

Literature, &c.

British Magazines for August.

Illuminated Magazine. A GLANCE AT THE PAST AND PRESENT.

[From an article bearing this title, we select the following extracts.]

The past and present! how much do these two words imply of stirring interest to all human interests, and yet how little we know of the one, and how anxious we are to escape from the other! That which is, gives us promise of something better; but the things that were, we leave to dusty antiquaries, to the learned tomes of old societies, or to the tattling of octogenarian gossips, who remember how "their father used to say, that when his grandfather was young, they did so"—yet all these matters concerned our ancestors, men and women like ourselves, who lived and thought, and ate and drank, set the fashions of the day, thought themselves better than all the world, as we do, laughed at the absurdities of their forefather, loved scandal and hated poverty, frequented the Cockpit as we do the Opera, and affected cudgel playing as we do the Ascot or the Derby. It is our one, however, to look back upon these old folks, with an ill-supposed laugh, and to consider them as little better than an odd, poor, barbarous sort of people altogether, and as we read old Peys, or some other quaint journalist of the times, and enjoy the humour of the thing amazingly, we feel as if looking on at a good farce, a little over done perhaps, and when convinced that the actors were indeed our own plain-thinking, quaint-speaking, clumsy old ancestors, we soothe our self-esteem, by observing how immeasurably they were behindhand with us; and as we encourage a half risible, half pitying scorn for them accordingly, congratulate ourselves, that our descendants in the third and fourth generation will think very differently of us, a fact, however comforting, that cannot be proved for the next six hundred years perhaps. As a rational people, it pleases us to find a satisfactory reason too for our strictures and anticipations, and we look with infinite complacency on all that tends to this effect, which indeed seems every where around us now in populous, growing London, if we do but look about us, at our squares, clubs, parks, streets, columns and costumes, and then go in to some old registry, and pore over ancient maps, histories, and records.

Perhaps these changes have carried from us a certain degree of freshness and merriment; there is less picturesqueness in our sight, less levity in our ears, but we can afford the loss. We are now a thinking, commercial, railroad-making, colonizing people; instead of an old Maypole in the Strand, 125 feet high, decorated with flags, gilt balls and trumpery, we have omnibuses to the Bank, that are much more spirit-stirring than old Morris-dancing and such mad nonsense. We do not require fairs at St. James's once a fortnight, as in Charles the Second's time, who, by the way, with amusing inconsistency, abolished them at last, because they led to levity and debauchery among the people; nor cudgel-playing in St. James's square, nor tilting yards at Whitehall, nor jousts nor mummings, to keep up the spirits of the Queen's subjects; steam and smoke, money-making and politics do that now-a-days, and although we have more poor men among us, our great men are richer, and the value of the coin of the realm considerably less, which, after all, seems of the greater consequence. Our Poor-house arrangements in the present day, are conducted, for instance, with great economy; but a question whether 447 poor people could be buried now, for one pound sterling, as by parish records, it appears they were, in the year 1635, nor inadequate as the pay is to the suffering sempstress of modern times, could four-and-forty coats be made for two-and-twenty shillings; but there was more food then, more people to be laboured for, and fewer labourers, a great secret in the condition of the working orders.

In Queen Ann's reign public amusements seem to have taken a more distinct form than they had done previously. The feat of a tiger plucking the feathers from a fowl's body, at Bartholomew Fair, induced the proprietor of the Lincoln's Inn Theatre to exhibit managed horses after the Italian manner, the origin of the present "Asley's"; very splendid entertainments were also given in May-fair, which, however, produced a very unique incident in the character of the times. Numbers of vicious and idle people being attracted by these shows the constabulary force interfered, to commit to prison some ringleaders of offence, whereupon, the soldiers took the part of the liberties of the fair, and a scuffle ensued, in which several persons lost their lives. The sports of the Bear-garden seem also to have been a stain also upon these times, a diversion which some writers seem to consider the English to have been very contented in by the customs of the ancients in their public shows and theatres; but the populace of London were not accustomed to the horrid sights common in the streets of Rome, nor to the brutalities practised by that people on their slaves and captives, neither had our women the character of the Spanish ladies, which led them to a bull fight as their favourite show; and yet humanity, pity, fear, and horror, seem to have fled from the hearts of these Englishmen, who, with their wives and daughters, would sit in the theatre of the Bear-garden, with keen delight, to witness their fellow citizens maimed and mutilated in the most cruel manner; the fighting of the bears being considered but a tame and poor

amusement long before, although one of these animals, who had been taught everything but forgiveness of injuries, tore his keeper to pieces on one occasion, before the faces of the audience.

The theatre at Moorfields was also filled with drols and Merry Andrews, who gave quite work enough to the justices and their assistants and it was not until the time of George the First, that real and visible improvement seems to have taken place in the manners of the people, and the vicinity of the King's Mews and the town of Westminster to have been illumined with the dawn of social improvement. Handel then shone forth to delight and fascinate our people; and in 1765, carriages might be seen crowded with ladies of fashion, and beaux of note, pressing to the new opera of "Atalo," played at the bottom of the Haymarket, while the scenery, painted by Selvandoni, was spoken of as most beautiful, and the spectators were all enraptured. The taste of the town then began to improve, and pantomime and dancing dogs lost their attractions for the educated; in 1778, the first academy of painting was agitated in Lincoln's Inn-fields, and Sir James Thornhill lent a room at the back of his house in Covent, or "Convent" Garden, as it was more correctly called, in accordance with its origin, for the reception of some very curious and valuable paintings, which his son-in-law, Hogarth, afterwards lent to a society of artists in St. Martin's lane, the origin of the present great collection of the National Gallery of Trafalgar square.

This brief and most imperfect attempt to sketch some of the changes which have accompanied the gradual improvement that has taken place since the village of Charing could boast but an old cross, a little Hermitage, and a few monastic cells, until great Trafalgar-square burst upon our view, with its fine statues, its fountains of pure water, its noble pavement, its magnificent clubs, and rich picture gallery, will prove at least, that improvement has been rapid in this our noble City, and that, although London and its environs is now overwhelmed with population, yet that there is much to rejoice at in its condition and improvements. Well do we know there is yet much vice, and yet greater misery, in the close and more crowded ways of this great city, yet the populace, increasing as it is, is more sober, more manageable, than of old. The Leprous Hospital of St. James, endowed by the Abbot and Convent of Westminster, in 1100, was a mere hat, compared to our present noble hospital of Charing Cross; the interesting Model Prison at Pentonville, the only real House of Correction worthy a civilized and intelligent nation, makes us shudder as we look on the rusty iron stocks and old whipping post that once disgraced the Haymarket; and although the starving and the miserable will yet seek in ardent spirits temporary alleviation from their woes, the habits of sack or other dram-drinking before breakfast, by all classes, and of general habits of offensive intemperance, are becoming gradually lost to us. True, the alms houses, work-houses, charity schools and hospitals, that surround us are very insufficient for the wants of the population; true, the garrets, cellars, and by-ways of this our noble city teem with the suffering, the hungry, the helpless, and the dying, whom no common aid can reach; the back lanes and purlieus of even Trafalgar-square, with all its grandeur, show us lanes and houses of the most miserable description, rotting with filth, and crowded by the sons and daughters of misery, existing in an atmosphere, vile, with pestilence and fever. Day by day, however, we see the carpenter and the builder opening the ways to health and ventilation—misery, sought in her chamber, brought forth, relieved, and dried; there is moral courage and strong will required for all this—but its growth is progressing. The old Cross of Charing looked but on warring fields and on an old monastic edifice, whose monks and benefactors cared only for the people as they contributed to their own wealth and self-indulgence; but the noble statue of the hero who made England feared by all who dared fob her shores, looks along a vista of strength, opulence, and beauty, to an edifice, whose walls re-echo with the demands of the protectors of the poor, and the claims asserted, in the cause of humanity and justice.

Happily, we hear no more the sound of the lances in the tilting-yard of Whitehall, nor the blows of the cudgels from the old falcon houses of the barbaric Kings of half populated England, but we meet the honest artificers of London, gazing with admiration on the skill of their fellow citizens, in the fine area of the square, and, entering the National Gallery, can there listen to the observations of men, on the genius of a Hogarth or a Wilkie, whose ancestors knew nothing better than the diversions of the Cockpit, and the credulities of the Bear-garden. It is with some reason, then, that we look with pity and contempt upon our ancestors, and on all that form the curiosities of antiquity as shown in the records of old London; but, as we do so, a generous sentiment takes possession of us, and we feel that we can afford to hope that civilization is progressing and can even support the idea that the records of the next century may, in like way, find abundant matter for their entertaining strictures, on the deficiencies and quaintness of London in 1844, and on the laughable inconsistencies of its people, in their luxuries, entertainments, and costumes.

A WORD OR TWO ON WITCH-CRAFT.

[This is the title of a long article in the same periodical, from which we take the following extracts.]

WITCH-CRAFT, real or supposed, in the more limited sense of the word—though instances of it, so called, had been occurring

occasionally for a long time previously—was, comparatively little heard of till the end of the fifteenth century, when Pope Innocent VIII. published a bull against it, empowering certain German inquisitors to search out witches and burn them. This was in the year 1484. The reception, however, of this, and the succeeding bulls of other Pontiffs, by the church, shows that no kind of doubt either as to the fact or the possibility of the commission of such a crime was then entertained. From the publication of Innocent's bull, for the space of some two hundred and fifty years, the witch-panic, so to speak, raged with but few intermissions, like a pestilence, throughout Christendom. The number of executions which during that period took place in Germany alone is calculated by Sir Walter Scott, in his article on the subject in the Foreign Quarterly, as exceeding one hundred thousand.

It is stated, in the same article, that in Geneva, in the year 1515, no less than 500 witches were executed in three months; a thousand in one year in the diocese of Cromo, and a hundred a year on an average for some time afterwards; in Lorraine, from 1580 to 1585, nine hundred; and in France, about 1520, a number almost infinite—nearly all these victims, having previously been subjected to tortures which it is hideous to think upon, expired in lingering agonies by fire!

We have mentioned, on the authority of Sir Walter Scott, the fearful multitude of those executions which took place, subsequently to the publication of Innocent's bull, in Germany, to which country it especially related. We should add that the victims included children of from twelve to nine years old, aged persons, and young women; one of whom, Gobel Babelin, was renowned as the handsomest girl in Wurzburg.

In New England, towards the close of the seventeenth century, the like tragedies were enacted, though during a shorter period, on a scale truly horrible. Nineteen persons were hanged at Boston and Andover; one was pressed to death for refusing to plead; and the amount of those either actually imprisoned or accused, was in all nearly four hundred. Among the sufferers there was actually a dog.

(See the article "Witchcraft" in the Retrospective Review, Vol. V. Part 1, Art. 5.) In 1728, in Hungary, thirteen persons were burnt alive at Sigeden. In 1749, one Maria Renata was put to death at Wurzburg; and it is said that in Glarus, in Switzerland, a reputed witch was burnt so late as 1786. (See the article already quoted, in No. XI. Art. 1, of the Foreign Quarterly.)

We have thus briefly glanced at the history of Witchcraft in foreign countries, merely that the reader, when we speak of the amount of human bloodshed and misery of which its supposed existence was productive, may know that he is not taking our assertion wholly upon trust.

We will now turn to our own country, not only because the subject considered in relation thereto assumes a more interesting aspect, but because the facts which its history furnishes have a peculiar bearing on the argument. For it must be remembered that those who suffered for this alleged crime in England and Scotland, were judiciously convicted by a process which, in criminal jurisprudence, is justly regarded by us as the most satisfactory means of eliciting the truth—Trial by Jury.

Passing over the comparatively rare, apocryphal, and questionable instances of Witchcraft that occurred prior to the Reformation, together with the statutes of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, we will come at once to the epoch of the "British Solomon"; the "Demonologie" of which "High and Mighty Prince" is familiar, by name at least, to every reader. And first, as the statute against Witchcraft, passed in the first year of his reign, contains so to speak, a definition of that crime as it was then understood, we may as well recite a portion of it:

"Oae that shall use, practise, or exercise, any invocation or conjuration of any evil or wicked spirit, or consult, covenant, with, entertain or employ, feed or reward, any evil or wicked spirit, to or for any intent and purpose; or to take up any dead man, woman, or child, out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth; or the skin, bone, or any other part of a dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment; or shall use, practise, or exercise, any witchcraft, &c. whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined or lamed in his or her body, or any part thereof, such offenders, duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer death."

Within fifty years after the passing of this act, more than one hundred and forty persons in batches of fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen each, were condemned, and most of them executed at different places in England; besides a large number of offenders singly indicted, and hanged or burnt. In Scotland it has been estimated, some thousands died at the stake.

Three thousand persons are said to have fallen victims to the accusation of Witchcraft during the Long Parliament.

Trials and executions for Witchcraft continued to occur at intervals till the year 1716, when a Mrs Hicks and her daughter, aged nine years, were hanged at Huntingdon, for selling their souls to the devil. In 1735 the statute of James I. was finally repealed.

Now we have already said that the convictions were the issue of trial by jury. We must add that in one instance the presiding Judge was Sir Matthew Hale, and one of the principal witnesses for the prosecution was Sir Thomas Brown! It is true that the evidence against the supposed witches consisted principally of their own confessions, which were often elicited by torture; and that it was other-

wise, in many cases, altogether unsatisfactory and absurd; but still, when we come to consider the multitude of the persons convicted, the supposition that in every single case the witnesses were either perjured or deceived, and the judge and the twelve jurors so destitute of common sense as to be unable to discriminate between true and false testimony, is not one to be entertained without difficulty. It must be borne in mind, that not every individual indicted for Witchcraft was found guilty; some were acquitted. Admit that the crime was impossible: here then were thousands of impossible offences brought home by circumstantial evidence; the very same evidence which is now resorted to to substantiate a charge of theft or murder. Surely this is not an unimportant consideration with reference to the value of this species of evidence. It is true that we are more what is termed enlightened now than our forefathers were in the seventeenth century. That is to say, we are in advance of them in science and philosophy. But the question is, were they so much our inferiors in common understanding, as to have been incompetent to decide upon a mere question of fact?

To what, then, it will be asked, do we refer those extraordinary coincidences, on which we have dwelt so emphatically? We will answer in two words—to MENTAL CONTAGION.

The whole history of Witchcraft presents an analogy to that of an infectious disorder; and here we would direct especial attention to what took place at Mohra. Here was an absolute multitude of persons, of all ages, with their mind possessed of identical ideas, all participating in one illusion. This is not like a common distemper of the fancy, which varies according to the individual brain which it affects. By the term mental contagion, we understand a definite disease of the imagination as uniform in point of its manifestations as the plague, small pox, or other like bodily distemper. This, we are aware, is an hypothesis. Some may consider it a wild one; but we know of none other adequate to account for those facts of which we have above presented a sample—which are acknowledged matters of history—and, if it be not adopted, will still constitute a problem to the psychologist.

In conclusion, we should inquire whether, although the belief in Witchcraft has passed away, there are not still phenomena of a kindred nature to it presented by the human mind? Not to mention remoter yet late instances in point, what was it that, within these last few years, diffused a delusion throughout a multitude in the case of the lunatic Thom? And what are the marvels numerously, and we must admit, respectably attested of Mesmerism? The latter are scarce less extraordinary than those with which we have been dealing in these pages: and we can hardly wonder, so striking is the resemblance, at the parallel which has been drawn between them.

By the foregoing considerations a practical conclusion of a two-fold nature is suggested to us. First, that in most matters of general and popular belief, there is, however alloyed by error, a nucleus of truth. Secondly, that our judgment, nay, our very perceptions, are liable to a perversion, against which our principal safeguard consists in the recognition of its cause.

Tait's Edinburgh Magazine. HISTORY OF THE LEGION.

[From an article entitled, "Bon Gaultier and his Friends," we select the following humorous description of the British Legion employed by the Government of Spain, and commanded by General Evans.]

YOUNG SCOTLAND.

Ah now, my dear fellow! do tell us something about the Legion. Confound the Old Peninsular exploits. What between Captain Hamilton and Colonel Napier and the squadron of military quilldrivers, who have spoiled more foolscap than cartridge wrappers, we know every inch of the campaigning ground from Torres Vedras to the Pyrenees. No, captain! Give us something fresh. You were one of those who drew the sword with Evans, and gathered, if not laurels, at least a change of linen, with the Westminster heroes, from the verdant hedgerows of Spain. Surely there must be something worth remembrance in such a chivalrous crusade.

O'MALLEY.

Faith, Charley, as to linen, there was a little of that as an elderly gentleman could desire. Happy was the man amongst us who saved his own British shirts, without wasting fruitless efforts in pursuit of the Lusitanian tweel. It was a devilish bad business, I can tell you. Only conceive my disgust, when, instead of commanding a company of Herculean heroes, I found myself degraded into the leader of the most villainous pack of rogues that ever were swept from the asses! I am done!

BON GAULTIER.

Were they really so bad? O'MALLEY.

Barrington was a joke to my serjeant. Before he was enlisted a fortnight he had pawned the regimental colours for a quart of gin, and picked my pocket twice upon parade. It was no use tying him up to the halberts, for every one of the drummers was under sentence of transportation, and treated the back of their ancient pal as tenderly as if it had been their own. The only tune under which they would advance to action was the "Rogue's March;" and we were obliged to remind them that they lay under the eye of the London police, before