

THE CURSE OF COWDRAY.

A hundred years ago on September 24, 1793, the magnificent and historical mansion of Cowdray perished in the flames. There would be little reason why we should record the centenary of the destruction of this great Sussex house, even though its name is linked with the memories of many services done to the Catholics of the neighborhood in the preservation of the faith during the days of persecution, were it not that the event recalls the fulfillment of what is known as the curse of Cowdray; the remembrance of which should not be allowed to die out amongst us. Being also that at this very time the Catholic Truth Society are holding their annual Conferences at Portsmouth, within easy reach of the ruins of the great English house, it is not perhaps too much to hope that by the retelling of this old tale some of its members may be tempted to turn a little space out of their way in order to visit this interesting spot. Sir William Fitzwilliam, afterwards made Earl of Southampton by Henry VIII., may be regarded as the builder of Cowdray House, and here, when at the king's order he arrested the Blessed Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, at Warblington, he lodged her on her way to the Tower. Lord Southampton had no children, and left his estates at Cowdray and the neighborhood to his half-brother, Sir Anthony Browne. This latter, sprung from a Cumberland family settled in the south, was another favorite of Henry VIII. He received many marks of the Royal interest in its welfare; not the least from a worldly point of view—though hardly perhaps in reality, if we may credit the legend—was the grant in 1538 of the site of the suppressed Abbey of Battle. His family was apparently wealthy enough already when Sir Anthony came into possession of the Cowdray estates, which included the domains of the neighboring Priory of Easebourne, as well as those of the dissolved monasteries of Bayham and Calceto, and the Cistercian Abbey of Worsley in Surrey. Nor did these represent all the spoils of the Church, which were accumulated in his hands through the favor of his master, but in his case the words, said to have been used by the Protestant Archbishop Whitgift to Queen Elizabeth, had their manifest application; for to his house "church land added to his ancient inheritance hath proved like a moth fretting a garment, and secretly consumed both; or like the eagle that stole a coal from the altar, and thereby set her nest on fire, which consumed both her young eagles and herself that stole it."

Two accounts have been handed down of the manner in which the family of Sir Anthony fell under a special curse of fire and water in consequence of his taking possession of lands dedicated to the service of God. The generally received tradition is that it came upon him and his when he took from the King the grant of Battle Abbey. The chapter-house, cloisters, and other monastic buildings, were quickly razed to the ground, and upon the site of the minster church the newcomer placed his garden, planting a double row of yew trees along what had been the nave. The abbot's lodging, as was usual at that time of spoliation, became the residence of the newcomer, and the story goes that when Sir Anthony Browne was holding in the abbatical hall his first great feast, a monk made his way through the guests and striding up to the dais cursed the new master of Battle to his face. He foretold the doom that would befall his posterity, and prophesied that the curse would cleave to his family until it should cease to exist. He concluded with the words, "By fire and water thy line shall come to an end, and it shall

perish out of the land. Another story places the origin of the curse in the possessions of the Benedictine priory of Easebourne, the remains of which still exist at the upper end of Cowdray Park. Local tradition relates that when called upon by Henry's commissioners to resign the nunnery into their hands, the valiant Sub-Prioress, Dame Alice Hill, bade them beware of what they were about to do, as the founders of the house had laid a heavy curse upon all who should dare to plunder. "As the traditions of our house," she continued, "and of all the faithful of Easebourne attest, a curse of fire and water on the male children and heirs of the spoilers is invoked," by those who gave the inheritance to God and His servants. He who takes these lands shall incur this doom, and his name shall die out."

As we have said, the Earl of Southampton, the first to profit by the spoils of Easebourne and the builder of Cowdray, once the rival of Audley End and Hatfield, died without heirs, and the questionable inheritance passed, with the penalty of sacrilege attached to it, to Sir Anthony Browne. His son, created Viscount Montague by Queen Mary, remained staunch to the Catholic faith during the reign of Elizabeth. And his descendants, with all their shortcomings, were for many generations the means by which the sacred lamp of faith was kept alive in the district, whilst under their protection the Holy Sacrifice continued to be offered in the presence of the Catholic people of the neighborhood during the terror of the penal laws. So things went on till towards the middle of the eighteenth century, when the seventh Viscount Montague, having for some time courted the society of Protestants, ended in marrying a Methodist of Lady Huntingdon's sect, and in giving up the practices, if he did not the beliefs, of his ancestors. He died in 1787, and in his last hours he had the grace of being reconciled to the Church, giving orders that his recantation should be published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and the newspapers of the day. In it he asked pardon for the scandal given to his fellow-Catholics, and declared that his apostasy was due solely to worldly motives. And now was manifested the fulfilment of the curse of fire and water under which the house of Cowdray had been laid. The seventh Lord Montague left two children. George, the son, was a wild and careless youth, and of course, educated under the influence of his mother, was the first of his race not Catholic. He was engaged to be married to a Miss Coutts, upon his return to England from a foreign tour, and with this in view the mansion of Cowdray had been for several months undergoing a complete repair and refitting.

The whole had been finished on September 23, 1793, and the steward had written during the afternoon to the owner on account of its completion, when the same night the house caught fire and was completely destroyed, in spite of all efforts to save even some portion of the great pile of buildings. A messenger was despatched at once to acquaint Lord Montague of the catastrophe, but the news never reached him, and within a few days a courier came post haste to England to inform the family of the Viscount's death. According to the account given in Mrs. Roundell's "Cowdray," Lord Montague and a friend determined to essay the wild project of going down the falls of the Rhine in a small boat. The old Cowdray servant, who was with his master, endeavored to drag him back, exclaiming, "Oh, my lord! its the curse of water! For God's sake give up the trial!" His efforts were useless, the boat started on its expedition, and, after passing the first fall in safety, entered the cloud of spray which hangs over the most dangerous parts of the passage.

Its occupants were never seen again. The title now devolved upon a poor friar at Fontainbleau—a distant kinsman—who most unwillingly accepted a dispensation to marry in order to carry on the line. After a very few months, however, he died without children, and with him the title became extinct. Mary Browne, sister of Lord George Montague, deprived of the blessings of the true faith by the apostasy of her father, succeeded her brother in the possession of the Cowdray estates, and shortly after married William Pontz. Continuing to live on the estate in the old keeper's lodge, both she and her mother, old Lady Montague, were continually haunted by the thought that, sooner or later, the terrible curse would fall upon her two boys, the sole male survivors of the Montague family. And so it came to pass for in 1815, whilst at Bognor, one lovely summer day, Mr. Pontz, seeing how calm the sea was, proposed a boating excursion. This project was at first strongly opposed by his wife, because of her vague fears of the curse of water, but finally she was persuaded into giving a reluctant consent. The boat, for some reason or other, keeled over, and the two boys sank never to rise again. Thus perished the line of those who had benefited by the spoils of the monastic houses of Battle and Easebourne, and, as the witness of the older inhabitants of the district testifies, according to the belief of the last of the old stock, in fulfilment of the curse laid upon all spoilers by the founders of those religious houses.—*London Tablet*.

Mont Blanc Observatory.

The observatory on the top of Mont Blanc is at last completed. The work was facilitated by the use of windlasses, which drew the materials up the icy slopes. Some of the builders remained on the summit for twenty days, the August weather being very favorable. The construction of the observatory was begun over two years ago. The builders hoped to cut through the ice cap to solid rock, but this was found to be impossible, after they had gone down a distance of thirty or forty feet. So at last it was determined to let the building stand upon the ice and snow. The observatory was made in sections at Paris, under the immediate direction of M. Janssen. The pieces were transported to Rochers-Rouges on the backs of men, and were finally brought to the summit by the aid of windlasses. The building is thirty-eight feet high, but only one-third is above the snow. The upper story is used exclusively for observatory purposes, while the lower stories shelter attendants and parties of tourists. The observatory rests on seven heavy screws, so that the building can be easily leveled. The interior is lighted by small dormer windows with double panes of thick glass. All wood used in the construction is fireproofed, and all necessary precautions against fire have been taken. Anthracite coal will be burned. It is seldom that the cold exceeds thirty-two degrees below zero. The observatory will be occupied from May to November, and a great deal is expected from the self-registering instruments during the winter. If possible, it is intended to connect the instruments with Chamounix by electricity, but no steps toward this end have been taken yet. M. Janssen was carried to the top of Mont Blanc last year in a litter borne by thirteen porters. The new observatory will enable scientists to carry out important experiments and observations in physics, meteorology, spectrum analysis and vegetable and animal physiology.

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Irish Names.

Prior to Brian Boru, that monarch of renown in ancient Erin, no surnames existed, says a writer in an Irish exchange. To him is due the conception of the idea. The clans took their designation from some one ancestor of distinction. The Olan MacMurrah, from Murrah, King of Leinster; the Clan O'Neil, from Nial of the Nine Hostages, so called from his prowess in battle, the Clan O'Brien, from Brian Boru, above referred to. It is well said:

By O or Mac you'll surely know
True Irishmen they say;
But if they lack the O or Mac,
No Irishmen are they.

Mac as a prefix is common to Irish and Scotch names, while O is exclusively Irish. The force of these prefixes is that if the clan or sept took their designation from a father they were called Mac or son of—, but if from a more remote ancestor they were called O or descendants of—. Many Irish names have undergone a complete change owing to the disuse of the Irish language and the prevalence of the English influence. At one period of our history it was the fashion for Irish families to assume English names, in instances of which are notorious and on record. And, again, at another period, of which Spenser wrote, English families took Irish names, as the De Veres became MacSwiney. It will surprise some to learn that Murphy is not an Irish name, but the absurd attempt of English-speaking to pronounce O'Murchoe (O'Murrow). There was no such name prior to the English in Ireland, and down to the sixteenth century the old pronunciation prevailed. Similarly O'Donoghue became on the English tongue Dunphy, though correctly O'Donoghue.

Thus we see, briefly, how neglect on the part of one generation will perpetuate an error irretrievably. Each generation is but a link in the chain of the nation's identity or the family's position. The moral of which is that each and every man ought to put forth his best endeavors to preserve intact the priceless heritage of those traditions, associations rights which have descended to him from the past, thus only can we refute the error implied in the well-known quotation, "What's in a name?"

"God Bless You."

Among the passengers in the car was a rather stout old lady with crutches, who sat in a corner seat. When the car had stopped she rose with evident difficulty and moved slowly toward the door. Two men stepped forward promptly to assist her. Supporting her by the arms they helped her out upon the platform. With the best intentions in the world they were yet making pretty hard work of it when the driver appeared; he had walked along outside the car from the front to the rear platform where the old lady and her supporters now were. Prompted clearly not by any desire to hurry anybody, but solely by a desire to serve the old lady, he stepped upon the lower platform, and at the same time with perfect civility of manner, and without a moment's hesitation, he placed his arms around her and lifted her from the car. She was heavy, but he was stalwart, and he lifted her as easily and handled her as gently as though she had been a child. She looked up at him with a pleasant smile as she stood upon the cross walk and said, "God bless you." A moment later the car was bowling along the street and the old lady was moving slowly but cheerfully on her way.

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