

The Largest Oak in Great Britain.

In spite of a rival claim put forward in behalf of an oak in Nowland in Gloucestershire, I believe that the largest oak in Britain—and our island home can boast of not a few giant oaks, many of them famous, too, for their historical associations—stands in the parish of Cowthorpe, three miles from Wetherby, in the west riding of the county of York. The Cowthorpe oak, whose age has been computed to exceed 1,500 years, has, as may be supposed from its extraordinary size, been noted in numerous works devoted to natural history and forestry. The circumference of its trunk close to the ground was, at the close of the last century, according to Evelyn's "Sylvia," 78 feet. Shortly after the publication of this work, earth was placed around the base of the trunk with a view to the preservation of the tree, which by covering over some very considerable projections, reduced the girth of the stem at the ground line to 60 feet. In 1829, the Rev. Dr. Jessop measured the tree and communicated its dimensions to Strutt's "Sylvia Britannica." We transcribe the reverend doctor's details, which, he assures us, may be relied upon.

Circumference at the ground, 60 feet; circumference at the height of one yard, 45 feet; height of the tree in 1829, 45 feet; extent of the principal remaining limb, 40 feet; greatest circumference of ditto, eight feet.

Dr. Jessop adds: "The tree is hollow throughout to the top, and the groundplot inside, an amount of which has been much exaggerated, may possibly afford standing room for forty men." In Loudon's "Arboretum" the diameter of the hollow within the tree, close to the ground, is given as nine feet, ten inches. "The circle occupied by the Cowthorpe oak," says Professor Burnett, "where the bottom of its trunk meets the earth, exceeds the ground-plot of that majestic column of which an oak is confessed to have been the prototype, namely, Smeaton's Eddystone Lighthouse." In Burnett's "Outlines of Botany" we also read: "So spacious is the hollow of the Cowthorpe oak that upwards of seventy persons have been, as the villagers affirm, at one time assembled in it." In the 12th volume of Loudon's Gardener's Magazine, the Cowthorpe oak is said to be undoubtedly the largest tree at present in England. Shaw, in his "Nature Displayed," says: "Many suppose the Cowthorpe oak to be the father of the forest;" and in Kent's "Sylvan Sketches" (1825) mention is made of this oak as surpassing all others.

Tradition asserts that at one time the branches of this tree overshadowed half an acre of ground. A large branch which fell about the commencement of last century is said to have extended to a wall 90 feet from the trunk of the oak. On this wall, which still remains, the villagers, so the story runs, used to mount to pick the acorns from the overhanging branches. The leading or top branch fell before the date of any record concerning the tree. The manner in which it is said to have fallen is, however, remarkable. The main trunk having become hollow, the perpendicular shaft dropped down into the trunk and could never be removed. There it remained wedged in, doubtless tending to strengthen the hollow cylinder and prevent compression from the pressure of its enormous branches. In 1772 one of the side branches was thrown down in a violent gale of wind, and on being accurately measured was found to contain upwards of five tons of wood. The largest of the living branches at present extends over 40 feet north northeast from the trunk. This giant limb is supported by a substantial prop of timber.

A century ago Yorkshire children used to amuse themselves with a game called the "Daisy Miller." The Cowthorpe oak was a meeting place for this diversion. Through the rents in the shell of the trunk, then only large enough to admit them, troops of merry village lads and lasses crept into the interior, and, provided with a spout, which was balanced in a hole in the wall of their living playhouse, they gathered the dry, crumbling dust and fragments of wood and shot them down the spout to their companions outside. It has been reported that for some time the cavity within the tree was used as stabling for cattle, but this, so I think, is fiction. The openings in the trunk, though evidently enlarging constantly, are even now scarcely wide enough to give color to this assertion.

In connection with this tree, an anecdote is related of that notable Yorkshireman, John Metcalfe, the blind highway contractor and surveyor, better known as "Blind

Jack" of Knaresborough. Blind Jack was a frequent visitor to the tree, and would measure its girth correctly at any height within his reach, going round it with his long arms extended. He used to point out, too, with accuracy, by putting up his staff, to the exact spot from which the great branch had fallen. Whenever he came, an old bloodhound which was kept near the tree, whose wont was to snarl at every stranger, fondled him and licked his hand. Blind Jack now lies at rest in Spillforth churchyard, almost within the sight of the old oak.

So great was the fame of the Cowthorpe oak that formerly small saplings raised from its acorns were sold in pots to visitors by the villagers for as much as a guinea each. As the old oak now stands, it is a very picturesque object. It is situated in the centre of a small green paddock; hard by is the little village church, a very ancient structure, and the clear waters of the winding Nidd glide noiselessly past. The battered trunk, annually crowned with green foliage, is grand in its venerable decay. The old tree has been termed "the glory of England and the pride of Yorkshire," and its enormous size, the growth of many centuries, entitles it to all the fame it has acquired.

Paper from Grass.

It has been discovered that any of the common grasses make a superior article, and a patent has been issued to the discoverer. The following is the process:

"The manufacture of paper pulp and paper from paper grass is one of the novelties for which a patent has been obtained. Any of the common grasses found in the field, lawn, or meadows, may be used, and it is said that the green grass pulp produced from them make a paper of great strength and length of fibre, and possesses tenacity, softness and flexibility; and further, that this paper is even softer and more transparent than that made of linen. An advantage not to be overlooked is the one of economy, since one square foot gives in the whole year, 100 to 100 of a pound of green grass, making from 30,492 to 66,340 pounds to an acre. One pound of green grass makes one-fourth to one-sixth of a pound of fine, bleached, finished paper, or 3,711 pounds of finished paper to the acre.

"So long as the sap is in circulation and the chlorophyll, silica, and other inorganic matters are not dried in, in which event the fibre is seriously impaired for the purpose of paper, either old or young grass may be used, but to avoid danger, it is best to have the grass cut or mown before it begins to bloom.

"The first process of manufacture is to pass the grass between the rollers of the press, which crushes or loosens the fibre and squeezes out most of the sap. It is then freed from dirt by being thoroughly agitated or washed by other means in a large tank of water, in temperature either warm or cold. A perforated false bottom in the tank contains the grass and allows the dirt to fall in to the compartment below, where a pipe gives egress to the dirt and wash water. After sufficient washing the crushed grass is boiled in an open kettle, or in a steam kettle with lye, in a proportion of a pound of caustic soda, or two tenths of a pound of caustic potash, or six-tenths of lime, to 100 pounds of grass. With an open kettle the boiling is continued from four to five hours; with a steam kettle two hours will suffice.

"From the kettle the material goes into a filtering trough of magnesia for about thirty minutes, then is placed a second time in the solution of sulphuric acid. These operations may be repeated more or less, till the pulp is as fine and white as required, after which it is washed in clear water."

Another method is to filter the crushed pulp with water glass, and bleach it with a solution of chloride of lime or chloride of soda. Still another is to bleach the crude pulp in chlorine gas, and finish with water glass, after which the pulp is washed with clean water.

As we were talking one day about churches and their curious ceremonies, a little boy remarked that he had seen a christening, a funeral and a wedding, but he had never seen a divorce.

Mr. Longfellow can take a worthwhile sheet of paper and by writing a poem on it make it worth \$50. That's genius. Mr. Vanderbilt can write fewer words on a similar sheet and make it worth \$50,000,000. That's capital.

A Great Invention.

A man living near Bloomfield, N. J., has contrived an arrangement, says the New York Sun, by the use of which he is enabled to get an hour or more of extra sleep in the morning, and in other ways he finds it of great benefit. In many ways it takes the place of a domestic servant. The gentleman has thought out and put into practical working an idea that occurred to him a year ago. He is awakened in the morning by a shrill whistle. He at once gets out of bed, for he knows what that whistle means. It tells him that all is ready for him to get breakfast. He dresses and goes into the kitchen, and there he finds a bright, fresh fire, a tea kettle full of boiling water, and other conveniences for preparing his morning meal. All this is accomplished by means of an alarm-clock with weights, a piece of wire, a sheet of sandpaper, and some matches. Paper, wood, and coal are put into the grate of his cooking-stove, and a tea kettle filled with water, and having a tiny whistle fitted into the nozzle of the kettle, is placed on the stove. By setting the alarm in the clock he can have a fire at any time he wishes. When the alarm in the clock goes off, a weight falls and hits the wire; the wire moves and scrapes the matches fastened to it on the sandpaper; the matches light the paper in the stove, the paper fires the wood and coal, and soon a fire is under way. In a little while the water in the teakettle boils, and then the tiny whistle gives the note of warning that everything is ready and it is time to get up.

"Simple thing, and yet what a comfort it is," the inventor says. "There is no getting up for me now an hour before breakfast, losing that amount of sleep, and then waiting around for breakfast. The arrangement costs next to nothing, and it is as trustworthy as anything in this world. I have not had it patented yet. Some persons advise me to, and perhaps I may. I haven't any for sale; get it up entirely for my own comfort and convenience, and it has more than repaid me already. But just think, if it were in general use it would save many hard words and do away with considerable domestic unhappiness among poor people. Doubtless it might have a tendency to make a better feeling between some men and their wives, by settling the vexing question as to who should get up in the morning and build the fire. Out of this question alone many divorce suits grow, and this arrangement would prevent them."

One Hundred Bushels of Shelled Corn to the Acre.

Mr. Nathan G. Pierce tells the American Cultivator how he raised 100 bushels of shelled corn to the acre, having accomplished that feat for the second time this year. He uses for seed an eight-rowed corn which he has improved by careful selection, and believes it to be a good variety to raise in that locality, or, in fact, anywhere between Virginia and the Canada line, or east of the Alleghany Mountains.

The ground selected for planting was a good piece of gravelly loam. It was well ploughed last spring, about the first of May, harrowed, treated to a broadcast application of 900 pounds fertilizer to the acre; again harrowed faithfully, rendering the land fine and mellow; rows marked three feet apart, a small amount of fertilizer scattered to each row. May 10th, three kernels of corn planted in each hill, two feet apart in the rows; cultivated and hoed four times, allowing no weeds to grow; passed through the entire piece, cutting each hill down to two stalks; every sucker in each hill cut throughout the field.

During the entire period of growth, through the season the field was closely watched, every weed pulled and every ear of smut cut out. At the proper time, after the corn has become hard, it was cut, bound in bundles, and stacked. When dry it was drawn into the barn, where, with the assistance of a hired man, the corn was husked, weighed as husked, and found to yield 100 bushels to the acre, allowing seventy-five pounds of ears to equal one bushel of shelled corn.

GOLDWIN SMITH, in the five years of his Oxford University course, won the Hertford, the Ireland, a first in "Greco," the Latin verse, the Latin essay, the English essay, and to crown all, a fellowship of the University. He remained an Oxford man for twenty years, and in 1855 was made by Earl Derby Regius Professor of Modern History, with a salary of £650 a year.

Some Strangely Fulfilled Dreams.

Dickens once had a dream which was fulfilled, at least to his own satisfaction. "Here," he wrote on May 30, 1863, "is a curious case at first hand. On Thursday night last week, being at the office here, in London, 'I dreamed that I saw a lady in a red shawl with her back toward me, whom I supposed to be E. On her turning round I found that I didn't know her, and she said, 'I am Miss Napier.' All the time I was dressing next morning I thought, 'What a preposterous thing to have so very distinct a dream about nothing? And why Miss Napier? For I never heard of any Miss Napier. That same Friday night I read, after the reading came into my retiring room, Mary Boyle and her mother, and the lady in the red shawl, whom I presented as 'Miss Napier.' These are all the circumstances exactly told." This was probably a case of unconscious cerebration. Dickens had no doubt really seen the lady, and been told that she was Miss Napier, when his attention was occupied with other matters. There would be nothing unusual in his dreaming about a person whom he had thus seen without noticing. Of course it was an old coincidence that the lady of whom he had thus dreamed should be introduced to him soon after—possibly the very day after. But such coincidences are not infrequent. To suppose that Dickens had been specially warned in a dream about so unimportant a matter as his introduction to Miss Napier would be absurd; for, fulfilled or unfulfilled, the dream was, as Dickens himself described it, a very distinct dream about nothing. Far different in this respect was the strange dream which President Lincoln had the night before he was shot. If the story was truly told by Mr. Stanton to Dickens, the case is one of the most curious on record. Dickens told it thus in a letter to John Foster: "On the afternoon of the day on which the President was shot there was a Cabinet council, at which he presided. Mr. Stanton, being at the time Commander-in-Chief of the Northern troops that were concentrated about here, arrived rather late. Indeed, they were waiting for him, and on his entering the room the President spoke off in something he was saying, and remarked, 'Let us proceed to business, gentlemen.' Mr. Stanton then noticed with surprise that the President sat with an air of dignity in his chair, instead of loling about in the most ungainly attitudes, as his invariable custom was; and that instead of telling irrelevant and questionable stories, he was grave and calm, and quite a different man. Mr. Stanton, on leaving the council with the Attorney-General, said to him, 'That is the most satisfactory Cabinet meeting I have attended for many a long day. What an extraordinary change in Mr. Lincoln!' The Attorney-General replied, 'We all saw it before you came in. While we were waiting for you, he said, with his chin down on his breast, 'Gentlemen, something very extraordinary is going to happen, and that very soon.' To which the Attorney-General had observed, 'something good, Sir, I hope?' where the President answered very gravely, 'I don't know—I don't know. But it will happen, and shortly, too.' As they were all impressed by his manner, the Attorney-General took him up again. 'Have you received any information, Sir, not yet disclosed to us?' 'No,' answered the President, 'but I have had a dream. And I have now had the same dream three times. Once on the night preceding the battle of Bull's Run. Once on the night preceding such another, (naming a battle also not favorable to the North.) His chin sank on his breast again, and he sat reflecting. 'Might one ask the nature of this dream, Sir?' said the Attorney-General. 'Well,' replied the President without lifting his head or changing his attitude, 'I am on a great broad rolling river—and I am in a boat—and I drift! and I drift!—but this is not business,—suddenly raising his face and looking round the table as Mr. Stanton entered.—'Let us proceed to business, gentlemen.' Mr. Stanton and the Attorney-General said, as they walked on together, it would be curious to notice whether anything ensued on this, and they agreed to notice. He was shot that night."

When John Skeil of Hickory township, Pa., met a snake in the woods that was eight feet in length, he became charmed, and found it impossible to remove his eyes from the dazzling orb of the monster. Finally he became unconscious and fell to the ground. The snake immediately coiled himself about the body, but the arrival of Mr. Skeil's son saved his life. The reptile was shot, but Skeil lies at home in a very critical condition.