

A TRAVELER'S NOTE BOOK

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The Late Lord Tennyson and His Rare Port Wine—A Good and a Bad British Custom—Wrathfuls of the Olden Roman Roads—John Connell, the Blind Singer of Edinburgh.

LONDON, Dec. 27.—An eminent German author and myself visited Farringford House, Isle of Wight, the home of the late Lord Tennyson, a few months before the poet's death. In his later years, the laureate, forgivingly enough, received this sort of tribute rather charily, as he had somehow become possessed of the odd suspicion that literary pilgrims sought his cellar, famous for the oldest and the choicest port wine in England, rather than for opportunity for worshipping at the shrine of his personality.

We found him among the shrubbery which luxuriously hides the quaint old place, wandering in the verdure and blossoms like an unseasonable St. Nicholas masquerading beneath a frowsy slouch hat. He received us kindly enough, but with brusque familiarity; as though we had been importunate tenants coming to insist upon rent reductions, and led us directly to his study. The one man servant of the place instantly appeared, with the air of a country inn servant awaiting a dubious order from questionable guests. The great poet simply said, "Two!" with a deprecating gesture; motioned us to a seat upon an ancient leather-covered settle; tossed his slouch hat into a corner of the study and sank wearily into his capacious easy chair at the study table, as if about to undergo an unpleasant ordeal.

Tennyson eyed my German friend with evident mistrust until the man servant returned with two bottles of port wine, glasses for his visitors, and a huge dock-glass, holding at least a pint, for himself. Then the great man deliberately put an end to conversation by abruptly declaring that he felt unable to discuss German philosophy or American politics; pushed one bottle and the glasses towards us; and held the other bottle by the neck as if fearful it might somehow disappear. Impatiently motioning us to partake, he at once helped himself to a good half pint of wine, to which was added half as much cold water. This was repeated, until in a half hour, his own bottle had been entirely emptied. We said some pleasant things and came away. My German friend was furious; more furious over the quality of the wine that had been served to us, than the poet's apparent antipathy to the philosophies of his countrymen. The same evening in London, while we were still in company together with a few literary friends at a Convent Garden resort, the German author indignantly related the incident. The entire party laughed merrily at our discomfiture, and one, a well known actor finally said:

"Henry Irving is the only person who ever really got the best of Lord Tennyson regarding his famous port wine. He was visiting him about two years since. When the desert came on, the poet left the table and retired to his study with Irving. Here a bottle of his favorite port, a glass for Irving, and the same huge dock-glass, with a pitcher of water was set before him. In a few moments Lord Tennyson fell asleep Irving gently disengaged his hand from the neck of the bottle, took it to his own side of the study table, and leisurely drank its entire contents before the poet awoke. The remainder of Irving's visit was distinguished by extreme hilarity on his part, and a well-defined coolness on the part of the laureate; but Irving has always been ecstatic over his achievement, and possesses the extraordinary distinction of being the only man living, aside from the laureate himself, who ever really drank an entire bottle of Lord Tennyson's rare old port wine.

In foreign travel, as in some other things, we are often the victims of our own openness or prejudice. In London and other British cities, the American will notice little signs at street corners, in crowded, narrow thoroughfares, in parkways, and at all sudden turnings traversed by vehicles, reading, "Keep to the left."

Some years ago when I first noticed that it worried me. I wanted to understand it, and like a true American, perhaps protest about it a little. I approached a London policeman with the earnest inquiry: "Beg pardon, officer, but might I ask why, in London, everything goes 'to the left'?"

Like one of Mrs. Jarley's figures his head moved stately. He regarded me one awful, official moment with contemptuous pity. His head moved back again. Then with withering scorn he answered: "An' w'y in 'ell shouldn't it?"

I had never thought of that. After observing and thinking a little, I saw that the English are right in keeping to the left. Drivers being seated at the right, there is absolutely no other way in which to utilize every inch of crowded street. In keeping to the right, as with us, no driver can safely judge distance, when meeting or passing vehicles. Here, where the drivers' heads practically come together over their wheel-hubs when meeting or passing, far greater speed is secured; while danger and loss from clashing wheels are almost wholly avoided. There is wisdom in discarding a bad custom for a good one, wherever we may find the latter. There is a quaint little inn of Edinburgh,

hard by St. Andrew's square, in which I love to make my home when in "Auld Reekie;" for while it is but a few steps from the city's peerless Princess Street, it is still within the precincts of a fine old residence district, made famous by some Scotchmen of other days.

Much going and coming between this inn and central city places, brought to my notice the fact that, nearly every pleasant summer night when the hush of evening had fallen upon the town, a marvellous singer of the tenderest ballads of Scotland came that way; stood for a quarter of an hour or so in the quiet entrance to St. Andrew's street; and at intervals to the accompaniment of an accordion sang sweetly for those who tarried.

At chance glimpses of the singer and his regular evening audience I noticed, too, that the man never solicited alms. He stood quite still in the middle of the street, and now and then some one of the crowd, in the pauses of his singing, would step quietly up to him and place a coin within his hand. These were copper coins always, and they nearly always came from the pockets of poor people. Finally, the songs and the scene touching my own heart, I went and placed a coin in his hand, as others had done before me.

Then for the first time I saw that the man was blind. I saw, besides, such a face as will haunt me all my lifetime. I cannot tell you what painter has put most of hopeful patience, exalted resignation and sublime faith into any one face upon canvas. But here was a face that instantly revealed them all. I went back to him. I told him I would like to know him; asked him if I could come to his home, or if he could find his way to my lodgings; and in a moment more we had arranged for a meeting at the little St. Andrew's street inn for the morrow.

When he came his first words put us both as warmly in touch as though our hearts had been open to each other for a lifetime.

"I knew by your voice," he said sadly, "you saw through my sightlessness. An' we blind folk are mair canny at seein' than ye think. You make rhymes. So do I." This deprecatingly. "God knows my heart is sair t' sing wi' a pen, too."

So I knew he had already sung "wi' his pen," and made him there and then repeat his rhymes. Here was another Burns in rags and obscurity. Surely this is so. Then I went with this blind poet and singer, John Connell, to his home, No. 12, Gibbs' Entry (second flat), Nicholson street, Edinburgh; away up among the densely inhabited wynds and closes of old town. What was there? Just so many children one could scarcely count them or remember their names; a kindly-faced wife, loyal and true; a hearthside as barren of the comforts of this life as the face of a storm-beaten crag; but with faith, hope and unflinching love enough within it to seed for saving an entire race.

The story of the man and his bitter struggle is a short one; because of his vocation, his poverty, his silent suffering. He was a mechanic once, with boundless hopes for education and advancement; perhaps with dreams of fame. The blindness came. That the wife and bairns might not starve, he must sing upon the street. Then a passing grand lady heard him sing. She sent for him and gave him an audience. The old hopes flamed anew. To make her husband presentable the soft-hearted wife gave all her savings and pledged all their little belongings for clothing and a brave new accoridon. "The pair body may find favor!" The fond wife prayed. He did—until he told the grand lady proudly of his good wife and bairns. Then she bid him good-day, and her servant showed him the door.

John Connell has been singing for alms now for more than four years for this mishap; that those dear to him may barely live; to relieve himself from the wolf-fangs of the usurer; and to retrieve himself from the favor of this grand Edinburgh lady. Many, silent, dreadful are the tragedies of this life from the heedlessness and heartlessness of the rich and great!

I added to his little store of books; helped a little in other ways from my own slender purse; but my heart aches and my eyes mist in the longing for some good and powerful man—is there not such a Scotchman in Scotland or America?—to place this blind singer where the songs of his tender heart may be made known to all men. Wherever my wanderings may lead me, I cannot but hear his thrilling voice in "Auld Reekie's" pleasant thoroughfares, or see him in the little Gibbs Entry home-cell, sitting in the silences of his sightless life, his faithful wife reading over and over to him the songs of other men, or taking down the lines that crowd upon his trembling tongue;—a transcendent picture of some modern Prometheus bound.

When tramping upon the grand Scottish highways, and drawn from the road to the fields by some vagarious fancy, a thrilling sense of exultation comes in the accidental discovery of some old Roman Road. You have perhaps leaped a wall and come upon a ragged hollow. This can be clearly traced, straight as an arrow for a long distance. There is a wondrous fascination in this bramble-covered swail. You pother about for a little, and find it paved with huge stones. More digging discloses solid walls set beneath the rubbish of its sides. The steatite hardly broke the line of this stout old artery, along which once surged the iron blood of Rome. Stern Agricola rode at the head of his legions

past the very spot on which you are standing. Almost ceaseless tides of warriors swept over the road to Mons Grampius, that ten thousand slain and stark Caledonians might form an impassable wall before the mist-wreathed mountains beyond.

Eighteen hundred years have passed since jealous Domitian recalled to Rome this invincible leader of steel-mailed slaughterers and the glowing pen of Tacitus told the surpassing bravery of the skin-clad Northmen who fell beneath his onslaughts; but as you linger upon this old Roman way, dreaming until the sun is almost level with the far mountain-tops, flaming their purple heather marvelously, countless wreaths pass and re-pass in olden battle array.

Then that is the nineteenth and not the first century upon which the sun is shining is recalled to you by the face of a keenly observant but solemn colie dog breaking between some clumps of golden broom above your head. He has been minding a flock of sheep, grazing yonder on the brae-side; and he has stepped aside for a moment to interrupt your vagarious fancies about Agricola and all the other grim old fellows of his blood-letting time, and to study your intentions and possibly examine your credentials. You beg his pardon for the trespass; leap the wall to the highway again; gaze back down the valley upon a score of red-roofed hamlets; push forward to the wayside inn where you are to tarry; and between the walls of its huge chamber, you march in dreams from the Seven Hills to the Grampians, with mailed hosts and forests of spears, along that old Roman Road throughout the living night. EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

A COLLIE DOG'S CUNNING.

How He Managed to Catch the Prowling Mink.

Mr. Nicholas H. Hilton, who runs a sawmill on Cranberry Creek, owns a smart colie dog named Shep. Soon after the mill pond became frozen over last month Shep trotted into the mill one day with a mink in his mouth. He dropped it in the sawdust, wagged his tail, walked to the opposite side of the mill where some siding was off, and went to gaze out on the ice-covered pond. The mink was warm, and Mr. Hilton tried in vain to get the dog to tell where he had caught it. When Mr. Hilton counted his hens that night he found that one was missing. The ground was bare, and the flock of hens and roosters had been scratching in some weeds and corn stubble not far from the pond. In the morning Mr. Hilton found the missing hen lying dead on the ice a few yards from the shore of the pond. Her neck had been bitten by a mink.

Two days afterward Shep fetched another mink into the sawmill and put it down in the dust. He noticed that his master was not looking at him, so he took hold of Mr. Hilton's trousers' leg and called his attention to the mink. Mr. Hilton put the mink on a shelf, and the dog went to the open space in the siding and began to peep out on the pond as before. The flock was minus another hen that night, and in the morning Mr. Hilton found her dead on the pond, with her throat torn. He couldn't make out how or where the dog had caught the minks, and the disappearance of the hens on the same day puzzled him so that he decided to keep a close watch on the dog.

Shep followed Mr. Hilton to the sawmill the next morning and immediately took his stand at the hole in the siding and began to gaze out on the pond. He watched there until the middle of the forenoon, when he ran out of the mill as though he had seen something. Mr. Hilton ran to the hole and saw a mink hopping along the ice from the direction of a stump in the upper end of the pond. It was making straight for the weedy bank, just below where the hens were scratching in the corn stubble, and Mr. Hilton watched it till it reached the shore and disappeared in the weeds. He was expecting to see the dog pounce upon it near the shore, and while he was wondering where the dog was, Shep trotted down to the pond, some distance above where the mink had left it, stole across the ice, and hid behind a stump.

No sooner had Shep got to the stump than Mr. Hilton heard a hen squawk out in the patch of corn stubble. The roosters and the other hens squalled and skeddaddled toward the barn, and Mr. Hilton who said he desired to see what the dog was up to behind the stump, stayed in the mill and kept a close watch on the shore and the stump. About a minute after the hen squawked Mr. Hilton saw the mink come out of the weeds with a hen by the neck. It held its head as high as it could to keep the hen from dragging, but the hen was large and heavy, and the mink wasn't tall enough to lift her clear of the ice. When it had got within a few feet of the stump Shep bounded out and nabbed it. He shook the mink for several seconds and then he trotted to the mill and dropped it in the sawdust as before. The discovery of the dog's cunning trick greatly pleased Mr. Hilton, and since then he has kept his hens shut up.—N. Y. Sun.

A New Slang Phrase.

Besides being very vulgar, a slang expression is undoubtedly the most comprehensive of language, and especially so in its up-to-dateness and its popular understandableness. "Ah! yer trolley's off!" contentiously sneered a scrubby little newsboy on Fulton street, Brooklyn, the other day to a companion with whom he was endeavoring to straighten out some difference of opinion. And "Your trolley's off" is getting to be pretty generally used to express what has been indicated by "You're off your base." If Macaulay or Charles Lamb offers anything more terse or pithy, that would express to every one just what everyone understands by "Your trolley's off," it would be worth quoting. Slang is perhaps richer in the history that touches the life and common experience of all the people most closely than most other words. Future generations may know the exact date when the trolley car was first used, but it they could discover just when "Your trolley's off" came into vogue they would know better when electric trolley cars began to be in general use and common to the people.—N. Y. Sun.

Japanese Hairpins.

Japanese women put up their hair with wooden, ivory or tortoise shell pins, seven or eight inches in length and fully half an inch wide. The pins are usually carved and are often capped with pivoted figures, which dance with every motion of the wearer.

THE KANGAROO CURSE.

A Great Nuisance and Expense to the Farmers of Australia.

The kangaroo plague (says Hardwicke's Science Gossip) has always been a great nuisance to the Australian squatters, for on an average these animals consume as much grass as a sheep. It is stated that, on a sheep run of 60,000 to 80,000 acres, 10,000 kangaroos were killed annually for six consecutive years, and yet their numbers remained very formidable in the locality. In the colony of South Australia hundreds of thousands of kangaroos are slaughtered annually for their skins and the bones offered by the authorities. The number of these marsupials in New South Wales in 1889 was estimated to be over 4,000,000, and yet about half a million kangaroos and 650,000 wallabies were destroyed in the colony in that year. A bonus of 8d. for each kangaroo killed is offered in Australia; hence the colonists are gradually exterminating these native animals. Over half a million skins are annually shipped to England, and a large number to North America, to be converted into leather. The macropidae include several kinds of kangaroos and wallabies. The progress of settlement in Australia has driven these animals from the more densely populated parts of the Australian continent, but in the country and unsettled districts they are still numerous enough to cause very considerable damage to the natural grasses. So serious has been the injury thus wrought that the Colonial Governments and run-holders pay a small sum per head for the destruction of the kangaroos.

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