

parson and the doctor are described, the monks as we know, were not all ascetics, for some of them were as jolly fellows as Friar Tuck, and in the account of the yeoman we have a glimpse of the good old days of Merry England.

Again, if we require some such particulars about the Elizabethan age, it is not so much in histories as in the writings of Shakespeare that we will find them. If we want some information about the country Justices of these days, there are Justice Shallow, and his constables Verges and Dogberry. The Boar Tavern in Eastcheap, and the hostel of Mrs. Quickly, invite us to learn something of the tavern life of our ancestors. Mr. Ford and Mr. Page will show us middle-class society; and in the company of Goodfellow and Peaseblossom, Snug the joiner, or Snout the tinker, we learn a great deal about the amusements and follies of the common people. Take some of the characters in Henry IV. as an illustration. The King sends an officer to demand the liberation of some prisoners, and he is described as follows:—

"Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly dressed,
Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin new reaped,
Shewed like a stubble land at harvest home;
He was perfumed like a milliner."

Prince Henry is a well-drawn figure. He was what in modern phraseology would be called a "fast young man." He gave himself entirely up to the follies of the hour, and spent his days in pleasure and amusements among a set of men of congenial tastes whom he had gathered around him. Tired of the constraints and ceremonies of court life, he spent his evenings in the taverns and theatres; and although not actually liking low company for its own sake, he yet took part in it, believing that he could see life better there than anywhere else. But his father's death, and his accession to the throne, seemed to have called forth his better nature, and like one who had been roused from a dream, he stirred up his dormant faculties, and became a new man. As he himself says:—

"Presume not that I am the thing I was;
For Heaven doth know, so shall the world perceive,
That I have turned away my former self;
So will I those that kept me company."

Here, too, there is Falstaff, perhaps the best known character in Shakespeare's writings. He was a regular man of fashion, without any principles of honour, and, indeed, a hoary old sinner. Shakespeare has displayed considerable ingenuity in describing him, for he had to make him both attractive and repulsive,—attractive to account for Prince Henry's partiality for him, and repulsive in the interests of virtue. He was rendered the former by his humour, which he possessed in a more than ordinary degree, and which he turned to account on every possible occasion, thereby getting himself out of many a scrape by his humorous excuses. He was what the Yankees would call "cute," always looking sharply after himself, and far too wide awake to be imposed upon. He excites our laughter by his cowardice, even when he is telling the most improbable stories of his own hardihood and bravery.

Such details and hints of life and manners as these cannot be obtained from history; and it is well that we can thus get them from other sources. We like to stand behind the scenes, and see the King and his courtiers, not only in their crowns and coronets, and engaged in state ceremonials, but as they were in their private lives, in their amusements, loves and hatreds, and it may be in their follies and sins. We desire to accompany the housewife to the markets and booths, as she purchases provisions for her family, and, true to her instinct, tries to cheapen her bargains. We wish to see the handicraftsman at his labours, and see how he did what is now being done by machinery. We want to stand at the corner of the streets, in the market-places, in the play-houses and taverns, where every part of social life is opened up to view, and where everything and everybody can pass before us like the figures in a panorama. All this is true history; and in reading old poetry, plays or novels, we are not only wandering among the flowers of literature, but gathering solid information, and studying history in the best possible manner.

It is especially interesting to read the past history of England, from the striking contrast it presents to its present condition. We have indeed wars, and rumours of war flying about, yet these affect us but slightly. There was the Crimean War, now nearly thirty years ago; still later the Abyssinian expedition, and recently the exploits in Egypt; and the difference these made to us was a little excitement and anxiety to hear the latest news from headquarters. But how different from the days of our forefathers, when the country was rent asunder by civil war, the people fighting with the Government, and faction against faction, the plains and hill-sides dyed with blood, and their fellow-men lying unburied around them! These men had literally to defend their families and property; everyone looked askance at his neighbour, the bourgeois had to mount guard over their cities; and the watchword was demanded at every gate. We can never read of the long and weary struggles which our ancestors made for civil and religious liberty, without deep interest and gratitude for the rich inheritance they have won for us. Especially are we grateful for the toleration and religious freedom now enjoyed by all; and when we read of the sacrifices made by the Covenanters in Scotland, and the Puritans and Nonconformists in England, we feel there is a close bond of connection betwixt them and us, since we are every day reaping the fruits of their labours. It is difficult to realize the true state of these troublous times. Traditions and stories have floated down to us on the stream of time, now elevating such a man into a hero of romance, and describing another of the worst possible character. And yet when we dive deep into the recesses of history, we often find how erroneous such impressions are, and how much some men have been misjudged, and their motives and lives misunderstood. Oliver Cromwell is a case in point. He has often been described as a stern and inflexible despot, a gloomy fanatic, or a canting hypocrite. That he was the greatest of men, the most unsullied of patriots, or the best of Christians, we cannot aver; and yet the latter description of him is far nearer the truth than the former. He was a man who set duty constantly before him, and ever acted up to the light he possessed; and although he had many faults, these we think were overshadowed by his virtues. We can form no true or adequate conception of him by merely reading his biography; we must also know a great deal of contemporary history. It is not enough to know that he usurped the government, but we must find out why he did it, and the results which followed. He must be judged, not by the light of the present day, but by the views of his own time, and by the circumstances with which he was surrounded. Most of his biographers present to us quite a different man, therefore we must judge for ourselves, and gather the materials from the whole range of historic details.

And now, may I not say in closing, that the attentive reader of history will find a higher hand than man's guiding it all, and disposing it for his own high purposes? Not that he will be able to see the reason of everything, or trace the divine hand work in every event; for many things will often appear inscrutable to his limited knowledge, and about which he must be content to remain ignorant. As a man could not be expected to understand the contents of a book by only reading a few pages in the middle of it, so he cannot understand the plans of God, from the little he knows of the past, or the little he sees going on around him. He feels that history is not the record of a confused mass of irregular events, carelessly thrown together, without purpose or utility; that it is not the working out of a cold and inflexible destiny, which has no regard to individual welfare, but which moulds all things according to its own purpose. But he feels that it is Supreme Intelligence carrying out a grand and comprehensive purpose, beneficent in its design, and glorious in its working; that it is the development of certain moral principles, and that the whole is presided over by one whose power is inexhaustible in its resources, unfettered in its exercise, and unlimited in its range.

CONUNDRUM.—Why is McGill this year like a cattle show?
Because there are so many fat calves on view.