

Rabelais in 1483. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose opinion is worth having, says:—

"Beyond a doubt, Rabelais was among the deepest, as well as boldest, thinkers of his age. His buffoonery was not merely Brutus's rough stick, which contained a rod of gold: it was necessary as an amulet against the monks and legates. . . . I class Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, &c.

The 1st of March is yet further to be remembered as one among many days associated with the bestowal of the Victoria Cross upon heroic soldiers and sailors, who now receive in this Order of Valour as great a reward for their hard knocks as the general officers get in the Order of the Bath for leading them where they get well peppered. Trifling as is the intrinsic value of the little bronze maltese cross, with its scroll bearing merely the words "For Valour," it has hitherto been *honestly* bestowed, which is more than can be said for certain academic titles bestowed by some Universities, such as D.D., LL.D., D.C.L., too often conferred on persons utterly unworthy of them, that is if the titles are to be the test of sound learning, ripe scholarship, and brilliant literary or scientific attainments.

CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE.

BY WILLIAM SAWYER.

A taste for relics is like a taste for caviare: it is generally acquired; and it may be affirmed of it with confidence that it is not worth acquiring. An exception may perhaps be made in favour of autographs, because they help us to understand the characters of the writers—or we think they do, which does quite as well. But he must be a great man indeed whose genius invests with a factitious value his old pipes, brace-buttons, odd gloves, and cigar ashes. Affection is, we know, potent in attaching interest to objects associated with the loved ones; but he was not the wisest of lovers who gave a beggar half-a-crown for a half-penny his lady had just thrown to him, and wore the precious coin next his heart while he lived—especially if it didn't happen to be the same half-penny.

I have tried to impress these views on my friend Whiffles, who is the greatest collector of literary relics I am acquainted with; but without effect. Whiffles feels it his destiny to collect, if—to quote his own small joke at his own small expense—it is only to collect his scattered thoughts. His relics are Whiffles. Without them he would be nothing, nobody; with them, he is at least—a bore. His admiration of great people is not of the highest kind, since he cares less for them than their surroundings: is content to know little of what they have done, if he can pick up something they have had, but even a furniture acquaintance, a cast-off-clothing intimacy, a waste-paper association with the illustrious, is not without its satisfaction. Whiffles will never achieve greatness; he knows that; but he feels all the bigger for sitting in a great man's chair, poking his head into a warrior's helmet, or scrawling "Whiffles" with an author's pen. We all have a little of this weakness; he is strong in it. It is his form of hero worship—the variety of it reduced to the meanest capacity. But what he is it makes him, and among the eternal necessities of things it may be—hard as it is to credit—essential that the world should have a Whiffles.

It was my fortune to meet with our friend in the crisis of his life. He was on the eve of commencing the great work with which he fondly believed his name would be for ever associated. This was nothing less than a collection of "The Used Postage-Stamps of Great Men." Superb idea! It had struck him, he modestly said, all at once, and the mental effect of the shock, he kindly added, had not been of a serious character.

"Consider," exclaimed he, with the natural pride of an inventor, "how interesting! The stamps they have fingered! the stamps they have licked! What more precious or intensely interesting? I began with a Tupper, an undoubted original. It was supplemented by an Odger (half-penny), and there was every prospect of my being favoured with a contribution from the friend of one of our greatest artists."

"Which one?" I ventured to inquire.

"Him to whom we owe the gorgeous cartoon of the Nabob, in a moment of ecstatic enjoyment, surrounded by envious attendants, ready to sacrifice him for a pungent relish—But the work is familiar to you: copies of it adorn most of our public thoroughfares."

I affected a vague knowledge of this work of art—admitted to pacify him that I might have encountered it, and proceeded to inquire into the circumstances attending the failure of the great collection, which was, when completed, to be presented to the nation. Various reasons were offered, but one will suffice. It was that he had failed to obtain the materials, and perhaps inability to collect ought to be accepted as a reasonable plea for their being no collection.

Impressed with the interest of the subject, and the inability of any one save Whiffles to do justice to Whiffles, I have prevailed upon him to set down the rest of his experiences in his own words. What follows, therefore, is a personal narrative the authenticity of which may be relied upon.

"In abandoning my idea of this unique gallery, I did not give up collecting. When I tell you that I have in my possession a pass-check, used by Mr. Ruskin's valet on the occasion of a visit paid by him to the Olympic Theatre, and inscribed in peculiar letters with the words 'In the Pigskin,' I know I shall excite your envy. But I will go further. It was my good fortune on one occasion to see the late Lord Macaulay (I could hardly be mistaken in him, I think) purchase a ballad in the street—a custom of his, you will recollect. Instantly I hastened to secure a ballad from the same man! And it is before me! What his lordship's was, I don't know; but the curious will be glad to learn that mine is called 'The Rum Go,' and has this charming refrain:

"Now that I call a rummier go

Than right-fol-de-riddle-iddle right-fol-de-ro."

The point of these words is no doubt political—I hope not Fenian.

"I have not the honour of George A. Sala's acquaintance; but he will doubtless recall being in Denmark Street, St. Giles's, on the night of the 10th of October, 1862. I too was there, and knew him by a portrait in that week's 'Penny Bouncer.' He was standing at a shop window, his eyes fixed on a placard inscribed 'Let-off Wearing Apparel.' No doubt the great humorist was, with myself, wondering who had adopted the indecent course of abandoning his or her garments, and making this audacious announcement of the fact—in that chilly weather, too! As if it were not a violation of

the law to leave off wearing apparel, and this statement did not add to the offence. The G. H.'s attention was next drawn towards a placard touching the price given for bones and rags—a pictorial placard, on which were depicted the advantages of economizing in these matters, namely, the privilege of wearing a red coat, yellow trousers, a pea green waistcoat, and escorting a magenta woman to witness the apotheosis of Fat in a temple resembling the Crystal Palace. Both the placards thus gazed upon by the G. H. (I am pretty sure it was he) I succeeded in securing. Need I say that to a literary mind they are priceless?

"I need not describe how other treasures came into my hands. Enough that I have them, and that in their possession I naturally look down with proud superiority upon feeble hero-worshippers, like those who drive Tennyson into exile from the Isle of Wight, through their impertinent intrusions, or help to 'guy' the Chelsea philosopher as he walks the streets, because of his literary white hair and philosophical glossy black coat. Without further preface, I will give a list of new acquisitions:

"1. Portions of a dinner service—two plates and a ladle—purchased at an establishment at which the Premier has bought old china for his collection. Identified as having belonged to the Premier from dealer's assurance that it originally comprised *three courses*.

"2. Half a first-class return ticket for the Crystal Palace, issued by the London, Chatham, and Dover Company, and used by the authoress of 'Lady Audley's Secret!!!' The relic is in a capital state of preservation. It bears on one side the words, 'L. C. and D. R. Return. C. Palace to Ludgate Hill. 1st Class. 2.159.' On the reverse—(curiously the reverse—CARLYLE) the announcement, 'This ticket is issued subject to the general regulations and bye-laws of the Company, and is not transferable nor available by express or fast trains without payment of the difference of fare.' It would be interesting to know whether the fair authoress ascertained from the Company 'the difference of fare' on her transferring the ticket, had she been so minded.

"3. A document which appears to be in the nature of a bill, probably that of some favoured butcher of the period, whose privilege it is to help to sustain the cockles of the merry heart of the immortal author of the 'Green Bushes';

"J. B. Buckstone, Esq., to John Champ, Aug. 13th.

To 1 leg mutton, 6½ lb. 8s. 9d.
" lites for kitten ½d.

"Pade J. C. 8s. 9½d."

What a touching picture this simple document conjures up in the mind's eye! Can we not see the genial comedian, English to the back-bone, sitting down to his goodly leg, contented in mind? for has he not the happy consciousness that, in the rude orthography of the shambles, all is pade? Light of heart, too; for has not his pet, his fireside darling (his 'harmless, necessary cat'—SHAKESPEARE) been mercifully cared for? 'Lites for kitten, ½d.'—touching sentence! Ah, J. B. B., whatever thy faults that day, doubt not but that, as in the case of Uncle Toby, while the accusing Spirit wrote them down, thy kitten's lights were dropped upon the words, and wiped them out for ever!

"4. Half a page from the washing-book of a distinguished literary lady, whose name, considering the delicate nature of the relic, will only be revealed to the curious on the receipt of six stamps. The fragment is most enigmatical, yet no doubt capable of being deciphered. I give it in *extenso*:

'Petts 6
Handkfs 12
Pill case 4
Boddy 1
Stocks 6
Jac-Tow 1

In the endeavor to ascertain the meaning of this fragment, I feel I have only been partially successful. It is natural that a lady should send four of her pets to be washed, though not, I should have thought, to a laundress, who would hardly have undertaken the responsibility. Besides, they could not have required starching, and what lady would send one of her pets to get mangled? Again, 'handkfs'—I can make nothing of it save 'handkerchiefs,' and that seems odd. So does that other instrument of punishment—the stocks. Then, is not 'body'—to correct the spelling—obviously set down at random while the mind was running on some sensational incident? The same explanation may serve for the elucidation of 'Jac Tow,' else I give up that in despair with the 'pill case' (the only reasonable case for pills being the person who swallows them). But does not all this mystery add to the absorbing interest of the fragment?

"5. Autograph of the secretary of the Close-ian Club, at Kirby Stephen. It is appended to a proposal to 'place the works of our Master in close consanguinity to the clear and clever Chickweed, side by side with the ravings of the robust Ramshackle.'

"6. A *serviette*, marked in the corner G. E., obviously George Eliot. It has been objected that the inimitable authoress of 'Adam Bede' would have her table-linen marked with her own initials rather than those of her *nom de plume*. This is clearly begging the question. The lady had clearly a choice of action open to her, and what more probable than that she should identify herself in every way with her literary life? Besides there is an historical parallel for this. Did not a late Scotchman of unimpeachable character always affirm his relationship to the Admirable Crichton on the ground that the family linen was marked A. C.?

"7. Pencil of unknown artist. Doubtful. Length 1½ inch. Cut. Initial B. B. Similar pencils in use by Millais, Jones, and Sir E. Landseer; especially by the former. History of relic curious, but forgotten.

"8. An original autograph letter addressed to Charles Mathews, Esq., on a subject of extreme delicacy, allusion to which will, I hope, be pardoned in the interest attaching to the work itself: 'Bow Street, Friday afternoon.—Mr. Clarkson begs to inform Mr. Mathews that his lady's w—g shall be ready without fail. Mr. C. will bring it round.'

"9. I reserve my greatest treasure to the last.

"NOTES OF A LADY RESIDING NEAR THE POET LAUREATE IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

"From my position as neighbour to the P. L. I am able to give many curious particulars respecting him or his household. These I offer in the order in which I have set them down. Our dear Alfred is often in his garden, especially in fine weather. I have seen him there, and therefore know it

for a fact. On these occasions he sometimes wears a garden-hat, but no gloves. At least, not always. Sometimes, shall we say? Judging from observation, I should say that a rose was a favorite flower with him. Perhaps from its perfume? The postman goes to his house frequently, sometimes three times a day. It would be an interesting point of inquiry whether he approved or disapproved of the system of giving Christmas-boxes to postmen? No passage in the poetical works throws any light on this point, so far as I remember. The baker is very regular in calling at the house on his rounds—often arriving there when the steps are being cleaned. It is a coincidence, though trifling; but then, trifles—well, well, I must not moralize. In the wet weather A. T. does not disdain an umbrella, and I have seen him in an extra coat; but this was in winter. We have often wondered whether the daughter of a half-pay officer near Ryde suggested the poet's 'Maud.' She has a lovely face, and since the publication of the poem has on several occasions appeared in white muslin. She did so at a ball last Christmas. I am making a collection of the autograph of the tradesmen who supply the post: it will be most interesting. I have those of the grocer and the butcher. A sweep who was once called in to see to the chimneys has also kindly added his smudge—he is unable to write. Major Jenkins, of Freshwater, has been kind enough to furnish a little anecdote, or rather trait of character. Being in London, he saw our dear Alfred in a cab in the Strand—opposite Rimmel's, he noticed. The cab was a four-wheeler, I need hardly say, as a man of genius would not demean himself in a hansom. The body of the vehicle was green; the wheels red. The post was looking out on the off-side. Major J. was good enough to notice the number of the cab, and to write it down for me. The number was 432. With this interesting anecdote I will conclude."

And I also will close the list of these Curiosities of Literature.—*Hood's Annual*.

Miscellaneous.

Greenwich Hospital was opened last month as a Royal Naval College.

The expenses of the inauguration dinner of the Lord Mayor of London came to £1,436 10s.

There are now ten English and American Protestant places of worship open every Sunday in Paris.

The North British Railway Company are about to put sleeping carriages on the limited mails between London and Edinburgh.

A Canadian Society has been established at New Orleans. The *Picayune* says that in personnel it is equal to any nationality in the city.

The Baroness Bartlett-Coutts has offered to hand over a piece of land in Bethnal-green to the local vestry, as a pleasure garden for the poor.

Baron Haussmann, the famous Prefect of the Seine, who built Imperial Paris, is now on his way to Constantinople to engage in some financial enterprise, where he will meet M. de Lesseps, who is negotiating about the Suez Canal difficulty.

The tournament between the English and French shoe-makers will shortly come off at Boulogne-sur-mer. A manufacturer of the town has offered to supply the materials gratuitously to the knights of the avi who will contend on condition that their handwork falls to his possession afterwards.

A Parisian chemist has been astonishing his neighbours by exhibiting a supposed "Siren" said to have been caught in the Sea of Okhotsk. On investigation, however, the Siren was found to be of Japanese manufacture, consisting of the skeleton of the head and shoulders of a monkey, artistically joined to the body of a fish.

A French journal of horticulture says that tan has been found to be an efficient preventive against the potato disease. For several years a French farmer has introduced a small quantity of the residue of the bark used in tanning into each hole on planting potatoes, and has been successful in preserving his fields free from the disease.

The Fenian Amnesty Association have made arrangements to secure the presence of the band of the 69th, or Irish, Regiment of New York State Militia, at a bazaar to be held in the Rotunda, Dublin, on St. Patrick's Day, for the purpose of raising funds to pay off the expenses incurred on behalf of the released Fenian prisoner, Charles J. Kieckham, in contesting the representation of Tipperary against Mr. Heron, the present member for that county. It is stated that the Inman Company have undertaken to give the band a free saloon passage.

Street singing in Paris appears to be a lucrative and not undesirable profession. The number is strictly limited to 103, and the police never grant a fresh license (for no one is allowed to sing professionally in the streets without a *permis*) save to replace a member dead or retired. With the license the artist receives a medal, which he is bound to produce when called upon, and he must submit every song to the Censorship. Most of the members compose their own words, which are printed and distributed in thousands in ten papers, &c. A good singer can make from eight to twelve shillings per diem.

Many of our readers, says the *Graphic*, will remember Azimoolah, the agent of the Nana Sahib, who avenged the ill-success of his mission to London by instigating the Indian mutinies. According to a correspondent of the *Friend of India*, we have had a similar adventurer among us, prepared to render this country a similar service. A young Afghan prince, we are told, has been living in London, flitting like Azimoolah, a ready acceptance in society, especially among ladies of a romantic turn of mind, to whom the idea of a handsome Indian prince seems irresistible. Azimoolah caused some scandal in the fashionable world, and the Afghan, it is said, is likely to follow his example. Indeed, it is declared that a lady whose affections he had appropriated has been the cause of his true character being discovered. To her he confided the fact that he was a Russian spy; and it is added in support of this belief that he had for some time previously been resident in St. Petersburg. However this may be, the lady told her husband and the husband told the India Office, so that the Afghan's antecedents—it may be supposed—have by this time been investigated. So at least the story goes. But probabilities seem somewhat against its accuracy. It does not seem likely that the Afghan would confide the secret of his mission even to a lady, nor that the lady, under the circumstances alleged, would take her husband into her confidence. The hero of the story is stated to be a near relative of the Amir of Cabul; but the circumstance, if true, would in no way implicate our ally, Shere Ally, as one half of the royal family of Cabul is usually in rebellion against the other half, and the Amir has no more deadly enemies than among its members. The story is principally notable for its resemblance to that of Azimoolah, who was supposed to be in the confidence of Russia at the time of the Crimean war.