

## EXTRACTS FROM "A DIARY OF TWO PARLIAMENTS."

## THE MAJOR.

As an unconscious humorist Major O'Gorman is unique. There is about him *je ne sais quoi* charm that enthroned him highest amongst the pleasant oddities of the House the moment he first rose in his place, and before he had spoken a word. Quite apart from the similarity in personal appearance, his humour smacks of Sir John Falstaff's. But the resemblance is only fleeting, and when we try to seize it, it is gone. There is an indescribable comicality in a back-view of him as he walks down the floor of the House, going to or from the division lobbies. No one could look without a smile upon the broad, nearly square expanse of cloth above, with glimpses below of the dwarfed legs that carry him along in a jaunty manner, each limb going out for the stride with a little flourish, as who should say, "This may look a heavy load, but it is nothing at all to me." Seen entering the House, always walking strictly in the middle of the broad passage lest peradventure he should carry away a corner of the bench, the smile of the looker-on grows broader and kindlier. There is a fierce look on his bearded face, such as Falstaff wore when he fought his battle of Gad's Hill over again. His mouth twitches as if one of the men in buckram had recklessly come in his way again, and he had bitten him in twain as a cat snaps at flies on a summer's day. He carries his hat in his right hand almost at arm's length, so that in swinging to and fro it shall have free scope. His step, though springy, is slow, and not without a certain elephantine stateliness. When he reaches his seat he cautiously deposits himself thereon; but once having ascertained that all is well, and that the bench will not give way, he reassumes a jaunty air, jerks his hat on to his head, often—especially after dinner—letting the front brim rest upon his nose, like a rakish old major as he is. Then he folds his arms as far as they will go over his capacious chest, and begins snapping at the flies again. When the thoughts stirring within him are on the point of explosion he jumps up, with hat held out in his right hand, and, standing silent for a few moments, gasps at the Speaker. Then comes the thunder of his prefatory, "SUR!" and thereafter, in a succession of thunder-claps, there follows the incongruous jumble of bizarre half-made thoughts which dim and mistaken notions of what other people are doing and saying have generated in some region lying between his boots and his hat. He does not try to be funny—at least, not often, and then is least amusing. He is indeed generally terribly in earnest, and those flights of fancy, adorned by unmatched fragments of classical lore, are laborious and determined efforts at rivalling Curran, or at least Butt. He has never yet understood why grave senators should have lain down helpless on the benches of the House of Commons and shrieked with laughter when he delivered that famous allegory about the nun bereaved by many murders. That speech had cost him long hours of preparation. It was pitched in a high key, and he thought it would show these Saxons that, though chains might weigh heavy on Ireland, and centuries of ill-usage might have "streaked her long black hair with gray," eloquence still abode on the tongues of her sons. Since then, as the unappreciative House will have it so, he has gradually come out as a funny man, a cracker of jokes, an utterer of sarcasms, a sayer of good things. His jokes are not always comprehensible; his sarcasms cut like the back of a razor; and the humour of his witticisms lies in the circumstance of their usually presenting themselves wrong end first. He is funny because he can't help it; and when he interferes with the slow processes of nature, and tries to re-direct or improve them, he mars the whole.

The following refers to Major O'Gorman as an obstructionist: The Major early in the morning saw that a great struggle was at hand, and, like an old campaigner, he made his arrangements accordingly. One thing was clear to his mind—that he must sit it out. But it was also beyond question that the weather was exceedingly hot, that a long day had already been gone through, and that if he were to spend the watches of the night in walking about the lobbies of the House, he must not unnecessarily waste his energies. Accordingly he planted himself on the front Opposition bench below the gangway, as near to the door as possible, so as to shorten the journeys, if it were only by a single pace. Then, taking account of the necessity of saving his breath, he determined to take no part in the verbal contest, confining his efforts to occasionally answering the Admiral's volleys of "Oh! oh!" with a broadside of "Hear! hear!" Lastly, he folded his arms, and, with his hat cocked on one side, so as to present a truculent appearance to the enemy, he adroitly took advantage of the intervals between the divisions to get a little sleep. Here, where midnight had left him, daybreak had found him—at the post of duty. As the sun mounted in the heavens and began to shine through the windows of the House, there was presented to the eyes of all who were awake a natural phenomenon not often witnessed. Men travel hundreds of miles, and do themselves despite in the way of getting up in the dead of the night, to see the sun rise on Mont Blanc or Snowdon. But what are these sights compared with the spectacle of the sun rising on Mount O'Gorman? Slowly the gas-light pales in the glass roof of the House. A dull, cold light fills the chamber. It grows warmer and brighter, and presently a timid ray of sunlight breaks in, settling on the top of the Major's hat, flashes for a moment, and is gone. But it has only fled to tell its companions that it has found the Major, and back they come in thousands, till a shaft of light reveals the upper half of the Major's hat. Slowly the shaft broadens, till the massive brow is revealed beneath the over-hanging hat-brim. The minutes pass on. The sun mounts higher. The shaft of light grows more perpendicular, and the Admiral, glancing across, trembles as he catches a gleam from the Major's eye, glowing with the light of battle. Higher and higher rises the sun, lower and lower falls the light; till, passing over the twitching mouth, and

falling on the manly chest, heaving with strange emotions, it creeps down to his very feet, and the Major sits revealed, glorified in the fresh light of the young day.

## THE CURSE OF THE GOLDSMIDS.

I HEAR a weird story in connection with the private history of the family of which the late baronet was the head. It is a tradition in the family, and generally with the Jews settled in England, that for nearly a hundred years a fatal spell has overhung the Goldsmids; and facts show that, in a manner doubtless due to coincidence, but nevertheless remarkable, the spell has not failed to work throughout several generations. During the latter part of the eighteenth century (so is the story told to me) there lived in London a Jewish rabbi, alleged to be gifted with those magical powers many instances of which are to be found recorded in the Old Testament. This seer was known as the Rabbi de Falk. When he died he left to Aaron Goldsmid, great-grandfather of the late baronet, Sir Francis, a sealed packet, with strict injunctions that it should be carefully preserved, but never opened. By way of enforcing this request, he informed the old Dutch merchant who founded the Goldsmid family in England that if his injunctions were obeyed he and his descendants would bask in the sun of prosperity till the coming of the Messiah. If his instructions were disregarded, ill-fortune would finally overtake each successive representative of the race.

Old Aaron Goldsmid kept the packet, holding it sacred for some years; but, finally, in an evil moment, curiosity overcame his reverence for the dead kabbalist, and he opened the packet. A few hours after he was found dead. On the floor near him were the contents of the packet, which proved to be a small piece of parchment covered with hieroglyphics and kabbalistic figures.

At the time of his death, Aaron Goldsmid had founded a great fortune and a prosperous family. Amongst the latter he divided his wealth. Two of his sons—Benjamin and Abraham—entered upon business as money brokers, and speedily established a colossal connection. They were omnipotent on the Stock Exchange, were popular in the country; and Benjamin enjoyed the personal friendship of the Heaven-born Minister who flouted the great Napoleon. Like all his family, Benjamin was a man of boundless generosity and judicious philanthropy. He founded a naval college, and was never tired of exercising private liberality. But as he advanced in life he began to feel the curse of the kabbalist. He grew despondent, scented ruin from afar, and, on the 15th of April, 1808, being fifty-five years of age—rich, honoured, powerful and esteemed—he died by his own hand.

Brother Abraham was now left to represent and guide the fortunes of the Goldsmid family. For five years he managed with accustomed success the great business of Goldsmid Brothers. In the year 1810 he joined the house of Baring in contracting for a Ministerial loan of fourteen millions. The bears came down on the fold of the loan contractors, and succeeded in depreciating the scrip. These were circumstances which came in the usual way of business, and would, a few years earlier, have been met with the skill, firmness, and infinite resource which had already lifted Abraham to the front rank of financiers. But the curse of the kabbalist was upon him. He shrank from an encounter with adverse circumstances. He hesitated, blundered, and, always losing, presently sank into a fit of despondency from which it was impossible to arouse him. A sum of half a million had to be forthcoming on the 28th September, 1810. In the state of the market Abraham Goldsmid did not know where to put his hand on the money. He shrank from the impending disgrace, and when the hour struck at which the cash was due, it was discovered that Abraham Goldsmid had paid another and still more terrible debt, for he was dead.

After this the Goldsmids fell from their high estate in the City; but not for long. A greater than Aaron or Benjamin arose in the person of Isaac, a nephew of Benjamin, and grandson of the founder of the English house. Isaac entering into business in the City speedily amassed a fortune, and became known as one of the greatest financiers in the world. Having made his own fortune, he maintained the family reputation for aiding in good works, and became largely engaged in philanthropic and educational undertakings. He was a friend of Mrs. Fry's, and was one of the principal founders of University College, London. At sixty years of age he retired from business, having heaped up enormous wealth and secured the honour of an English baronetcy and a Portuguese peerage. He seems, among other good things, to have at least staved off the curse of the defunct De Falk, and though he sank into childishness during the last years of his life, that is a calamity which poor humanity is subject to when it sees fourscore.

But with the next heir the curse showed itself with added malignity. The late baronet, Sir Francis, was the son of Sir Isaac, and the news runs like wildfire through the town to-night that he is a mangled corpse.—*Henry W. Lucy.*

## THE SCRAP BOOK.

## BETTING ON HORSE-RACES.

THE river begins to flow in early spring. It bursts like a mountain torrent at Lincoln in the end of March; flows wide and deep through Newmarket, Epsom, and many lesser places; has grown swifter and more dangerous when it revisits Newmarket a month later; is a seething torrent at the Epsom Summer Meeting, and with unabated flood deluges royal Ascot in June, ducal Goodwood in July: it knows not dam or ford as it sweeps through Doncaster in September; it shoots over the cataracts of the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire in October, and reaches the winter sea of calm at Warwick in the end of November. On that dangerous stream you shall see many a proud garlanded bark, many a gay and gallant