

Those dreaded devotees, trained unhesitatingly to execute the fatal fiat of the Old Man of the Mountain, either upon themselves or on others, were called Hesch-heschins, from which is derived the word *assassin*.

In our own language there are some words very curiously formed—for instance, the plant foxglove, apparently the fox's glove. The plant was termed the fairies or good-folk's glove, shortened into folk's glove, and again contracted into foxglove. By a similar process, the daisy has been contracted from day's eye, or eye of the day—a most appropriate name for this favourite little flower. It is well known that bread and highly-flavoured toasted cheese form one of the most esteemed viands among the Welsh. Being imported thence by English tourists, the pabulum and its condiments were together called a Welsh carebit. By pronouncing the two syllables rapidly, and, in English fashion, eliding the middle 'r,' you will get a Welsh rabbit, with little trouble and no expense.

Names of men who have rendered themselves famous or infamous by their deeds, or misdeeds, are formed into words expressive of similar conduct in others. The story of Tantalus furnishes a good instance of this sort. He, for divulging the secrets of the gods, was placed up to the chin in water, yet so fixed as in that position to die of thirst; hence, when one is almost within reach of something he desires much, yet cannot attain, he is said to be *tantalised*.

The German general, Merode, who rendered himself universally feared and detested by subsisting his troops on supplies forced from the people among whom they were quartered, suggested the word *marauder*. For a word of similar formation we are indebted to the genius of Mr. William Burke, who, in the former part of this century, favoured the West Port of Edinburgh with his residence and exploits, and, by his ingenious method of putting troublesome subjects to silence, first suggested the idea—greatly expanded since—of *Burking* a question.

The names of many articles in common use are derived from the places where they were first known, or whence imported; thus, we have Calico from Calicut, Damask from Damascus, Muslin from Mosul, Tobacco from Tabac, Coffee from Caffa, the Bayonet from Bayonne, Sherry from Xeres, Cordovan leather from Cordova, Delft-ware and Gouda cheese from towns of the same name in Holland, &c.

The feminine occupations of mantua-maker and milliner are recent imports from Mantua and Milan. It is not very long since the mysteries of these arts were understood and practised by men; one of Flatstaff's ragged recruits, and the most valiant of the corps, having been a woman-tailor.

In Glasgow and London are two streets, which, though pronounced differently, are identical in derivation—the former, a wretched pile of rickety buildings, called the Rattonnaw; the latter, Rotten Row. These are derived from *route au roi*, 'the route or road of the king.'

Anthony Trollope mentions a curious instance of word-degeneracy. One of Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides, after the civil wars, settled down as landlord of a village inn. True to his training, he selected a scriptural motto for his signboard, on which he inscribed the words, 'God encompasseth us.' The words became obliterated through time, but something of their sound remained; and when, long after, the signboard was renewed by a new landlord, the motto reappeared, with a suitable device in the centre, as 'The Goat and Compasses.'

I had intended to give the history of some other phrases, as *hocus-pocus* from *hoc est corpus*, *hogmanay* from *hoc mane*, 'You're a brick,' &c.; but the rigid hand of the editor, conservative of space, restraineth me, and I must conclude this branch of my subject with the classic history of the expression, 'All my eye and Betty Martin O.' A ship returning from the East Indies with some rich Dutch planters aboard, encountered a dreadful storm in the Indian Ocean. The terrified passengers fearing a wreck, and trembling for their lives and property, were on their knees imploring the aid of their patron, St. Martin. One was overheard by a sailor most abjectly crying: 'Ah mihi, Beate Martine! (Ah me, blessed

Martin!) The hardy tar called out to his mate: 'I say, Jack, just hark to that shivering land-lubber singing out, "It's all my eye and Betty Martin O!"'

## THE GREATNESS OF LITTLE THINGS.

IN the course of nature there is nothing more remarkable than the stupendous results which spring from apparently insignificant causes. Straws have turned the current of our lives; a word, a thought vivid as lightning, has often decided our destiny. Mark Antony sees Cleopatra on the Cydnus, sitting in her barge as on a burnished throne, and if her nose had only been shorter he might have kept the world. The prophet Mahomet conceals himself in Mount Shur, and his pursuers, according to a Moslem tradition, are thrown off the scent, and baffled by a spider's web over the mouth of the cave. Thus the Koran, the Crescent, the Crusades, with their boundless consequences, depended at that moment on the filmy meshes of a spider's web. A young Athenian, named Xenophon, at sixteen years of age, is met in a narrow gateway by a man of extraordinary appearance and manners, who attends his stick across the path, and asks, "How can one attain to virtue and honour?" Xenophon cannot answer, and Socrates, for the strange being is none other, bidding him follow, becomes thenceforward his master in philosophy. But for that stick, that narrow gateway, Xenophon, perhaps, would never have enriched the world of letters as he has done to this day. Look again at Demosthenes. He rushed from the Athenian assembly burning with shame, for he has been hooted for his pronunciation and defective style. In the moment of his degradation he meets an actor named Satyrus. Was it chance or his good genius that threw him in this way? Satyrus teaches him the art of elocution, and, amid the wild roar of waves, with pebbles in his mouth, he corrects the vices of his utterance, and acquires pungency and force which none have equalled. No grit of the pebble roughened his lip when next he mounted the rostrum, and poured on the astonished audience a flood of eloquence, impetuous and flashing as a mountain torrent.

In science, as in literature, slight causes occasion great results; nor need we go back to the ancients in order to find remarkable instances. When Galileo was studying medicine in the University of Pisa, his attention was attracted to the regular oscillation of a lamp suspended from the roof of the cathedral, and the swinging lamp led to his study of the vibrations of pendulums. Brunelleschi by accident broke an egg, which remained standing on its broken base; and the shape of the shell inspired him immediately with the idea of the Duomo at Florence. Giotto, while tending his flock, sketched a sheep on a stone; and Cimabue, passing by, detected his latent genius, and led him on to fame—to the friendship of Dante, and to having his name immortalized in the Divina Commedia. Newton—but why tell of that falling apple in his orchard, which is better known than the laws of gravitation, to the discovery of which it led? Cuvier dissected a cuttle-fish; and the comparative anatomy of the entire animal kingdom unfolded itself before him. A single remain of an extinct animal or vegetable became a standpoint from which he could infer and describe the form and properties of the creature or plant to which it belonged; and the subsequent discovery of further remains of the same species often proved the accuracy of his deductions. The use of fossil fragments is another illustration of the importance of little things and isolated inductions. Kepler resolved to fill his cellars from the Austrian vintage, but, doubting the accuracy of the wine-merchant's measure, he worked out one of the earliest samples of what is now called the modern analysis. What suggested the embossed alphabet for the blind? A sheet of paper sent from the press with the letters accidentally raised. What called forth the most learned book on diseases of the heart?

A physician's lying awake and listening to the beating of his own. Giotto is not the only genius whom a chance visit has rescued from obscurity. Evelyn was sauntering one day along a meadow near Says Court, when he looked in at the window of a thatched cottage, and saw a young man carving one of Tintoretto's cartoons. He entered, admired the work, and soon recommended the artist to Charles II. Thus the name of Gibbins became known. Milton sees a wretched "mystery" in Italy, and conceives the plan of "Paradise Lost." The plague breaks out in London; he retires to Chalfont, and the simple question of a Quaker friend calls forth "Paradise Regained." Gibbon muses among the ruins of Roman grandeur; and the Decline and Fall of the mighty Empire breaks in long perspective on his view. A Welsh harper thrills the cord at Cambridge, and Gray, fired with sudden emotion, writes the conclusion of the "Bard." Lady Austen points to a sofa, and Cowper creates the "Task." Opie bends over his companion's shoulder when he is drawing a butterfly, and rises up a painter himself.

The history of nations, as of individuals, hangs on threads. Robert Bruce was about to join a crusade when a spider, struggling to fix his web to the ceiling, gave him a lesson in perseverance, and, remaining in his own land, he routed the army of Edward II. at Bannockburn, and achieved the independence of the Scottish crown. Cromwell was about to set sail for America, and clear forests with his axe, when a royal edict forbade emigration in unlicensed ships. Had he embarked the day before, he would never have been Lord Protector, nor Charles Stuart have laid his head on the block. The fleet of William of Orange had been driven westward of Torbay. To return in the teeth of the wind was impossible, and Plymouth, the next port, was garrisoned by Lord Bath. The Royal fleet was out of the Thames, and hastening down the channel. "You may go to prayers, doctor," said Russell to Burnet; "all is over." But it was not so. A soft breeze sprung up from the South, and the sun shone forth. The fleet turned back, William landed, and the Stuart dynasty ceased to reign.

Slight circumstances, which have occurred in childhood, often take deep hold of the memory, and recur to us through life, we know not why, when things of far greater moment are forgotten. Warren Hastings, amid the cares and splendour of Indian government, had always before his eyes a little wood at Daylesford, in Worcestershire, where he was born. Insignificant sayings in praise or blame have often had immense effect on men in pursuit of knowledge and fame, and have disconcerted or encouraged them, as the case may be, in a marvellous manner. Burke rose to address the House with a roll in his hand. A member deprecated the infliction of a MS. on his hearers, and in shame and disgust the orator quitted his seat. He who could have faced a lion was discomfited by a bray. Little things are often our great vexations. The prick of a pin will make an empire insipid. During 140 years the retainers of a Norman monastery fought and hated each other for the right of hunting rabbits. On the other hand, trifling events are frequently great consolations. The packet-ship, *Lady Hobart*, was driving before the hurricane, and hope seemed vain, when a white bird suddenly lighted on the mast. The hearts of the crew revived, and the bird was accepted as an omen of safety. Mungo Park, stripped and plundered, sat down in despair. It was a wilderness in Africa, 500 miles from any European settlement. A little moss was at his feet in flower, and it inspired him with the thought that He who planted, watered, and perfected in the desert that tiny blossom, could not be insensible to the sufferings of one formed after His own image. So he went on his way rejoicing, and soon came to a village.

Yes, little things are of wondrous importance. They are the last links in a long chain of effects, or the first in a long chain of causes, or they are both. They make the sum of human things. They test a man's character every hour in the day, and, as the jutting and curving of the bank regulates a river's flow, so do they, directly or indirectly, determine the entire course of our existence for good or evil, brilliant or obscure.