

English Jottings.

To be tough and hardy, and endowed with a strong spirit of resistance and endurance is looked upon (and always has been since the days of that vile barbarian, glorious Peter the Great) as one of the most important qualifications of a Czar. It has, therefore, been the custom for the members of the Romanoff family to subject their children to a most cruel, absurd, and wholly useless course of hardship, such as sleeping on hard straw beds, bathing in icy water, jumping out of a warm bed in the dead of night when suddenly summoned, learning to live on hard bread and water, working for a certain number of hours without relaxation, and with but little food—in fact, all the stupid blunders and senseless cruelties of which so many English people are guilty, when they want to “harden,” as they term it, their children.

Alexander III. was himself subjected to some such stupid regime as this, and recognizing the cruelty, folly, and even danger of it, has taken good care not to allow it to be applied to his children. And here we may shrewdly suspect that the influence of that most charming of ladies, the Empress Marie, has made itself felt, for her children have been brought up in the simple but easy and comfortable, and sensible fashion that she herself and her brother and sisters were brought up in Denmark.

The result has been that in the case of the Czarewitch, a happy youth has succeeded a happy boyhood, and although, a child born of a long series of dipsomaniacs and victims to neurosis on the father's side, and of such an extremely nervous lady as the Czarina Marie, can hardly be expected to be possessed of what is termed “rude” or “boisterous” health, still the eldest son of Alexander III. is a fairly healthy young man, and certainly in every way, both mentally and physical, greatly the superior of the inanimate Claret and Lemonade, his cousin, with whom it is an injustice, not to say an insult, to His Imperial Highness to compare him.

There is a good piece of news for bachelors in the *Levant Herald*. We read that with a view to combating celibacy amongst Mussulmans the Imperial Government has decided to establish a bank, which would advance money to all those persons desirous of marrying, but whose means are not sufficient to enable them to do so. What does Lord Salisbury say to this? We have bachelors enough here, and the adoption of a similar scheme might tend to rid us of some of our surplus female population. The wily Turk is evidently a long way ahead of us yet.

Is anybody in this world utterly void of superstition? I think not. Superstition is literally a dread of the future. If there is such a thing as an atheist, I dare be sworn he, too, is superstitious. And superstition is something more than dread of the future—it is an unspoken, unacknowledged, a perhaps unconscious homage to the occult. Death omens have been too well accredited to be sneered out of vitality. It is accepted without a doubt in Germany that the White Lady of the Hohenzollerns appears before a death, and many families in the Highlands of Scotland have special omens, of figure, sign, or sound. It never occurs to them to doubt their reality, they do not question their why or where froms. They accept them, that is all. The Royal Family of Hawaii have a curious herald—a shoal of red fish, or alulua, in the harbour of Honolulu. When this shoal comes into the harbour the natives know one of the Royal Family has to go. The fatal fish appeared in immense numbers in January last, the nets were full to breaking, and the natives said, “Our King is doomed.” And so he was. Twenty days later King Kalakama crossed the Great Divide.

I asked on one occasion, when going over Windsor Castle under particular circumstances, if there was no ghost belonging to any part of the building, or story about a ghost, but I was assured that no one walked within the sacred precincts. It had been said that Anne Boleyn had been seen some years ago, and a tradition exists that misfortune always happens to the person who sees her, but there is no real live ghost in the old historic pile. I remember being in a house in a far country many years ago, where the head of the family lay a-dying. We were all—six in number—in the room waiting the event, the servants—three, all told—stayed in a room adjoining. The house was in its own grounds, no trees grew close to it, and persons could easily be seen when approaching from any side. The night was clear and brilliant, and snow lay on the ground a foot deep. Suddenly the hall door bell rang violently, and one of the servants—a man—at once hurried downstairs to open the door. The tinkle of the bell had not ceased when he reached it, but on opening it no one was there, and there was no footmark in the snow: the steps were a white unbroken mass. He shut the door hastily and returned upstairs, to find death had taken place. The family evinced no surprise. “A bell always rings before a death now,” they said. I remember a dog yelped as if in terror at the first sound of the bell, and ran into a corner and hid, trembling all over.

In *Alexander Dumas's Mémoires* a similar incident is given. He was a child when his father died. The night of his death, Alexander, who was asleep in bed, was awoken by a loud knock at the door. It was an inner door, and the two outer doors were shut. He felt no fear, but got up and went towards the door. A cousin, who was sleeping in the same room, was greatly frightened, and asked where he was going. “To open the door to papa, who is coming to say good-bye,” he replied. The cousin caught hold of him and forced him back to bed, he struggling and crying, “Good-bye, papa, good-bye, papa.” “Something like a faint expiring breath passed over my forehead and calmed me, and so I fell asleep.” The next morning, at daybreak, word was brought that his father had died just as the knock was heard.

And talking of superstition, it is not generally known that church lands are supposed to bring bad luck to their holders. In Ireland this is a matter of faith, and I could tell some strange corroborative facts connected with it. In England the superstition is confined to forfeited ecclesiastical lands, and Lord Beauchamp, who has just died, has revived it. It is pointed out that although the peerage only dates from 1815, the late Earl was the seventh in succession. However, he was an earnest churchman, and had during his lifetime devoted to church purposes a sum far exceeding the value of the luckless lands he held, so it is to be hoped that he broke the spell. In strange contrast to this mortality of Earls is the longevity in the Albemarle family. The present Earl of that name is also the seventh in succession, but his honours have date from 1696.

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