



LITERATURE.

From the London Punch.

CHRISTMAS IS NOT WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE.

Nobody burns the yule log,
All the old customs are banished !
Where is the scavenger's dog ?
The regular dustman has vanished.
A thorough legitimate play
For the season George Barnwell was thought to be ;
That kind of thing's all done away :
Christmas is not what it ought to be.

The London apprentice no more
Appears on the stage in white trousers ;
His uncle would raise but a roar
Of mirth if they murder'd him now, sirs.
Poor George's excessive remorse
The Gall'ry would order cut short to be ;
With laughter the house would be hoarse :
Christmas is not what it ought to be.

Pantomime's quite on the wane,
Though vainly they try to enrich it,
By calling, again and again,
For " Hot Codlins " and " Tippetwitchet " !
The stealing of poultry by clown
Has ceased irresistible sport to be,
If he swallowed a turkey it wouldn't go down :
Christmas is not what it ought to be.

The butcher, the baker, the sweep,
Employing the men as their proxies,
No longer a harvest can reap,
By a cool application for boxes.
Such impudent claims on the purse
By many are deemed set at naught to be ;
And here we our burden reverse,
Singing, " Christmas is quite what it ought to be. "

Though wholesome the downfall may be
Of customs whose end is extortion,
At Christmas the head should be free,
Not numbed by the coldness of caution.
Of beef, of plum pudding, of beer,
Permit not the neediest short to be :
To all here's a happy New Year,
Whose Christmas has been what it ought to be.

[From Graham's Magazine, for January.]

ALICE LISLE.

A SKETCH FROM ENGLISH HISTORY.

BY MRS. CAROLINE H. BUTLER.

There is perhaps no data in the annals of English History marked with a more bloody significance of the fearful extent to which the evil passions of mankind will reach, when not held in check by religious or civil discipline, than that characterized as the " Bloody Assizes," in the reign of James the II—1705—which, even from out the lapse of two centuries, still stands forth in loathsome and horrible distinctness. When the savage and bloody-minded Jeffreys, empowered by a vindictive and arbitrary monarch, stalked like a demon through the land, tracing his passage with blood and tears, while the music of his infernal march, was the groans and death-shrieks of his victims. As he strode onward—behind him he left horrible, eye-blasting, soul-harrowing proofs of his cruelty—corpses swinging in the wind at the corners of the cross-roads—gibbets stuck up in every market-place—and blackening heads and limbs impaled, even before the windows of the holy house of God !

Such was the more than brutal ferocity with which this fiend in human shape, George Jeffreys, Chief Justice of the Court of the King's Bench, prosecuted his commission.

Through all those districts where the inhabitants had either taken up arms in the Monmouth Rebellion against the king, or who had been known five years before to have received the unfortunate duke with favour and homage, when assuming the rank of a rightful prince he passed with almost regal triumph through the land, did Jeffreys and his well-picked myrmidons pursue their murderous track, sparing neither sex nor age—the death-blow descending alike upon the silver head of tottering age, or lisping, helpless infancy. " And," says Maculay, " his spirits rose higher and higher as the work went on. He laughed, shouted, joked, and swore in such a way that many thought him drunk from morning to night, but in him it was not easy to distinguish the madness produced by evil passions, from the madness produced by brandy."

In such a frame of mind he entered Southampton and proceeded toward Winchester, which although not the scene of any warlike encounter with rebel and royalists, had nevertheless been resorted to by many of the former as a place of safety, among whom was their unhappy leader, the infatuated Monmouth himself. It was here, near the borders of the New Forest that the unfortunate

man was taken prisoner. Worn out by fatigue—crushed by disappointment—his high hopes blasted by defeat, the ill-fated son of Charles was discovered concealed in a ditch, where all through a long, long day, and a weary night, without food or drink, the unhappy fugitive had vainly hoped to evade the search of his pursuers.

Hither, then, came Jeffreys, tainting the air as with a pestilence, and causing great terror and dismay, particularly among the peasantry, no one knowing who might prove the victim of the tyrant's insatiate thirst for blood.

He was now, however, in hot pursuit of two men—one a Nonconformist divine, named Hicks ; the other a lawyer, Richard Nelthorpe, an outlaw, who had made himself obnoxious by being concerned in the Rye House plot.—These men, it is needless to say, Jeffreys was resolved to pursue to death.

In a fine old mansion, encompassed by a closely wooded park of a century's growth, dwelt the Lady Alice Lisle. She was the widow of John Lisle, who had held a commission under Cromwell, and had also sat in the Long Parliament. He had been created a Lord by Cromwell, and the title of the Lady was still courteously assigned to his widow, for she was one greatly beloved by all persons and parties, both Whig and Tory, for her many excellent qualities, and was also nearly allied to many noble families.

It was near the close of a beautiful autumnal day, that the Lady Alice, clad in deep mourning weeds, might be seen passing slowly beneath the dark foliage of those venerable trees, stretching in such primeval grandeur far on either side her domain. The chastened radiance of the setting sun here and there burnished the almost motionless leaves with gold, or stealing athwart the mossy trunks, and over the deep green sward, mildly illumined the forest aisles, seeming thereby as paths angels might love to tread. The only companion of the lady was a child—a beautiful boy of perhaps six years old—an orphan whom the kind Lady Alice had taken under her protection, and who now, far from partaking in the seriousness of his benefactress, skipped and gambled before her in wild and happy recklessness—now springing like a fawn into the path before her from behind some lofty screen, where for a moment he had laid concealed, or striving to attract attention by his childish prattle as he bounded playfully at her side.

As heedless to the deepening twilight as she seemed to all else around her, the Lady Alice had proceeded further into the depths of the wood than was her usual custom, when she was suddenly aroused to the lateness of the hour by a scream from little Edwin, who, burying his face in the folds of her mantle, cried,

" O run, dear lady, run—bad men—ah, they will kill us !"
" What are you talking of, Edwin ?" she answered, taking his hand—" who will kill us ? We shall soon be at the Hall ; fie, boy, are you afraid because the sun has set, and the old woods grown dark ? Ah, is this my little hero !"
" But, lady, I see men—bad, wicked men ; there, lady, there," pointing as he spoke, to a clump of low oaks.

" Foolish boy, it is only an owl," said the lady, now turning to retrace her steps.

At that moment two men sprung from out the thicket and stood in her path. Well might that lady tremble, alone and unprotected in the deep, dark wood, yet in tones well believing her fears, she unflinchingly bade them stand aside, and give passage to herself and the pale, timid child she led by the hand.

" We mean not to harm or frighten you, madam," said one of the men, lifting his goatskin cap and stepping aside, " we seek at your hands shelter and food. For three days we have lain concealed within these woods, not daring to venture forth even to satisfy the cravings of hunger. We are neither thieves nor murderers—slight offences may be in these signal times of despotism and injustice—but men hunted down like wild beasts in the cause of civil and religious freedom. It is for our lives we implore your aid."

" Yea, for our lives—that we may be spared to trample the sons of Belial under our feet, and smite, and slay and destroy the arch tools of oppression !" interrupted the other, with violent gesticulations ; " and thou, woman, art the chosen vessel of the Lord to shield his servants from the man of blood against that dreadful day of retribution."

" I ask not to know why you are thus thrown within peril of your lives," answered the Lady Alice, it is enough for me that you are fellow beings in distress, and as such must claim my sympathy, and the shelter of my roof.—God forbid the doors of Alice Lisle should be closed against misfortune. Follow me, then, friends, and such food as my house affords, and such security as its walls can give may the Lord bless unto you."

Confident in the attachment and fidelity of her domestics, the Lady Alice, in a few words, made known to them that the lives of these unfortunate men were in jeopardy, and that they sought from her kindness, safety and concealment, and sharing in the benevolence of their mistress, each one of that well-tryed household regarded the fugitives with generous sympathy.

An excellent supper, such as their famishing natures required, and a bottle of old wine, was soon placed before the weary men. They were then conducted by the Lady Alice herself to a room on the ground floor.

" Observe," said she, " this oaken panel—press your finger thus ; a door opens, leading into a secret passage, connected with the vaults of the old chapel, where, in case of emergency, you will be perfectly secure from search. Sleep, then, my friends, in peace, one of my most faithful servants will this night keep watch, and upon the least alarm, you will be notified in time to avail yourselves of the way of escape I have pointed out.

As she bade them good-night, one of the men, seizing the hem of her mantle, carried it to his lips with a grace not unfitting the presence of a queen, while in the canting oratory of the day, his companion devoutly prayed the Most High to bless the woman through whose assistance vengeance was yet to be heaped on the head of the scorner and those who now sat in high places to be brought low.

And thus fortified and encouraged by the assurances of their noble benefactress, the fugitives took heart, and throwing themselves upon the bed, were soon soundly sleeping.

Not so the Lady Alice. True, those men had not revealed their names, neither had she sought to discover who they were, or for what crime they were driven to their present stratagem—yet that they fled the wrath of the cruel-minded Jeffreys she felt persuaded, and fearful that with his myrmidons he might be close on the track of these unhappy men, she, too, sat watching all the night, or pacing with light footfall the long galleries, ever and anon stepping out upon the balcony and listening to every sound, her ears magnifying the whispers of the wind stealing through the branches of the old trees, into the suppressed murmurs of an armed force. All, however, remained quiet. Just as the day began to dawn, she threw herself upon her couch—not meaning to sleep. But, overcome with the fatigue of her lonely night-watch, and lulled perhaps by the security which almost always comes to the watcher with the dawn of day, she soon unconsciously sunk into a deep sleep, from which, alas ! she was but too rudely aroused ; for even in that brief half hour when tired nature claimed its own, the wily Jeffreys had surrounded the house with his no less brutal soldiers.

" Come, come, madam, bestir yourself, you are wanted," cried the leader, seizing the Lady Alice by the shoulder, and rudely shaking her ; " methinks you sleep well this morning—long watching makes sound slumbers, eh !—Come, up with you, woman, and tell us in what corner of this rebel's nest you have stowed away the Presbyterian knave and his worthy friend ?"

In a moment the lady was fully awake, and comprehended at once her perilous situation. But her self-possession did not forsake her, and breathing an inward prayer for the safety of the two unhappy men so closely pursued, she said, as she drew herself proudly up,

" What means this unmanly intrusion ? Off, sir ! unhand me, or your audacity shall be punished as it deserves !"

" Ho-ho, my brave wench, words are cheap ! you will find proofs not so easy ! Know, mistress, yourself and your servants are my prisoners," said Jeffreys.

" Your prisoners !" cried the lady, with cutting contempt ; " and who are you, and by whose authority do you dare to lay hands on me or any beneath my roof ?"

" Who am I ? That you shall soon know to your cost," said Jeffreys, with a horrible oath. " George Jeffreys has a peculiar way of making himself known, my mistress.—Now deliver up these two arch rebels—the canting, whining priest, and the traitor Nelthorpe, into our hands, and mayhap I'll not press my further acquaintance upon your ladyship, except to taste the quality of your wine, for I'll warrant you, my men, (turning to his followers) these old cellars are not dry."

" I know no such persons as those you seek," replied the Lady Alice, firmly ; " and what reason have you to suppose they are within my house ?"

" We know it, and that is enough," replied Jeffreys.—" They are known to have lain hid within your neighborhood ; and we know they have been secreted by you ; and now, by G—d, madam, unless you lead us to their kennel, your body shall writhe in flames, or be hacked in pieces by my soldiers !"

" Infamous, cowardly wretch," replied Alice Lisle, undaunted, " think you your threats would induce me to betray, more especially into your blood-thirsty hands, any unhappy individual who had sought my protection !—Know Alice Lisle better."

" Ho-no, are we so brave ! here, my men, take this boasting mistress, and give her a dance upon hot coals !" cried the ferocious Jeffreys.

At that moment little Edwin, still in his night dress, opened the door of his little bed-room, and ran terrified toward the Lady Alice ; but he was not permitted to reach her ; a soldier rudely seized the poor boy by the shoulder, and notwithstanding his shrieks, held him with such a grip as left the print of his fingers upon the tender flesh.

" Ruffian, unhand the child !" exclaimed the lady, attempting to rise, but held back by the iron hand of Jeffreys.

" Ha ! a pretty hostage, truly !" he said. " Here, Ratcliffe, draw your dagger across his pretty white throat, unless this stubborn woman yields up our prey—do you hear that ?" turning to the Lady Alice.

" O save me—save me ! don't let them kill me !" screamed the poor little fellow, striving to break away ; then turning his beautiful eyes upon the hard, stern features of the man who held him, he clung piteously around his knees, repeating his cry for mercy, his face uplifted, and his soft, golden curls falling over his white shoulders, from which the loose night-dress had slipped away.

Tears, which neither her own danger, or the insults heaped upon her could draw forth, now streamed down the pallid cheek of the Lady Alice.

" Are you men ?" she cried, turning to the rude soldiers, " are you men, and can you stand by and see that innocent, helpless lamb inhumanly murdered before your eyes ?"

" Ah !" cried Jeffreys, with a hideous leer, " we are used to butchering lambs, madam ; bless you, we do it so easy the poor things don't have time to bleat ! Strike, Ratcliffe !"

A scream—a wild scream of agony burst from the heart of Alice Lisle ; then dashing off the arm of Jeffreys, in the strength of her despair, as but a feather's weight, she sprung to the boy, and threw her arms around him.

There was heard at the moment a loud shout from the court-yard, coupled with oaths and imprecations, and one of the troops burst in, waving his cap.

" Hurrah, your honour ! they're caught, your worship ; we've got the rascals—hurrah ! hurrah !"

" Now God help them !" murmured Alice.

" Your life shall answer for this, vile traitress !" muttered Jeffreys, in a voice hoarse with rage, and shaking his fist at the unshrinking heroine. " But where found you the knaves ?" he added, turning to the bearer of such fiendish joy.

" Ha, ha, your worship—but I can't help laughing ; we found his reverence, chin-deep, in a malt-tub—ha, ha, ha ! and the other rogue we hauled from the kitchen chimney, as black as his master, the devil !"

" And to his master he shall soon be sent with a crack in his windpipe," said Jeffreys.