

## The Queen and the Methodist Postmaster.

In the Diamond Jubilee Number of the 'Methodist Recorder,' reference was made to a curious little story about a gingham umbrella which was lent by the grandfather of Mr. Groves (circuit steward in East Cowes) to Her Majesty when first she and the Prince Consort came to live in the Isle of Wight. A pamphlet, for the most part in poetry, was written on the subject. It is now scarce, and of no worth at all except as a curiosity. A copy is in our possession.

Mr. William Groves has written us an extremely interesting letter, in which he tells 'the real story of the famous umbrella.' As he is the son of the oldest sexton—who, by the way, was also postmaster in Whippingham village—his account of the little incident may be regarded as absolutely reliable.

The following is an extract from Mr. Groves's letter:—

What happened was this:—My father was standing at his door when a Londoner came up and called his attention to the fact that it was about to rain and the Queen and the Prince Consort were some distance off and had no umbrella. My father went after them, and, as it was raining, offered the use of his umbrella. The offer was accepted, and he was requested to accompany the Queen and Prince to Osborne House. He did so, and the Royal pair spoke pleasantly to him on the road.

When my father reached Osborne House with the Queen and Prince he was sent to the kitchen and some refreshments were given him. In a few minutes £5 was brought to him.

'Oh, no, said he, 'I do not want any £5.' 'But you must have it,' he was told; 'the Queen has sent it; you cannot refuse what she gives.' And, reluctantly enough, he was compelled to take the money.

The umbrella is now in my possession, though it is all the worse for wear.

The Queen obtained possession of Osborne by an exchange of estates, and my father became her tenant. From that time until 1878, she never visited Osborne without calling at the post-office to talk to her tenants.

My sister was born deaf and dumb, and, through the Queen's influence, she was sent to the deaf and dumb institution in the Old Kent Road, London. Here she was known as 'the Queen's child.'

Previous to her marriage she made the greater part of the woollen boots and clothing for the Royal infants and other articles for the Queen's own wear.

The front room at Whippingham post-office was usually set out with my sister's Berlin wool work, and the Queen never visited Osborne House without coming to the post-office and purchasing the whole of the stock. The Royal family at this time were only young, and required many woollen articles of dress.

When my sister returned, ill and broken down, the Queen, while in the island, was a frequent visitor, and spent much time speaking to her in the deaf and dumb language, never allowing anyone to interpret for her.

When my sister was on her dying bed, Her Majesty came to see her, and, to revive her, gave my sister a smelling bottle (also in my possession). She also gave her a devotional book, in which was inscribed 'Victoria.'

At her last visit, before going to Balmoral, knowing she should never see her again in this world, the Queen bent down and kissed the dying woman, and then went downstairs. As though she had forgotten something, Her Majesty returned, made her 'Good-

by' again, kissed her once more, and left for Balmoral. Before leaving she placed a five pound note in my father's hand. My sister died, and was buried in Whippingham churchyard.

Prior to this the trouble with respect to my sister affected my mother's health very deeply, and, while talking to the late Prince Leopold and his medical adviser, she fell down and died. The Prince and his medical adviser gently lifted the inanimate body and placed it on a couch near at hand. It was supposed that heart disease was the cause of death, and to spare the Prince's feelings no inquest was held.

The occurrence was reported to Her Majesty, and she at once went to the house of mourning, where, after a few words of kindly, womanly sympathy, she handed my father an envelope. On her departure, the envelope was opened and found to contain a five-pound note.

Within a day or two my father met the Queen in the road; she stopped and spoke to him. He thanked her for the money, and said; 'Now, your Majesty, I shall be able to have a brick grave.' I mention this for a reason which will be found later on.

On one occasion during my mother's lifetime the Queen one day came in whilst she was ill, and, handing her with her own gracious hands a small jar, said, 'Mrs. Groves, I have brought you a pudding. I think you will enjoy it.'

Her Majesty intended to be present at the funeral of my mother, and inquired the hour of interment. She was told the hour the party would be at the graveside, and left, evidently believing it was the hour they would leave the house, for, when the mourners were returning to the post-office, she met them and exclaimed, 'Oh, dear, is it over?' She was informed that it was, whereupon Her Majesty walked to the churchyard, and, beckoning me to her (in accordance with a Hampshire custom, I was still at the graveside with my brothers), asked:

'Is there any water in the grave?'

'No, your Majesty,' I replied.

'Is it a brick grave?' she further asked, and, on receiving a reply in the affirmative, walked away after a few more kind words, apparently satisfied.

The reason Her Majesty asked these questions was that my father had told her the churchyard was a wet one, and she could not see the bricks of the grave at the top.

This occurred in January, 1873. In the month of February, 1879, my father died. Three days before his death Her Majesty called at the post-office, and, after talking with the dying man, as only a bereaved woman can talk, kindly handed him a fourth and last five-pound note.

For the last ten years of his life my father was allowed to live rent-free at Whippingham post-office, by Her Majesty's orders, on account of his failing health.

On the death of my father, the old post-office was pulled down, but, by Her Majesty's orders, the ivy with which it was covered was carefully removed, and when the present structure was substituted the ivy was carefully replaced. — 'Methodist Recorder.'

## Expiring Subscriptions.

Would each subscriber kindly look at the address tag on this paper? If the date thereon is December, 1901, it is time that the renewals were sent in so as to avoid losing a single copy. As renewals always date from the expiry of the old subscriptions, subscribers lose nothing by remitting a little in advance.

## The Major's Boy.

(By J. A. Haskins, in 'Classmate.')

The weather was growing colder, and the loungers had left their summer benches in front of the only hotel the little town boasted and were collected about the barroom stove.

Hastings was like a hundred other towns on the prairies, or what was called the frontier less than twenty years ago, when the railway was building westward and stations were erected a few miles apart, although at some of these the passenger train only stopped when a flag was raised to show a traveller was waiting.

In a short time an elevator was built to receive the grain from the surrounding country; then a store or two, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, and numerous saloons followed; then most of young cities were content with their condition, and ceased to grow.

In the Hastings hotel before the barroom fire and appropriating most of its heat stood a tall, portly man, discoursing of politics to an attentive audience. The man's face would have been rather fine, but that it was reddened and made coarse by drink; but his language was that of an educated man.

The major had come to the town with the advent of the railway; he believed in the town almost as much as he believed in himself (which was no very moderate belief). He often said to Mrs. Swift, the wife of the hotelkeeper, 'The greatest proof of a man's confidence in a town is to cast his lot therein, which I have done,' he would add, with a gracious sweep of his hand toward a little shanty opposite, where swung the sign: 'Major Overly, Attorney-at-Law. Collections a Specialty.'

A party of duck hunters, at a lake near the town, who had known of the Major in New York, had told something of his story. He had been a man of wealth and influence, but an appetite for drink had grown upon him, and gradually his business had fallen away, as his fine intellect had become impaired; then his wife died, and, placing his only son in the home of the lad's grandparents, the Major had come West, intending to start life anew, and finally drifted into Hastings.

The one daily train was nearly due, and the listening loungers slipped away by twos and threes to collect about the station.

Among the half-dozen passengers who alighted from the train was a boy of about thirteen, with a fine, resolute face and manly bearing, who asked if anyone could tell him where Major Overly lived. On being directed to the hotel, he walked quickly toward it. Very soon all the town knew that the Major's boy had arrived.

At first the Major had said that Hal must return to his grandfather's, that Hastings was no place for him; but Hal pleaded so earnestly to stay that day after day passed, and he still remained.

To Hal Overly his father had always seemed the bravest and best of men, for his mother's great love had carefully guarded from him all knowledge of his father's faults, and the lad had patiently borne the separation for a time; but now that his father was permanently settled he wished to be with him.

For a short time after Hal's arrival the Major kept much in his office, attending to business, but as days passed he returned to his old habits. One evening it had grown very late, and as his father did not come, Hal went out to look for him. In passing a saloon he heard, with surprise, his father's