless search by the whole country-side which followed threw no light upon the mystery. Lost on the moor! that was the verdict—that was all that could be said, and it was no uncommon phrase in that wild and treacherous region. Scores of men had so vanished, and been never heard of since. Natives even, accustomed to the dangers of bog, crag, and fell, of overwhelming blinding mist, of overtaking nightfall, of the sudden, deep, obscuring snow, and of the lost track; natives alive to all these perils have been lost on the moor, nor any trace of them even found. What wonder then that a Londoner entirely unused to, and unknowing of, the treachery lurking in such a wild, should now and again share the same fate? The thing, indeed, was too common to create much more than the nine days' astonishment. And, since no clew could be obtained as to the direction the unfortunate man had taken, the searching parties that volunteered soon lost heart; their explorings were too vague at best to give them encouragement; and, finally, the kindly impulse which stirred the seekers died out, and the affair was given up as hopeless.

1855.

Sophy Morris, still young and pretty, and as placid as ever, bears traces nevertheless of her life-sorrow, as how should it be otherwise? The marvel is that she survived the blow. In all probability she would have sunk under it, but that the flood of new-born wifely love, which in its outpouring had seemed to carry the very essence of her soul before it, had found its channel changed, although not checked. As a mother, the devotion bestowed upon the stalwart lad of nine now standing at her side gave almost vent and verge enough for the deep love that was in her. In young Ronald she seemed to see, perhaps concentrated, a double claim upon her affection; first, for the father, whom he so much resembled, and then for his own sweet sake.

Thus time and circumstance lent their healing influence to her great heart-wound, and though the cicatrix was vividly evident at times, the healing had been healthy, and with the birth of her boy had come about, as surgeons say, at the first intention. But for this there was enough outside her loss, and consequent upon it, to crush all hope and joy from her future. Widowed as she had been, she had been obliged to return to her parents' roof, and found, as the eldest of a large family, that the poor pittance of the merchant's clerk, her father, made home far from a bed of roses. For, be it remembered, with the husband had disappeared the provision for the widow, which the uncle's will had insured. Carried in Ronald's pocket as the document had been, no claim upon the old man's estate could be established; and the money, a round ten thousand pounds in Consols, had passed to the next of kin, a younger brother, John, a very different man. This John Morris refused to acknowledge any intentions that his elder brother might have had. He knew of none of them, he said, and he stood upon his rights. Would he do nothing for the nephew's widow and her child? Well, why should he? He knew little or nothing about this nephew Ronald. What had he meant by marrying a penniless girl solely upon the strength of some vamped-up promise, made or not made, John Morris said, by 'that old fool, my bachelor-brother Matthew?' The mere copy of the will produced by the lawyer might, or might not, be genuine; at any rate, John Morris declared it was a worthless piece of paper as it stood. Besides, had he not claims of his own to meet? However, he would educate the boy, that much he would do, until he was fifteen, and then he should wash his hands of the whole affair.

This was the utmost which all the urgent appeals that were made to him would produce, and there the matter stood.

1865.

And now there is indeed a second Ronald Morris to the front, the very pith and marrow of his father's self; and all who remember the cordial, happy, and promising young author foresee that in a few more years, when time has filled out the son's muscles, broadened his shoulders, and deepened his chest, he will grow to be the very counterpart of the lost man.

Young Ronald was just nineteen, and since he left school had been placed on a drudge's stool in a city warehouse, from which there had been no release in the way of holiday until it was promised in that year of grace, 1865. A dreamy imaginative lad, the tradition of his father's fate had come down to him with an impressiveness which increased with his years. But of course it had only been tradition, after all; of the tangible, actual sorrow of that fatal time and its results he had known nothing, realized nothing. Youth, strong health, and commensurate good spirits made him, notwithstanding his reflective nature, a happy, cheery fellow, who was bent on making the most of his holiday now that it had come. Two youngsters in similar circumstances to his own were off with excursion tickets to the Land's End, and he arranged to join them.

Very soon the sight of mighty cliffs, of foaming, thunderous seas, of vast stretches of bleak Cornish moor, and the stories of the wild places and all the legendary lore clinging to that ancient western land, began to take possession of our young Ronald, and to stir what there was of the poetic and dreamily imaginative in his nature. He drank in eagerly all descriptions and accounts which he could get of the lonely districts and inaccessible solitudes by which he was surrounded. Rod and line mainly occupied the attention of his companions, and though he was no fisherman himself he would accompany them for miles along the moorland streams where they sought their sport. They met with so little success, however, in their efforts to catch the wily trout, that, like most novices, the young men attributed their failure to the fish, or rather to their absence. The Devonshire rivers, it was declared, would afford them a fairer opening for their skill, so they harked back eastward, and found themselves after awhile whipping the pools and rocky channels of the West Dart. They took up their quarters at the small inn in an out-of-the-way hamlet, known as Two Bridges, some eight miles from the town of Tavistock, and found the solitude of this unfrequented and almost mountainous region compensated for by the better luck which attended their fishing. Indeed, to Ronald's dreamy nature the romantic and desolate character of the scenery had an especial charm, and whilst his friends were occupied with their favorite pastime, he would often wander far afield exploring the remotest fastnesses of stream and fell.

The account which he sent home to his mother of the last of these solitary expeditions, graphically brings his story to a climax.

'The day,' he wrote, 'was still and cloudy; gray mist hung heavily on all the highest tors, and crept far down their sides in graceful, fantastic, ever-changing folds. Such slight movement as there was occasionally in the air—it could not be called wind—carried the lightest sound to and fro with a wailing sort of echo. The never-ceasing rush of the river over its rocky bed was audible long after I had wandered away from it, and at intervals the voices of my two fishermen-friends fell faintly on the ear. Presently, however, a curve in the way across the hill-side over which I was walking shut off all sound even of voices or running water, and I experienced a keener sense of loneliness, perhaps, than I had ever known. Very rarely, I take it, could nature have appeared so utterly motionless: not a blade of grass stirred. There was a hush on everything which was almost terrifying—it prelude, it would seem, as I look back upon it, to the storm of emotion which was so soon to overwhelm me. Another turn in the track plunged me, if possible, into a yet deeper silence and solitude. I was on the verge of a dreary, ragged, boulder-strewn valley, in the depths of which appeared what at first looked like three large patches of scrubby underwood, but which on approaching them, proved to be composed of stunted diminutive oak and mountain-ash trees, their dead bare tops, all spread and battened out as evenly as though they had been cut by some gigantic scythe—which I guessed to be the mighty, seldom-lulling blast of an all-prevailing wind sweeping up the hollow. The trees grew amidst massive blocks of granite, covered, as were the stems, with a dense and overwhelming growth of lichen and parasitical plants. A yet closer acquaintance with it showed the spot to be one of the strangest I had ever seen or dreamt of. The gaunt, bleached, outspreading arms of the trees had something skeleton-like and ghostly in their aspect; weird demons of the forest they might be, stunted gnomes struggling with outstretched misshapen limbs to free themselves from the superincumbent weight of the split and tortuous rocks which held them fast, earth-bound as it were, between their clefts and fissures. A ghastly, ghostly, uncanny, awful spot indeed, and seen under the gray gloom of the waning autumn day, and in the silence and the mystic solitude surrounding it, most impressive. I cannot describe the sensations with which I approached the outskirts of this wood, for despite its forbidding character, I felt myself irresistibly drawn toward it. It seemed to exercise on me a fascination, a spell, which cowed my will, and whilst almost curdling my blood, yet impelled me forward, I knew not how or why! It was a spot to flee from rather than penetrate; it might be likened to a witches' trysting-place, the haunt of evil spirits, of demons, elves, and goblins, who all had found embodiment in the shrunken and misshapen trees.

'I had strolled off on this wandering and desultory excursion without any definite purpose, hence I came upon this place purely by accident; but, once there, and realizing its strange appearance, I was, notwithstanding the feeling of awe which it inspired, filled with a sense of gladness.

'Moving forward half unconsciously, I had entered out a yard or two within the confines of this unhallowed-looking region, when I was startled by a large black snake writhing away before my tread from under the rank grass and dense parasitical growth. The next moment I caught sight of a huge fox as he rushed across a narrow opening amidst the trees straight in front of me. Although I plainly saw the noisome creatures, it was as one sees and shrinks from such objects in a nightmare, and I felt as incapable of drawing back as if I had been really dreaming. The uneven nature of the ground soon, however, made further progress so difficult that I hardly knew how I got along at all. Yet I did manage to push on further and further into the wilderness, and was only arrested by suddenly sinking up to my waist between a gap in the rocks as I stepped on to what looked like a piece of smooth greensward. This, in fact, was nothing but soft mossy undergrowth, which yielding the moment I trod on it, let me in and left me with one foot jammed tightly in a cleft of the granite. Some minutes elapsed ere I could extricate myself, and I had great trouble and difficulty in scrambling up on to my former level.

'Standing still then for a while, I gazed dreamily into the depths of the impenetrable thicket, my head only a little below the level tops of the trees, whose bare and twisted branches spread out net-like above and around me. Now that I was, in a measure, in their midst, more than ever did they resemble misshapen and petrified skeletons. Like a very sepulchre seemed the place, with its ominous calm, and damp, deadly chill. The density of the thorny underwood, and the rank luxuriance of the ferns, ivy, and creeping plants growing thickly over the blocks of granite, and on the lower part of the tree-stems, and here and there entangling some of the lower boughs with fantastic festoons of pale and yellowish green, lent, by contrast, an additional look of ghastliness to the barer portions of the old dead goblins of the forest.

'A shudder more than once ran through my veins as I remained automatically surveying this mysterious spectacle. It seemed that I was rooted to the ground as firmly as the trees! The half-terrifying, half-fascinating sensations which at first lured me on now became intensified, and kept me motionless, for a frightful thought entered my head. What would have been my fate, had I been unable to extricate myself from that cleft in the rocks, or supposing I had fallen into a deeper place and been jammed by shoulders or hips between a similar fissure; should I ever have got out unaided? No help could have reached me in such a wilderness, and I must have been held there a prisoner until I starved to death—never perhaps to be discovered, or not until my rotting and bleached bones had begun to look like the other bare skeleton forms surrounding them. Treachery now seemed added to the other perils of the place, and when at last I began slowly retracing my steps, I struck my stick on each piece of ground ere I ventured my foot upon it.

'As I turned back by the way I had come, the first breath of air that had been felt for an hour or more blew across my face; it was but a slight puff, but it was sufficient to create a little stir among the bracken, and to send a dismal wailing sough through the wood. Faint as it was, it nevertheless gave an additional melancholy to the place, and increased the fascination with which it had beset me. I again stood still, now to listen. The wind by degrees increased, rising and falling, and creating with every breath more and more sound. It seemed now as if the weird forms of the trees were endowed with voices, and were moaning and whispering sadly to each other. One particular wail especially caught my ear, and the longer I listened the more definite it became. It might easily have been mistaken for the voice of a human being in direst misery. Presently, wrought up as my imagination was, I began to fancy I could almost hear the very words it uttered: "W-a-i-t f-o-r me-e! W-a-i-t f-o-r me-e!" it seemed to say, now faintly now quite audibly; and at length so actual, so real did the utterance become, that I turned back toward the spot whence it appeared to proceed. This was not far from where I had been brought to a stand-still, but as I advanced the voice grew fainter, and when I had got a few more yards the wind died away, and it ceased altogether.

'Evening was coming on apace by this time, and I again began retracing my steps. No sooner did I do so, however, than the wailing whisper recommenced: "W-a-i-t f-o-r me-e! W-a-i-t f-o-r me-e!" a long drawn-out wailing whisper. Once more I turned back, drawn on by a sort of supernatural power which, against my reason, moved me to the belief that I was being entreated to return. Such an imploring, heart-breaking appeal, so inexpressibly pitiful and touching, I had never heard before. But it stopped again as I neared the particular spot whence it seemed to arise. After listening over and over again, and going to and fro nearly a dozen times, always with the same result, a conviction stole over me that the effect was merely due to an echo, and that the reverberation was only audible in one especial spot. It was but my morbid fancy, I said, which made me attribute it to any other cause, and I was recovering something like a healthy tone of mind, when, as I was taking a last long look into a deep recess of the wood, I beheld a sight which half paralyzed me, and instantly brought back with renewed force that sense of the weird and supernatural which I was just shaking off. Yonder, there, within a narrow cleft in the rocks, moss-grown, and covered with the eternal undergrowth, there was a spectacle about which there could be no doubt; no tree could assume such a shape as that. Evidently, positively, it was a human skeleton, jammed tightly like one of the trees, in a treacherous fissure, such as that into which I had just lately slipped.

'Very indistinct are my recollections of what I did or what my feelings were, during the next few minutes. I have a hazy memory of remaining irresolute for a time, and then of hurrying away, dazed, and then of returning, and plunging into the thicket, regardless of the thorny brambles and the uneven, slippery, crevice-beset boulders, for I remember I was standing presently close to these human remains, only a little above them, at the mouth, as it were, of the cleft. I was examining them intently, peering at them between the ferns and grass, which, hanging in thick clusters and pendant wreaths, drew from either side of the deep fissure in which the skeleton was immured, upright, and with an arm outstretched, and caught by the elbow tight between a smaller interstice of the rock. I shuddered as I looked into the eyeless sockets with their grim yet pitiful expression, at the two rows of glistening teeth, at the bleached bones with here and there shreds of rotten clothing still adhering to them. Tall dank weeds and brushwood hid the form nearly up to the waist, but, as the herbage was, down by its roots, somewhat thinner, I, with a tremor running through my whole body, dragged this a little aside with my stick, which struck on a substance that resounded like metal.

'I know not with what object, it was not curiosity, certainly not cupidity, but I knelt down, and thrusting my arm elbow deep into the wet and mossy grass, followed the stick's point with my hands, and after a little groping got hold of a watch and chain—hardly recognizable as such, truly, but still obviously nothing else.

'Then I pursued my search still further, for I foresaw that it now might lead to the identification of this unhappy human being who had been buried alive. Heaven knows how long ago! by a fate which I myself had only an hour before so narrowly escaped. Thenceforth, although my feelings were greatly perturbed, and a host of emotions surged through my breast, my wits quickened; these were stern facts that I was dealing with, and I acted accordingly. The second time I thrust my arm in among the herbage just beneath the skeleton, which I was reverently careful not to disturb, I drew forth one or two more hard, and, at first, less distinguishable articles than the watch—less distinguishable because twilight had set in, and, added to the density of the wood, rendered it impossible for me to see anything very plainly. I felt that I must instantly hasten back to the inn and give information of my discovery.

'In the obscurity of the fast fading light, the weird gloom of the wood was greatly increased. A large owl suddenly flapped away from a near bough with a doleful hoot, whilst the wind, growing stronger every minute, turned what had formerly sounded like moans and sighs into shrieks and groans. I dared not, however, give way to any more fanciful imaginings, beset me as they might, and as they were even already doing. I wanted all my senses to get clear of this charnel-house of a place. Yet, having done so, and come back again on the road to the inn, which I knew, these same imaginings, these indefinable sensations which had overridden my commonsense during the whole afternoon, returned, and, will you believe it? ran on this letter of Ronald's to his mother, which he wrote the next morning, so persistently have they stayed by me, that I have not yet had the courage to examine closely the articles I found. No! though more than twelve hours have passed since then, somehow I cannot touch them. They seem as if they might influence my whole future, might change the very current of my life: it is ridiculous, but inexplicable.'

Was it inexplicable to Sophy Morris? Hardly, for did not her mind instantly fly back over those twenty years to that ever memorable time, and could she not see in those indefinable imaginings in her son's mind a possible solution of the mystery surrounding her husband's fate? Might it not be that the marvellous and unseen working of human destiny had guided the son at last to the father's unknown grave? That the strange sensations, the awe, the gladness, the irresistible automatic impulse to linger in the wood, which he described; the readiness with which he interpreted the wailing of the wind into a direct, articulate, and whispered appeal 'to wait'—to wait till the discovery was made—were traceable to the link existing between that vigorous young life and those mouldering remains, and without which, when they too were endowed with life and vigor, her young Ronald would never have had his being. Her hope was strong that all this might prove so, and it was realized. In the end no doubt remained, for among the relics her boy had recovered was the small, flat metal tobacco-box containing the will of Matthew Morris, soiled, sodden, besmirched in places, well-nigh illegible, yet still preserved intact, and susceptible of being sworn to as the genuine document by the two witnesses, the lawyer and his clerk, who signed it, and who yet lived to see right and justice done.

It was to Wistman's Wood, then, that fate had directed the son's steps, and, as he thought, by merest accident—to Wistman's Wood, that uncanny 'whist old place,' the 'wonder of the wonders of the Dartmoor wilds,' and whither the father had gone across the moor, never to return, on that fatal day twenty years before.—(*All the Year Round.*

SPOILING FAMOUS DIAMONDS.

From The Antiquary.

The "Star of the South" was found in Brazil, in the mines of Bogagen, by a poor negress, in July, 1853. It originally weighed 254 carats, but was reduced, by being cut as a "brilliant," to 124 carats, or less than half its size. Considering the enormous price set upon diamonds of the largest size, it is strange to find that several of them should have been deliberately cut down to much smaller dimentions simply to give them an artificial shape, little increasing their original beauty, but immensely decreasing their value. It is estimated that the Russian "Orloff" lost four-fifths of its value by being cut down to one-half its original size.

The most striking instance of such injudicious cutting is to be found in our own famous "Koh-i-noor." As before mentioned, this stone, once going by the name of the "Great Mogul," was originally of the weight of 787 carats, but "polished down" by an unhappy and unskillful Venetian lapidary to 280 carats, and as such came into the possession of the Crown of England. It was then a "rose," but Prince Albert, not liking the appearance of the crystal flower, conceived the idea of having it re-cut. After consulting Sir David Brewster and other scientific men, it was determined by the Prince Consort, with the consent, of course, of the Government, to polish the "Mountain of Light." For this purpose one of the largest of Dutch diamond merchants, Mynheer Coster, of Amsterdam, was engaged, and he sent over to London his most experienced artisan, one Herr Voorsanger, with assistants, to "improve" the "Koh-i-noor." The improvement was carried on with the help of a four horse-power steam-engine, which began working on the 6th of July, 1862, the Duke of Wellington placing with his own hands the "Mountain of Light" on the cutting machine. For thirty-eight days the unlucky diamond was swung round on it until it had been reduced from 280 to 102 carats, at a cost to the Government, or rather the Nation, of £8,000. It was, as truly remarked by Mr. C. W. King, one of the best writers on and judges of gems in this country, "a most ill-advised proceeding, which deprived the stone of all its historical and mineralogical value," reducing the once famous stone, "unrivalled in Europe," to "a bad-shaped, shallow brilliant, of but inferior water." *Sic transit gloria mundi*, even for such "everlasting" things as diamonds.

HOME INTERESTS.

FULL CHRISTMAS MARKETS.

NO FALLING OFF IN THE SUPPLIES—THE FISH MARKETS—CHEAP BLUEFISH IN MIDWINTER—SATURDAY'S PRICES.

The Christmas dinners have not made any perceptible change in the appearance of the markets. Poultry, game, fruit, fish and vegetables seem quite as abundant as they were on Friday morning, when the heads of many families and housekeepers by the dozen were doing their Christmas marketing. Saturday morning found many persons still unprepared for the great feast. Possibly they had been anticipating an immediate decline in prices, but if such was the case they were doomed to disappointment. This week will undoubtedly make a change in the price of poultry, as the markets are full, and the demand always falls off after a holiday. Chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese sell quite generally at 18 cents per pound; capons are sold as high as 22 cents, but the average price is 20. Fowl is 15 cents per pound uptown; in the markets fowl was sold Saturday morning for 12 and 13 cents per pound. Squab are $3 per dozen; grouse, $1 50 per pair; quail, $2 per dozen; partridge, $1 25 per pair; teal duck, 75 cents; English snipe, $3 per dozen; wood duck, 75 cents per pair; mallards, $1 25; redheads, $1 25; canvas-back duck, $3 per pair; rabbits, 35 cents per pair—uptown, rabbits were selling for 40 and 50 cents; pigeons, $1 per dozen; small birds from 75 cents to $1; reed birds, $1 25 per dozen; venison is selling for 20 and 25 cents per pound, according to the cut.

The fish markets always succeed in making a brave appearance, regardless of the weekly supply of freshly caught fish, because the refrigerated fish are so fine and plentiful. The prices also vary but little from summer to winter. Bluefish, for instance, is selling for 12½ cents; it was 8 cents in summer and not much better than the bluefish in market today. So that even admitting the inferiority, the price of a fine large bluefish is very little more than it was in the season. Bass, also refrigerated, is 25 cents per pound; sea bass sell at the same price. Fine selected fish for boiling are sometimes sold a little higher than this, but in the markets the prices run about equal, because there is more wholesale business done there and customers are not generally selecting for individual use. Salmon is 35 and 45 cents per pound; shad, 50 cents; white perch, 15 cents; mackerel, 12½ cents; smelts, 15 cents; Spanish mackerel, 35 cents; green turtle, 18 cents; terrapin from $12 to $24 per dozen; frostfish are 10 cents per pound. These queer little fish are brought into market and thrown out of barrels frozen like little lumps of ice, stiff and hard as rocks, but if they are thawed properly in cold water they soon come to life and swim about quite unconcerned about their recent marvellous state of suspended animation.

Halibut is 18 cents per pound (the halibut now in market is excellent); haddock, 6 cents; codfish, 6 cents; blackfish, 12½ cents per pound; flounders are 10 cents; eels, 18 cents; lobsters, from 8 to 10 cents; sheepshead, 25 cents; scollops, 30 cents per quart; soft clams, from 40 to 75 cents per hundred; shrimps are $1 50 per gallon; pompano, 40 cents per pound; red snapper, from 15 to 18 cents per pound; muscalonge, black bass and salmon trout are 18 cents; whitefish, 16 cents; pickerel, 15 cents; smoked haddock, 12½ cents per pound; smoked salmon 20 cents; dry cod, 8½ cents.

The green-grocers offer cucumbers to the unwary buyer at 50 cents apiece. The least that can be said of them is that they are worth no more. Fresh hot-house tomatoes are also to be had at 50 cents per quart; spinach is 25 cents per half peck; cauliflowers from 15 to 25 cents per head; lettuce, not especially good, from 5 to 10 cents per head. The hot-house lettuce is a disappointment this year. Oyster plant is from 10 to 15 cents per bunch; Brussels sprouts, 15 cents per quart; celery, 15 cents per bunch. In the regular winter stock of vegetables are beets at 20 cents per peck; turnips from 20 to 25 cents; sweet potatoes, 40 cents; common potatoes from 25 to 30 cents; cabbages at 5 and 8 cents per head; onions from 50 to 60 cents per peck; cranberries from 10 to 13 cents per quart.

Butter is selling all the way from 35 to 50 cents per pound. Very good table butter can be found in the markets at 40 cents; uptown the same butter is selling at 42 and 45 cents per pound. The very best rolled butter is sold at first-class groceries at 50 cents. Domestic cheese is 16 cents per pound. The finest imported cheeses are to be found only at the more important groceries, and at the little shops, which are scattered throughout the city, called "Delicatessen." In these shops are to be found all manner of dainties in the shape of prepared fruits, meats and vegetables, and cheeses from all countries. A very nice imported cheese is a slight variation on the regular Neufchatel, called "cream cheese." It is done up in square cakes and covered with tinfoil; it is sold at 25 cents per package.

New preparations of food for the convenience of cooks and the pleasure of consumers are constantly being brought to the public attention, and housekeepers, being a progressive class, readily test the novelty and pass judgment. One of the most popular of these inventions is what is called "snowflake corn," used in the preparation of puddings and breakfast cakes. The old-fashioned minute pudding is now a thing of the past. For, if a package of corn, costing but 10 cents, is kept in the house, the housekeeper need fear no surprise, as a most dainty dessert can be prepared at a moment's notice, either by thickening a little boiling salted water with the corn, and serving it with sugar and cream or a milk sauce, or by taking two cups of corn, and a half cup of milk, two tablespoonfuls of sugar, beaten yolks of two eggs; put in half the whites, beat up well and bake sufficiently to stiffen the eggs; to the other half beat up a tablespoonful of sugar, spread on the pudding, and return to the oven a few minutes. Experience has proved this to be delicious and convenient.

MENU.

Barley soup.
Fried Smelts, garnished with parsley and lemon.
Roast Beef. Mashed Potatoes. Cauliflower. Sweet Potatoes.
Roast Quail. Jelly.
Salad—Lettuce and Shrimp Mayonnaise.
Cheese.
Monday Pudding.
Fruit and Bonbons.
Coffee.

HOUSEHOLD NOTES.

BARLEY SOUP.—Boil one pint of pearl barley in one quart of stock till it is reduced to a pulp, pass it through a sieve, and add as much more stock as will be required to make the *puree* of the consistency of cream; put the soup on the fire, when it boils stir into it, off the fire, the yolk of an egg beaten up with a gill of cream; add half a pat of fresh butter, and serve with small dice of bread fried in butter.

ROAST QUAIL.—Rub the breasts of the quail with fresh butter, and as they roast, baste often with butter. Cook twenty or twenty-five minutes with a good fire. Season and serve hot.

SHRIMP SALAD.—Dress some lettuce with a mayonnaise sauce, and arrange plenty of canned shrimps or fresh-boiled ones around it.

WHIPPED CREAM.—Whips to be light must be quickly and lightly whisked, and as the froth rises carefully skimmed off with a spoon, and laid on a reversed sieve. Half a pint of cream, half a glass of sherry, the juice of half a lemon, and a little sifted sugar—these, added by little at a time, make sufficient whip to cover an ordinary trifle dish.

IMPERIAL CAKE.—This is a rich cake and a very delicious one. Cream together a pound of the best butter and a pound of white sugar. Then add eight eggs—yolks and whites beaten separately—a pound of raisins, stoned and chopped, one-half pound of blanched almonds and one-quarter pound of citron—both thinly sliced—a little mace, two wineglasses wine and a pound of sifted flour. Bake in a steady oven and be sure the cake is thoroughly done.

PLAIN FRUIT CAKE.—One cup of butter, one of brown sugar, one of molasses, one of sweet milk and three of sifted flour; one and a half teaspoons of cream of tartar and one of soda; two pounds of raisins stoned and chopped fine; one nutmeg and a scant wineglass of brandy. This will make two loaves which will keep three or four weeks if properly covered.

WINE JELLY.—Soak a box of gelatine in cold water half an hour. Add ¼ pound sugar and pour over it 3 pints of boiling water, stirring well. When the mixture cools a little add a pint of wine and the juice of a large lemon. Pour into moulds.

DROP CAKES.—One pint flour, half a pound butter, quarter pound sugar, half a nutmeg, two eggs, small handful Zante currants, and a pinch of soda. This makes thirty cakes, which must be baked in a slack oven ten or fifteen minutes.

OLIVES OF CALVES' HEAD.—Parboil the half of a calf's head with the tongue and brains, and cut thin even slices from the thickest part of the head, and lengthway slices from the tongue. Make a stuffing of minced ham, savory herbs, and pepper and salt. Brush the slices with the beaten yolk of an egg, and spread your stuffing equally over them. Roll them firmly into shape, and tie them securely with twine. Lay the olives as closely together as possible in a stewpan which will just hold them, and stew them very slowly for an hour and a half with sufficient good stock to nearly cover them, and slices of fat bacon over them. When done, arrange them neatly on a dish with brown mushroom sauce.

APPLE COMPOTE.—Pare and core half a dozen large, fair apples, throwing each as it is pared into cold water to keep it from turning brown. Put a half pound of loaf sugar into an enamelled stew pan with three pints of water; as soon as it is melted and boils put in the apples with the juice of two lemons, stew gently until the apples are sufficiently cooked but not broken. Then take them out carefully and lay them in the dish in which they are to go to the table. Cut the rinds of the lemons into the thinnest possible strips and put them into the syrup; boil till tender, by which time the syrup will be much reduced. When cold pour the syrup about the apples, and also dispose the transparent strips of lemon about them. This dish looks prettily with a bit of quince jelly placed in the hollow of each apple; or with a candied cherry in the hollow, and angelica cut into lozenges and inserted around the top of each apple.

AMERICAN FISH.

WAYS OF COOKING THEM.

III.

Blackfish are abundant in winter, and when from three to five pounds in weight are excellent for baking with brown sauce.

Red-snappers, which have become deservedly popular in the last three years, are in season during the fall and winter. They weigh from three to twenty pounds, and are good either baked or boiled with lobster sauce.

Flounders, usually plainly fried, have become much esteemed in the last few years, and are greatly sought after by French cooks for *filets de sole*. The best weight is a pound and a half. After the fish is scaled, cleaned, and skinned, a cut is made with a sharp knife from head to tail down the backbone. The knife is then carefully worked underneath the flesh, following the backbone, cutting the flesh loose in a strip two inches wide and about five inches long, which is the fillet. The easiest way of cooking this is to dip it into the beaten yolk of an egg and into powdered crackers, then fry to a light brown in oil or butter and serve with tartare sauce, made by adding chopped pickles and capers to a Mayonnaise dressing. *Filet a la Normandie* is prepared by stewing in a saucepan with a covering of white wine, and served with a sauce of lobster meat and truffles. *Bechamel* sauce is also used.

Sea bass from three pounds upward in weight is good boiled with drawn butter sauce, while the smaller fish should be fried.

Eels are usually cut into pieces three inches long, rolled in flour, and fried to a dark brown. In Connecticut, eels are often broiled with the skins on. They are split, cleaned, and the heads removed, then the slime is scoured off with clean wood ashes. The backbone is removed after splitting, and the skin side very thoroughly cooked.

Lobsters should be killed before putting them into the kettle. A three-pound lobster should be boiled forty-five minutes. Lobsters are sometimes stewed or broiled, though in the latter way they are apt to be hard and tough. As lobsters change their shells, soft-shelled lobsters are sometimes found in market, which when fried are said to be equal to crabs.

Sheepshead, a favorite at dinners and for hotels, is best boiled with Hollandaise sauce.

Scollops are best stewed in oyster liquor. They are usually dipped in the yolk of an egg, and in cracker dust or Indian meal, and fried to a dark brown. They are excellent fried in batter as in oyster fritters.

Whitefish, which come from the lakes in the late fall, should be boiled and served with melted butter and parsley. They are excellent cut in fillets, dipped in batter, and fried.

Pickerel should be usually broiled, though the large fish are better boiled or baked with Spanish sauce.

Salmon trout are only good to boil. Lobster sauce should form the accompaniment.

Brook trout, weighing from three-quarters of a pound to a pound and a half, should be boiled and eaten with melted butter and lemon juice. They should boil for twenty minutes. Trout under half a pound should be dredged with flour and fried with strips of bacon in hot melted butter. Trout from one to three pounds in weight are excellent split and broiled with melted butter and lemon juice.

Black bass, one of the best of fresh water fishes, may be cooked in any way, but is best broiled.

Muscalonge is very palatable when boiled and served with shrimp sauce.

The different methods of cooking oysters and clams are too familiar to need notice.

Whitebait, which was introduced by Mr. Blackford a few years ago, became so popular the demand exceeded the supply. The genuine whitebait are young herrings, but different fish are sold under that name. Whitebait is excellent dipped in flour batter, or cracker dust and egg, and fried in hot fat. This completes the list of fish ordinarily found in our markets.

SENATOR INGALLS ON GARFIELD.

From The Atchison Champion.

I had an interesting talk with Senator Ingalls the other evening respecting the career and personal qualities of the President-elect. The Senator was fortunate in being intimately associated with General Garfield during two years of college life, and unhesitatingly avers, as do all his school-fellows, that the successes of those early days gave abundant promise of the remarkable experiences of subsequent years. The Senator