A STRANGE STORY.

PROPHECIES BY A HIGHLAND SEER.

Among the many travellers who every summer and autumn visit Inverness, the beautiful capital of the Scottish Highlands, and are now carried by the swift railway along the brink of its blue sea-lake, few will fail to note the long, low, sandy isthmus projecting far into the firth, and marked by the dull fortifications of Fort George—a name once hateful to the ears of all true Highlanders, whose friends and kinsmen had been slain on the neighboring moorland of Culloden, and to whom the Duke of Cumberland's fortress was an abhorrent and obtrusive memorial of a foreign yoke, and of the downfall of a dearly loved royal race.

On the opposite shore of the great bay lies Fortrose, a name which does not, as we might suppose, recall another military station, but was rather an ecclesiastical centre. The ancient burgh of Fortrose was once a place of considerable importance, and was the headquarters of the Bishop of Ross, whose palace stood near the cathedral. This was a fine building of red sandstone, but only the south aisle now remains, the cathedral of Fortrose, together with the Bishop's palace and the neighboring Priory of Beauly having been demolished by the ruthless Puritans, who there found convenient quarries of ready-hewn stone for the construction of Cromwell's Fort at Inverness. It is satisfactory to know that the fort so sacrilegiously built was not long suffered to cumber the soil of the Highland capital, for at the restoration of King Charles it was totally demolished, and only a rampart remains to mark the spot where, for a little while, it commanded the entrance of the dreamy Firth.

With the turn of fortune, the persecuted ecclesiastics were reinstated in what they might recover of their former position, so far at least as State protection could avail. Of the abuse of that power a painful instance is recorded in local tradition, and is commemorated by an upright monolith, near the modern lighthouse, on the extremity of the low sand-spit which runs out half across the firth, opposite to that on which stands Fort George. Though half-buried in drifting sand, this weather-beaten stone still marks the spot where, two hundred years ago, a cruel tragedy was enacted, with full sanction of the Church. This was the burning of a local prophet, Coinneach Oag, or "young Kenneth," also called Coinneach Ore, that is, "brown Kenneth," or, as my Gaelic-speaking informant put it, "dun," as you would say, "a dun cow," but now generally known as "the Seer of Brahan,"—a man who was reputed to possess that extraordinary gift of second sight, which has ever held an important place in the superstitions of the Highlanders, and by which they account philosophically for innumerable visions of things not yet come to pass, which certainly are totally inexplicable by any ordinary process of reasoning.

Foremost in the ranks of those endowed with this strange faculty was this far-seeing prophet of Ross-shire, whose mysterious sayings were carefully treasured, not only by the peasantry, but by various literary men, notably Sir Walter Scott; and wonderful indeed is the accuracy with which many have been fulfilled, while others, yet unaccomplished, afford food for speculation as to a possible future.

Though internal peace is better assured nowadays than it was in the time of the seer, it is nevertheless strange that long before the calamitous days of Prince Charlie's last struggle, Coinneach beheld in a vision the bloody battle of Culloden. As he crossed that bleak moorland, then known as Drumossie, he foretold how, ere many generations had passed away, the best blood of the Highlands would there be shed, and he rejoiced that he should not live to see that dismal day.

Foolish indeed must have sounded in the ears of his contemporaries his assurance that full-rigged vessels would one day be seen passing to and fro through the wooded valley that extends westward from Inverness. But a hundred and fifty years later, the great Caledonian canal was dug, connecting the chain of inland lakes one with another, and entering the sea at Inverness!

Many must have listened as to the ravings of a maniac when he foretold in prophetic vision that long strings of carriages without horses would run with lightning speed between Inverness and the Isle of Skye, and when he told of rushing fires moving across the moorland between these points, which then were accounted far apart. But a few years have elapsed, since the construction of the Inverness and Skye Railway has furnished the fulfilment of a widely known but previously incomprehensible prophecy!

Equally strange was the prediction that a day would come when fire and water would run in streams through all the streets and alleys of Inverness. Such words must, to our forefathers, have seemed to augur death and destruction. Yet they have received a very peaceful solution, since gas and water have been laid on all over the city!

The seer, whose mystic words have been so carefully preserved, was born in the early part of the seventeenth century (a few years before the Commonwealth). The name he bore—Kenneth Mackenzie—is one common to many members of the clan which claims descent from Coinneach Mac Choinnich, i. e., Kenneth the son of Kenneth.

His birthplace was on the estate of Brahan Castle, in the county of Ross-shire, the property of the Mackenzies of Seaforth. His social position was that of a farm-servant, and many a shaft of his caustic wit was sped at the expense of the farmer's wife, a cross-grained, ill-natured woman, who at length determined to free herself from the annoyance of his jests, by causing his death. Accordingly, one day, when his master had sent young Kenneth Mackenzie to the moorland to cut peats for fuel, and she had to send him his dinner, she seasoned it with poisonous herbs, and trusted never again to hear his voice.

But Coinneach, being weary, had lain down to rest on a little knoll—doubtless a fairies' hill, for when he awakened he found under his head a small white stone with a hole in the centre, such as a Highlander would at once recognize as a mystic divining stone. According to one account, the seer derived his knowledge from a small round blue pebble, which had been bestowed on his mother by the spirit of a Norwegian princess, who had left her grave one night to revisit Norway, and, ere returning, gave this gift to the brave Highland-woman whom she found watching beside her empty tomb, and who even dared to bar the entrance of the dead by placing her distaff upon the grave.

Picking up the pebble, he naturally applied it to his eye, and thereby discovered the treachery planned by his mistress. So when the messenger brought his dinner, he gave it to a poor dog, who swallowed it trustingly, but soon afterward died in agony. Then Kenneth returned to taunt the cruel woman with her evil intentions.

From that time forward his fame as a seer spread far and wide, and many a strange foreboding of evil did he venture to utter concerning county families, then in the zenith of their power, and strangely indeed have these been fulfilled. For instance, concerning the powerful family of Mackenzie of Kintail, he foretold their downfall when "Fourfah James" should be laird; and through senseless pride, the goat should replace the deer, and fishermen of Avoch rule over the Black Isle. The present generation has seen the fulfilment of these enigmatical words (with various details of local interest), for the career of folly of the last Sir James necessitated the sale of his lands on the Black Isle to Mr. Jack, the son of an Avoch fisherman, who by marriage with the Fletchers assumed their name and armorial bearings, with the goat as a crest. Thus the famous deer's head of the Mackenzies is replaced by the goat of the Fletchers!

Strangely accurate was the forecast of the downfall of the once mighty house of Macneil of Barra. "When the blind man with twenty-four fingers and the Sheriff's officer with the big thumbs shall meet in Barra, then may Macneil prepare for the flitting."

Early in the present century a celebrated blind beggar, having six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot (who hence was known in Gaelic as "the hound with twenty-four fingers"), started on a begging expedition through the Long Isle. Resolving to cross the six miles of sea which separate south Uist from Barra, and then by his fortune, he took his place in the ferry-boat, and had for fellow-passenger a sheriff's officer, whose Gaelic nickname described him as "the man with the big thumbs." This man's errand was actually to serve a summons on Macneil of Barra, who thereupon was compelled to "flit," and make way for the new owner of his estates.

But far more improbable was young Kenneth's forecast concerning Fairburn Tower, a stronghold of the Earls of Seaforth, overlooking their lands of Brahan, and inhabited by a branch of the Mackenzies, kinsmen of the chief.

The eyes of the seer, however, looked far beyond the present scene, and he spoke unflattering words, revealing a future when the broad lands of the family should have passed into the hands of strangers, when few should survive to bear the once powerful name, and when a cow should give birth to a calf in the highest chamber of Fairburn Tower!

The last item certainly appeared a crowning dream of folly, yet, strange to say, all has been literally fulfilled. As years rolled on, the estates did pass away from the old family, and the old castle, which was wont to echo the song of the bard and the music of the pipes, was shadowed, and allowed to fall into decay. All was dismantled. The doors fell from their hinges, until not one remained to bar the progress of man or beast. Then the tenant farmer bethought him of using the uppermost rooms as a barn wherein to store his straw, and as the straw was carried up some was accidentally scattered on the staircase. This attracted the notice of a cow who had strayed into the open hall, and, enticed by such good pickings, she clinched step by step, till she actually reached the topmost room.

But how to descend was quite another matter, for such stairs would puzzle any cow, under any circumstances, and this particular cow was not in condition for acrobatic feats! So finding a plentiful store of straw, all ready for her use, she decided on remaining where she was, and there, a few days later, she gave birth to a fine calf. The rumor of this unexpected fulfilment of Coinneach Ore's well-known prophecy spread far and wide, and various persons, still living, took the trouble to go from Inverness and elsewhere to see this aspiring cow and her calf in their exalted byre, which has now become "the show-room" of the Old Tower.

Innumerable predictions, of purely local interest, have been recorded, but those which have most established the fame of "The Seer of Brahan" had reference, like the last quoted, to the fortunes of the Lord of Brahan Castle, Lord Mackenzie of Kintail, whose grandfather had in 1623 been created first Earl of Seaforth. He married Isabella Mackenzie, sister of the first Earl of Cromartie, a proud, vindictive woman, whose cruelty to the seer called forth that prophetic sentence of doom which (as in several other cases well known in the history of Scottish families who have taken part in some deed of blood, and thus goaded the sufferers to invoke curses worthy of the Psalmist of Israel on their unborn descendants) has been so strangely and minutely fulfilled.

This Kenneth Mackenzie, third Earl of Seaforth, was a devoted adherent of King Charles the Second, fought manfully in the Royalist cause, and paid the penalty for his loyalty by being subjected to several years' imprisonment under the Commonwealth, till the Restoration enabled King Charles to release him. Soon afterward, he had occasion to visit Paris, and seems to have found so many attractions in that gay capital that he was in no hurry to return to his stern counties. Months slipped away, without even bringing her a letter from her absent lord. At last she determined to call in the aid of one whose fame had already spread throughout the district. So she sent messengers to Strathpeffer, summoning him to Brahan Castle. On his arrival, instead of granting him a private interview, she received him in her hall, in presence of many of her retainers, who crowded round to hear his revelations, for many feared that the earl must be dead.

Then she bade Coinneach prove his mysterious power by giving her tidings of Seaforth. He produced the precious divining stone, and, looking through it, he laughed aloud and announced that the truant earl was well and merry. The neglected lady desired further details, which at first Kenneth refused to give. But when she very unwisely urged—nay, commanded—him to speak freely, the seer revealed that he beheld Seaforth in a richly furnished room, kneeling beside a beautiful woman, who suffered his arm to encircle her waist unchidden.

Pale and trembling with anger, Lady Seaforth heard these words, spoken in the hearing of all her people. She heeded not that she had compelled their utterance, and that in her own heart she believed them true. Her own dignity required that she should discredit them, and that the calumniator of her lord should be disgraced. Carried away by mortification and passion, she suddenly resolved that nothing short of the death of the hapless seer should atone for his scandalous revelations, so, to his unspeakable amazement, she then and there turned upon him and pronounced sentence of doom.

She appears in the first instance to have condemned him to be immediately hanged, but, on second thoughts, she determined to obtain the sanction of the Church and have him burnt as a wizard. Some days, therefore, elapsed ere the cruel sentence was carried out. Then the poor seer was bound hand and foot and carried to Chanonry Point, where, with full sanction of the Church—the Canons of Fortrose Cathedral doubtless standing by to witness the hideous punishment of a wizard—he was thrown head foremost into a barrel of burning tar—a barrel which, moreover, bristled with long sharp spikes, driven in from outside so as to transfix the wretched victim.

On this very day the long-absent earl returned to Brahan, and, finding the castle well-nigh deserted, he learnt that his wife and his retainers had all gone to the Ness of Chanonry to attend the burning of Coinneach Ore. Horror-stricken, Seaforth started instantly in pursuit, hoping still to save the unhappy man. Spurring his good steed to its utmost pace, he galloped without drawing rein till he reached Fortrose, and there, looking toward the isthmus, he beheld a dark column of dense smoke rising heavily. With renewed energy he tried to increase his pace, but the willing horse could do no more—it staggered and fell, never to rise again.

Rushing forward on foot, Seaforth shouted aloud, trusting that the assembled people, hearing his cry, might delay the terrible deed. But it was too late. Already the tar-barrel had received its victim, and the prophetic voice was silenced forever.

Among those who stood by, to witness the horrid scene, was the cruel Lady Seaforth, who, as he was led past her, could not resist a last shaft, so she cried out that he was even then on his way to hell. Coinneach turned, and, looking upon her, said: "Nay! for that he was bound for that heaven where she should never enter," and in token that his words were true she should see that after his death a raven and a dove, flying swiftly from east to west, should meet above the funeral pyre, and thereon alight.

If the raven should be the first to descend, then might her words be true, but, if the dove were foremost, she might rest assured that he had not spoken without cause. And so it proved, for ere the smouldering ashes had wholly cooled a raven and a dove did thus alight on the embers, and the dove was the first to alight, even as Coinneach had foretold.

But this was not the sole prophecy of future evil which he bequeathed to the proud lady. Standing on the brink of Loch Ussie, a mountain tarn which lies cradled in the hills above Brahan Castle, just before he was carried away to Fortrose to meet his cruel fate, he gazed for the last time on his magic stone, and then uttered the words of prophetic doom which, in every detail, were so strangely fulfilled only two generations ago. He foretold how, ere many generations had passed, the line of Seaforth should become extinct; and that when the time came when there should be a buck-toothed Gairloch, a hare-lipped Chisholm, a stammering laird of Raasay, and a half-witted laird of Grant, then all men might know that the day of doom was at hand. That the last Lord of Kintail should be deaf and dumb, that the gift-lands of Kintail be stowed on his ancestors by King David II. should pass away from him, that he should be the father of stalwart sons, all of whom should pre-decease him, and that he should go down in sorrow to the grave, knowing that no heir male survived to bear his name and honors as Chief of the Mackenzies of Brahan and Kintail. Then a woman with snow on her cap (or a snow-white cap) should come from the east across the sea to sit in Seaforth's chair, but the broad lands of the Mackenzies should pass to other families. As a crowning agony, he added that this white-hooded woman should cause the death of her own sister.

Having uttered these words of doom, he cast his magic white stone into the loch, whence the Highlanders believe that it will one day be recovered inside of a poke, and its fortunate finder will forthwith be endowed with the gift of prophecy.

The terrible curse was heard by many, and naturally impressed itself deeply on their minds, so that it became a common tradition handed down from father to son. The earl (whose gay life in Paris had been so unfortunately revealed to his vengeful countess) died A. D. 1678, and thenceforward the Highlanders looked with superstitious dread for the signs which should mark the approach of the day of doom, but upward of a century elapsed ere these were recognized.

Among those who were well acquainted with the prophecy were Sir Walter Scott, his friend Mr. Morritt, and Sir Humphry Davy, and with wonder and deep regret they noted how every particular was being fulfilled. They looked around among the great Highland lairds, and perceived that the Chief of Clan Grant was half-witted, that the Chisholm was hare-lipped, that Sir Hector Mackenzie of Gairloch was commonly known as "buckie of the buck-tooth," while Macleod of Raasay was acted with a painful stammer.

And to complete all, the Cabarfeidh himself (i. e. "The Stag's Antlers," as the Chief of Kintail was commonly called in Gaelic, by reason of his crest) was deaf and practically dumb. Not that he had been so born. By nature the last Earl of Seaforth was gifted beyond his fellows, both physically and mentally. Not till about the year 1770, when he was about sixteen years of age, was the dread sign revealed. When a clever, promising lad, scarlet fever of a virulent type broke out in his school, and about twenty of the boys were attacked by it.

All were placed together in one large room—the school hospital—and here young Lord Seaforth saw a vision which the Highlanders of course attributed to second sight. One evening, in the gloaming, the sick nurse had left the room, when she was recalled by a wild cry. Hastening back, she found the lad fixed and trembling; he positively affirmed that a hideous hag had passed through the room, halting a moment beside each bed, and standing longer by some than by others. She had a wallet hanging from her neck, from which she took a mallet and some pegs, and, after gazing steadfastly on one of the boys, she bent over him, and drove a peg into his forehead. The boy never stirred, though, forsooth distinctly heard the sound of breaking bones. Then the hag passed on to another boy and yet another, and, fled like, drove in her dreadful pegs. On some of the sick lads she gazed long without touching them, and others she passed by without notice. At last she came up to young Seaforth, and handled both his ears. She seemed to feel for a nail, but after a pause she passed on, and disappeared from the room.

Then the sick lad, who hitherto had lain spellbound, and unable to move or to utter a sound, burst forth in the cry of horror which had startled the nurse. Never, to the last hour of his life, could Seaforth forget the horrible agony of that moment when the hell-hag touched his ears. The nurse strove to soothe him, and told him it was but a fever-born dream; but when next the doctor came round he found this patient so strangely excited that the nurse afterward apprized him of the circumstance. Returning to the sick-room, the doctor bade the lad tell him his dream, and, while seeking to quiet the dreamer, he made notes of every detail. To his amazement and horror, he found that all those patients whom Seaforth pointed out as having received a special look from the hag became so seriously ill as to hover between life and death, while those into whose brow she had driven the peg died. Seaforth's life hung long in the balance, and finally the fever left him stone deaf!

His power of speech was not actually affected, and during the greater part of his life he could speak, till at last, bowed down by ever-increasing cares and sorrows, he was stricken with paralysis, and ceased to utter any articulate sound; and so, during the closing years of his life, he was practically dumb as well as deaf.

Notwithstanding this very grievous drawback, Lord Seaforth's natural genius and mental power enabled him to take a leading position in the service of his country. Though no longer so powerful as his great ancestor Kenneth Mor, High Chief of Kintail (who in the time of James I. was, perhaps, the most influential chief in the Highlands, having upward of two thousand armed men ready to follow him to the death), he was sufficiently influential, at the beginning of the great European war, to raise a noble Mackenzie regiment—the 78th Highlanders—of which he was appointed colonel; eventually he attained the rank of lieutenant-general. His services were rewarded by a British peerage, and he was successively appointed Governor of Barbadoes and Demarara, in both of which he ruled with a strong and just hand—no easy matter in colonies where the murder of a slave had previously been treated as a venial offence!

Though well aware of every detail of the prophecy, which, like the sword of Damocles, ever hung over his devoted head, he wooed and wedded a very lovable woman—Mary Proby, a daughter of the Dean of Lichfield—and a family of four sons and six daughters grew up around them in strength and beauty; and the heart of the father was gladdened by their comeliness, though his dulled ears never heard their joyous young voices. But first one son died, and then another, and friends and kinsmen noted with grief the gradual fulfilment of the doom.

A touching incident in connection with the death of one of these sons seems worthy of record in these days of æsthetic sun-flower worship. This noble flower was still rare in the far north, and some plants had been sent to the beautiful old garden at Brahan some months before the death of one of the young Mackenzies. With keen interest did the lad note the growth of these unknown plants, eagerly watching for the buds that should expand into such gorgeous blossoms. But ere those buds unfolded a fatal illness had stricken the young life, and the first golden blossom was gathered by a loving hand and laid within the coffin—perchance to gladden the spirit of the dead ere it winged its onward flight.

But for the sorrowing father fresh troubles were in store. Pecuniary cases began to weigh upon him; heavy losses in his West Indian estates compelled him to sacrifice his old ancestral lands. "The gift-land of Kintail"—and, while vexed and perplexed with these manifold cares, news came to him at Brahan Castle in 1815 that his only surviving son (a talented and eloquent member of Parliament) was seriously ill. After a few days, better tidings came, and a friend of the house gladly announced the improvement to the old family piper. But the aged Highlander refused to be comforted. "Nana" said he, "he'll no recover. It's decreed that Seaforth shall outlive all his sons." And the words of the faithful retainer proved true. But a few days elapsed ere a messenger arrived, bearing the announcement of the young man's death, and in the bitter cold of January saw the bereaved father followed his last son to the grave.

Sorrow and sickness now claimed him for their own. A few months later he was stricken with paralysis, and his once brilliant intellect became so clouded that thenceforward only fitful rays of intelligence from time to time served to enable him more deeply to realize his misery.

On his death, the male line being extinct, the lands passed to his eldest daughter, the Hon. Mary Elizabeth Frederica, the young widow of Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, who had commanded the fleet in the West Indies at the time when Seaforth was Governor of Demarara, and who latterly had been on the East Indian stations. He died just about the same time as Seaforth, so that the heiress of Brahan actually returned to Scotland from the East in the snow-white cap which marked her widowhood.

Then it was that Sir Walter Scott wrote to his friend Mr. Morritt of Rokeby, "Our friend Lady Hood will now be Cabarfeidh herself. She has the spirit of a chieftainess in every drop of her blood, but there are few situations in which the cleverest women are so apt to be imposed upon as in the management of landed property, more especially of a Highland estate. I do fear the accomplishment of the prophecy that when there should be a deaf Cabarfeidh, the house was to fall."

Of Francis, Lord Seaforth, last Baron of Kintail, Sir Walter wrote: "He was a nobleman of extraordinary talents, who must have made for himself a lasting reputation, had not his political exertions been checked by painful national infirmity."

Ere many years were over, Lady Hood Mackenzie sought to lighten her heavy responsibilities by bestowing her hand on James Stewart of Glasserton, son of Admiral Keith Stewart, a nephew of the Earl of Galloway. In right of his wife, he assumed the name of Stewart Mackenzie, and in his anxiety to preserve her estates he sacrificed his own, to try and pay off the heavy mortgages. He was talented and popular, and successively held posts of high honor, first in the Home Government, then as Governor of Ceylon, and lastly as Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands. But all his skill could not avert the doom nor save the lands of the Seaforths. The "Giftland" of Kintail was already gone, and now the Isle of Lewis had to be sold, and thus passed into the hands of Sir James Matheson. The barony of Pluscarden, the Church lands of Chanonry, the braes of Ross, were successively brought to the hammer, till at length, of all the once vast possessions of this great house, there remained only Brahan Castle and its immediate surroundings.

Sad to say, even that part of the prophecy, which was literally fulfilled, foretold that the white-capped woman must cause the death of her sister, for one day, when herself driving a pair of spirited ponies, she invited her sister, Caroline Mackenzie, to accompany her, and the ponies took fright and ran away. Both sisters were thrown from the carriage, and Miss Mackenzie was so seriously injured that she died not long afterward.

Thus strangely have the seer's prophetic visions been accomplished (as in various other Highland families, the curse of some humble sufferer, unjustly put to death, has most unquestionably rested on successive generations).

Now the last Earl of Seaforth lies within the ruins of the once stately Cathedral of Fortrose, beside the dust of the cruel countess, while on the dreary sand-pits the gray weather-worn stone marks the burning place of poor Coinneach the Seer.—[C. F. Gordon Cumming in Belgravia.

WHEN HE CAME HOME.

From The Louisville Courier-Journal.

"Hand me that collar-button," demanded George Wellsley, turning with an annoyed air toward his little girl. "Learn to let things alone, will you? There now, tune up and hear your mother sing."

"George, don't speak to the child that way," said Mrs. Wellsley, depositing a shirt on a chair.

"Why, why can't she behave herself? Every time she sees that I am getting ready to go any place, she makes a point of bothering me. Let that cravat alone."

"Put down papa's cravat, darling. She's too young to know any better."

"No, she isn't. Other people's children know how to behave. I'll bet I'll miss the train. I am sometimes tempted to wish she had never been born."

"Oh, George," exclaimed the wife, "I wouldn't say that."

"Confound it, she worries me so. I haven't more than time to catch the train," nervously kissing his wife.

"Kiss me, too, papa."

"I caught her, you see, on—on—the—" stooping and kissing her. "Good-by. Will be back in three or four days."

Mr. Wellsley is a commercial traveller, a kind and tender-hearted man, but subjected at times to nervousness. Seated with several occasional acquaintances, speeding over the country, a little voice would steal in between the roars of merry laughter and say:

"Kiss me, too, papa."

In the sample-room of the village hotel, between the inquiries of interested old people, hear the voice, and at sight of the little face drawn beneath see the little hands reaching toward him and could hear, "Kiss me, too, papa."

At morning's dawn the sunbeams fell across his bed he thought of the bright little face at home and said:

"God forgive me for wishing that she had never been born."

"Wellsley, what's the matter, old fellow?" asked a companion.

They were in a conveyance, riding toward an interior town.

"I don't feel very well to-day."

"Do any business back here?"

"Yes, did very well."

"I didn't do anything, but I won't let it worch me down. Got a letter from the home this morning. The old boy is kicking about expenses. Got a bottle of cocktail here."

"I don't care for any."

"Then there must be something the matter with you." On a night train, going home. He could see the little hands. "Clack, clack, clack—kiss me, too; kiss me, too."

"What's the news?" he asked of a friend, when he had stepped upon the platform and called a hackman.

"Nothing, I believe; everything's quiet."

"Nobody left or anything dreadful happened, is there?"

"No, not that I have heard."

The familiar scene brought rest to his troubled. He looked back upon his trip with a shudder, like one who awakes and contemplates a nightmare through which he has just passed.

"Good-night," he said, paying the hackman. "A light burning. I'm disappointing her," he mused, ascending the steps.

A ghastly face met him at the door. A voice in agony whispered: "Oh, George, our little girl is dead."

STORIES OF BERNAL OSBORNE.

From Temple Bar.

Among the houses at which he visited was that of Lord Dunmore, an old Carlothian. A story told by him in after life gives a curious glimpse of Highland hospitality years ago. An evening out of the dining-room after dinner at Lord Dunmore's Bernal noticed two stalwart Highlanders in full costume. On inquiring what they were stationed there for, he was told that they were always posted near to carry the guests up to bed. Lady C—— tells a story about this time of Bernal's readiness. The colonel and officers of the 71st Regiment were lunching at Lord C——'s beautiful place near Dundee. Bernal's task was to carve a pigeon pie. It happened that the colonel's name was Pigeon, against whom Bernal had an old grudge. Accordingly he at once turned to Mrs. Pigeon, and offering to help her, remarked audaciously, "Do you like Pigeon?" [illegible]

Bernal Osborne had no respect for rank per se, and he would have chaffed a duke with the same pleasure as a costermonger. Here is a terrific encounter which he had with a sneezing Archbishop at Dublin Castle during the reign of Lord Carlisle. A lady whose rendering of some of Moore's melodies gave great satisfaction to the Viceroy, was singing one of his particular favorites, "One dear smile," while his Excellency sat listening attentively at the piano beside her. Suddenly there was heard a terrible fit of sneezing. Everyone looked up, and the culprit was discovered to be no less a personage than Archbishop Whatley. The famous prelate had always been notorious for his unceremonious manners, and on the present occasion he gave a further illustration of them. Again and again was the sneezing repeated, and as the Archbishop was in close proximity to the piano, and needed his sneezing efforts with a large red silk handkerchief, the situation became first painful and then ridiculous. Finally the fair songstress was obliged to cease singing, and "One dear smile" was transformed into a very broad and irreverence laugh. Bernal Osborne's musical sensitiveness was outraged to such an extent that he remarked in his most caustic manner: "I trust your Grace's next sermon will not be cut short by a sternutatory obligato of the same description, or you will certainly blow the whole of your congregation out of church." The Archbishop was rather uncouth. Once good Dr. Murray, when seated by him at the Education Board, felt something moving in his coat pocket, which turned out to be Dr. Whately's foot!

Ma! why is that darkey equivalent to a conundrum? "I'm sure I don't know, my son." "Because he's a sig-ma. See!"—[Yonkers Gazette.

JOTTINGS IN LONDON.

NOTES HERE AND THERE.

A VISIT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—THE SYSTEM OF QUESTIONING MINISTERS—RELIGIOUS WORK IN LONDON—LONDON TAILORS.

[FROM AN OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE TRIBUNE.]

LONDON, August 17.

A visit to the House of Commons one day when there was rather a more plentiful crop than usual of "questions" to the Government inspired some reflections as to what the result might have been if Senator Pendleton's plan for allowing Cabinet officers the right of debate in our House of Representatives had carried. The idea has had no little approval from many who saw the possible awkwardness of having a Government policy defended by men who were not engaged in carrying it out. But the right to speak would, apparently, involve the necessity of meeting challenges, and a Cabinet Minister who defended himself or asserted a policy could hardly avoid meeting his enemies when they summoned him to the combat. John Sherman might have found it inconvenient to be continually "nagged," while he was engaged in the resumption work, by Bland and Buckner and others of our wild-eyed statesmen. Or to go further back, Mr. Chase might have been hindered, rather than helped, in his task of keeping the Treasury full for the war, if he had been busy answering impertinent and trivial questions from a factious opposition. The change would involve others. The overworked Secretaries of the great departments could hardly add the labor of even occasional debates to all their present duties of administration.

The system of questioning Ministers grows naturally out of a Ministerial form of government, and its usefulness under such a Government is not to be doubted any more than the principle of free speech. But as it is carried on in the House of Commons, it must often seem quite as worthy of satire as the practice in Congress of reading long speeches, to which no one listens, which is one of the many disagreeable consequences of free speech. On the day in question it certainly looked like a labored and perfunctory method of eliciting information, consuming a great deal of time for a small product of useful knowledge. The questions for the day are printed and distributed. As the Speaker calls upon the member who has given notice of a question, the latter rises, removes his hat, and reads his question, which has been printed in all the newspapers already, and which every one in the House has probably read in the official document before he arose. Then he sits down and resumes his hat—it being the habit of the Briton to wear his hat in many places where a sense of comfort, to say the least, would be expected to induce him to take it off—such as in not only the House, but in restaurants, the cheaper parts of theatres, etc. Then the member of the Government whose department is interested rises, and, usually, reads a carefully prepared answer. Then he resumes his seat. Then another questioner reads his question, and another Minister or his representative reads his answer. That day Mr. Gladstone was the only Minister who did not read his answers, except, of course, Mr. Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General. This process of bobbing up and bobbing down goes on, on alternate sides of the House, for a long time. The questions are, of course, usually attempts on the part of the Opposition to make "points" at the expense of the Government, and the answers are attempts to turn the "points" of the other side and make some for the Government. The questions are blandly insinuating, or ingenuous to a surprising degree. The answers are guarded, and hedged about with reservations. The questions are often amusing to the American, who is not accustomed to seeing the National Legislature taking care of a multitude of local matters: Is it true that the grass in a certain London park is very much neglected, and if so, will the Government say why; is it true that a public school pupil died the other day in Ireland from the effects of over-study; what are the religious affiliations of certain newly appointed constables, etc. This order of business of course gives a great opportunity for pushing men to force their names into prominent places in the Parliamentary reports. A young man with plenty of assurance, like Mr. Ashmead-Bartlett for example, can by dint of continually putting questions, without caring whether they have much point or not, win an easy notoriety. It is said that this particular young man is a favorite speaker at public meetings in the country because Conservative constituencies have an impression from the newspapers that he is continually giving it to Gladstone.

In spite of its being an old story in books and newspapers, it is interesting to watch the behavior of the House of Commons. If these gentlemen should meet outside of the House, they would no doubt treat each other with scrupulous politeness, but here they jeer and growl at each other like school-boys. The Opposition member reads his question, or makes his speech with its strong opposition flavor, and there is a confused babble from the Government benches of "O! O!" "Hear, hear," and derisive laughs. The Government makes its answer, and then there is a similar chorus from the Opposition side, while the Government members swell the noise with various sounds intended to convey approval that are grouped in the reports under the single head of "cheers." To one accustomed to the gravity, and, as a rule, the great decorum of American legislative bodies, this child's play seems curious. You look for it in the Latin races, whose audacity must have expression, if they die for it, but the Englishman is certainly not vivacious, and usually seems able to contain his ideas until his turn comes to speak. The "disorder" that is sometimes charged against our Congress is certainly of a very mild type as compared with that to be seen in either the House of Commons, or the Chamber of Deputies at Paris. When twenty members shout at once to get the floor, in some time of great excitement, our stern newspaper critics read the riot act, at once, and the word goes out that there has been great "disorder." The fact is that since the slavery period went out, with its occasional pistols and rowdyism, our congress does its business with a decency that is more than dulness.

Mr. Moody has been quoted as saying that London is the most religious city in the world. If he meant that more religious work against misery and heathenism is done here than anywhere else in proportion, to all appearances he was more than right. The poverty and wretchedness that are to be seen in London are probably not to be found anywhere else; but it is true at the same time that the activity of the religious classes in efforts to reduce destitution and crime is remarkable. The classified list of charitable institutions of all kinds—hospitals, asylums, homes, etc.—shows a total of more than 1,000. The sum of the annual subscriptions to these objects is enormous, and demonstrates the great benevolence of the English people. A vast deal of evangelizing work goes on among the poor. The Moody and Sankey meetings were attended by great crowds each day, and there were similar movements in progress at the same time in other parts of the city, which is so great that almost any number of missionaries could divide it up among them. The Rev. George O. Barnes, the so-called "Mountain Evangelist" of Kentucky, who, unlike Moody, is a college graduate (Princeton), and a natural orator, has been preaching among the London poor, now here, and now there, for nearly a year, and with remarkable success. One of the monuments of this religious activity is a barrel-to-a-hall in the East End, a large hall where there is preaching every night. This work began with half a dozen young men banding themselves together, and now they are building a hall to hold 4,000 persons. The prime mover is a young man named Charrington, son of a well-known brewer, who refused his father's entreaties to follow that business, and devoted himself to religious work. When some one asked him how much it cost him to wear his "blue ribbon," he answered £15,000 a year. A great deal of street preaching is done, especially in the East End. At night, and on Sunday night especially, bands of young men will be heard singing hymns at intervals in the crowded streets of that quarter of London, and preaching is going on on all sides. In a number of the great parks on Sunday afternoons the grass is dotted here and there with crowds listening to preaching, or sometimes to debates between Christians and atheists. Evidences of a striking religious activity meet the stranger on every side—evidences which he would hardly see in New-York. The London Sunday is remarkable for its quiet and order. In most parts of the city it is as decent as in a New-England village.

No more interesting charity can be seen in London than Dr. Barnardo's Homes. One peculiarity of their work is that young thieves and other like characters are enticed away from lodging-houses and other corrupting resorts, and fairly lured into the Homes. Dr. Barnardo carried on this work himself at first, and used as much ingenuity in entrapping his boys as any one ever had to teach them to steal. A Girls' Home is in the country. In all nearly 2,000 children are housed and taught useful trades, many of them being sent to Canada and Australia. The Homes are maintained "on faith," and never lack for supplies.

One of the happiest touches in Henry James's "International Episode" was the unspoken thought of the American woman as she glanced over the costume of the Duchess who came to call—"She'll never know how well I am dressed." Probably the Duchess would not know even yet how well the other was dressed, but the chances are that that noble lady is better dressed herself to-day than she was then. It seems to be the general verdict of feminine opinion that the dressing of certain types of Englishwomen has improved greatly within the past ten years. The glaring contrasts of color that used to be worn with such complacency are less numerous than they were. No doubt the past ten years have done a vast deal in England as well as in America, in all matters in which a sense of the artistic can affect daily life. The same competent authority asserts that the English dressmaker is far more skilful than the French, and that no such exquisitely fitting dresses are to be seen anywhere else as in London. They are not to be found in Paris, though the Paris dresses always show better taste in colors, trimming, and finish. On the other hand, the masculine American who is tempted by the prospect of comparatively cheap clothes to fit himself out in London needs to be careful where he goes. Moneyed Americans are used to a style of tailoring that is not always to be found even in the more expensive London shops. It is always rash to generalize from individual experience, but the case of two Americans who gave a large order to one of the principal London tailors is one in point. Every article sent home had to be returned for alterations, as not one fitted as they were accustomed to have clothes fit. A London tailor who was ordered to make a suit exactly like the neat ready-made New-York suit of an American boy, gave one price on a hasty look, and then when he had examined it and found how much sewing was involved in the thorough work done on it, raised his price. The English clothes seem often to be made with much less attention to perfect and durable finish than American clothes. But the wise Yankee will take home with him all the English shoes the law allows him, for the sake of the good leather.

Business in England appears to be so largely a matter of personal relationships that the good will of an established business becomes valuable, and firms are long-lived. A little apothecary's shop where we got occasional medicines had been established for 133 years. A duration like this is so far from being uncommon that it excites no remark. One sees many much older dates than this, on little shops as well as big. One tavern—the White Hart—claims to run back more than four centuries. Bronson Howard tells a story which illustrates the conservatism of English business methods. He was discussing with James Albery, the dramatist, the changes to be made in the "Banker's Daughter," to convert it into a play of English life—which is what the English managers always insist upon—and came to the scene where two old men, in business together for many years, dissolve their partnership preparatory to giving it up. "O, no," said Albery, "that will never do. A business like that would be worth a great deal of money here. We must sell it to somebody." So they sold it to George Washington Phipps for £30,000. An American friend living in London has a ninety-nine years' lease of his house, which he will be able to sell like any piece of property. The stability, of which little things like these are among the signs, helps to that feeling of repose which is one of the chief charms of life in England.

HUMBERT.

From The Chicago News.

The king came forth, wearing a golden crown—
Haughty his mien, and stern his royal face,
And, as he swept along with regal grace,
Armed soldiers cleared the way through all the town.

Nor friend nor foe could pierce the horrent ring
Of swords and staves that compassed him about;
And as he strode, ever his brazen shout
Flaitered his vaunting pride: "God save the king!"

The king came forth again in humble guise,
Dismissing pomp and all the soldier band—
Sweet charity he bore in either hand,
A father's love beamed from his pitying eyes.

With gentle hand and sympathetic breath,
He soothed the woe a ghastly plague had brought—
King that he was, most kingly deeds he wrought,
Serving his people in the midst of death.

A courtier's shout, a hireling soldier's cheer
May be the earthly monarch's dearest prize—
They cannot swell beyond the honest skies
And find their way to God's attentive ear.

But there is one sweet, holy, subtle thing
Speeds up to heav'n and finds a welcome there—
A trustful, grateful nation's soulful pray'r—
"God bless our Humbert—God protect our king!"

HER NAME.

From The Merchant Traveller.

"The best laid plans of men and mice,"
The poet says, "gang aft agley,"
And though a poet sometimes lies,
In this case truth holds sway.

There was a man deep in whose soul
Poetic fancies held high place;
His name was Rose, a pleasant name,
With more or less of grace.

Unto this Rose the angels brought
A dear, delightful child,
A very ball of promise, and
The father called her "Wild."

A Wild