

LONDON LETTER.

NOTES ON AN AUTUMN HOLIDAY.

HAVE you any recollection of a delightful *Uncommercial Traveller*, in which Dickens speaks of the life led by the tramping clock-mender, as he goes ticking and striking through the country with a timepiece under his arm? I was reminded of it this morning by meeting one of those gentry *en route* for the keeper's cottage, I suppose, and who, asleep to-night at the ancient sign of the Crispin and Crispianus, will undoubtedly dream of the wonderful grey Gothic palace with its delicately-tinted Italian gardens and great hammered-iron gates, round about which he lingered on his way through the woods. As he passed by, the hour sounded from over the stables, startling the circling pigeons and grave, stately rooks. He echoed the heavy strokes with an answering light chime from his own moon-faced clock, and then, with many a backward stare at the million windows, went rustling away, across the slopes and through the fallen leaves.

Near to these very slopes, adown the cheerful broad road, once rattled a rumbling, dusty, high-swung post-chaise. By the window sat a young girl, with powdered hair and wistful dark eyes, who gazed at the peaceful, lonely park-lands through which they were driving, looking about her quietly (I think), talking gently to her round-faced, kindly companion, in his three-cornered hat and green travelling coat, till of a sudden the chariot stayed at the beautiful palace, ablaze with sunbeams, and the front doors opened wide. Bewildered, she was led through the long saloons, where the pictures smiled at her from the walls, where the flowers nodded their welcome from the tall crystal vases, till at last—so the pretty story goes, which you know as well as I,—the round-faced gentleman thought fit to throw off his disguise and announce himself, like a Prince in a fairy tale, to be the owner of these fine things:—

"And while now she wonders blindly
Nor the meaning can divine,
Proudly turns he round and kindly,
'All of this is mine and thine."

The furniture has remained unchanged since that day, the ornaments untouched: the faces on the walls are the same, except that in the billiard-room, amongst the Knellers, Richardsons, Lelys, and Dobsons, there now hangs a charming piece by Lawrence, the centre of attraction to most of those who find their way here. This sweet, white-gowned lady, of a type that is always in fashion, has looked out of the golden frame, in company with her husband and little daughter, for close on a hundred years. But Hazlitt can never have seen this harmonious family group, as among the pictures he criticises in his well-known essay on Burleigh House, he does not mention this. Therefore, I take it, that in the days when he was a visitor in Lord Exeter's "fair domains," it must have hung in some private apartment. "I never wish to have been a lord but when I think of this story," declares the essayist, after repeating, in his terse fashion, the particulars of the idyll. Young Lawrence has so obviously imitated Sir Joshua, both in composition and colour, that the picture cannot fail to please, and with his principal sitter, at all events, it is impossible to find a fault. For my part, I would rather have this canvas, with all its imperfections, its occasional bad drawing, its various weaknesses, than any of the artist's later and more ambitious work, in which affectation and untruthfulness are too often prominent. In Bret Harte's humorous conclusion to *Maud Müller* he gives a version of what he considers to be the saddest words from tongue or pen. I could not help the rhymes crossing my memory as I looked at the Cottage Countess with her arm round the child, and noted her husband's attitude and expression. But I don't believe this graceful, pretty-mouthed girl can have spoken with a Shropshire accent. I can't think but that the Earl (very like Pope's "Sir Plume") was entirely happy and contented with his unpedigreed bride. Some of the Hodnet villagers took him to be a highwayman, it is said—he did no work and yet had always money,—and Hazlitt, at all events, makes no mention of the palette and brushes with which Tennyson poetically endows him. But the most sagacious of his humble neighbours must have thought him a farmer out of luck, if he resembles his portrait. Would you not like to have heard some of the conversations to which this still group of people have been such patient listeners? Think, too, of the sorrow they have witnessed, for soon after the skilful young painter had finished his work my lady died; and by-and-by, in the course of six or seven years, the vault was opened to receive my lord; and then the little girl was alone, the only one of the three left to stand in front of the bright canvas, all blue and white and yellow. There were boys—a child-marquis and his brother,—so the present owner is grandson of Sarah Hoggins. Would one be ashamed of the peasant strain in one's blood, I wonder, and are cottage folk never mentioned in these lordly halls? I remember that in *Choses Vues* Victor Hugo declares genius is the only thing on earth to which we should bow, goodness the only thing to which we should kneel. There is so much of the better quality to be found in Lady Exeter's sweet face that the picture would hardly be out of place as an altar-piece, with a score of candles flaming and flickering in front of it.

And now do you care to hear of the rest of the house? There are corridors, ballrooms, drawing-rooms, dining-halls, state bed and dressing-rooms, their walls looped and wreathed with the finest carvings by Grinling Gibbons, and lined with pictures, many of which are not pictures at all—dreadful Castigliones, Carraccis, Caravaggios and the like. Here is, too, in the Jewel Closet, the famous Carlo Dolce, in my eyes valueless; and here the admirable Lady Des-

mond, by Rembrandt, a head that has been well engraved; and a small Princess Mary Tudor, which (*pace* Hazlitt) I do not believe Holbein ever saw, and two or three careful, excellent Janssens. But can you imagine the quality of mind possessed by people who, with a palace to decorate and their coffers full of gold, liked to have their ceilings and staircases splashed over by Verrio and Laguerre, who, later, bought fifteen Angelica Kauffmans and only one Romney; who spent their money on bad specimens of Guercino, Bellini and Valerio Belli, rather than on our own excellent little band of artists whose pictures, then being exhibited in the domed room of Somerset House, beat the Italians out of the field? Would you have chosen a Pordenone, when instead you might have had a Gainsborough, or indulged in a Passeri when in its place a Reynolds might have gleamed on the walls? There is consequently not much to envy at Burleigh, if I except an excellent Nollekens (a copy of the Dolphin and Child in the Barberini) and a few pretty trinkets, interesting for the association, such as Elizabeth's watch, given by her to her Lord Treasurer, and a rosary used by Mary, Queen of Scots. There are tapestries, too, and beautiful china, and some treasured relics left by Queen Victoria when she stayed here,—the wreath she wore one night at dinner, carefully gilt and placed in a case; her white glove; the glass from which she drank, and so on. But better than all these is the view from out of these oriel windows on to the lawns and gardens, shining lakes and many-coloured woods; and infinitely superior to saint and angel drawn by Italian fingers, to ruffled Queen or red-gowned statesman, is the portrait, sketched by the innkeeper's son, of the farmer's daughter in her white skirts, a portrait which, of them all, is the one I should like best to possess.

From Burleigh it is barely a mile before you reach Stamford Town, where are many beautiful old churches and quaint bedehouses and deserted posting-inns, and over all an air of old-world tranquillity. While the church-bells were stammering singing their noonday songs (I made out "Auld Lang Syne," but to a jerky hymn-tune I could put no name) I wandered up Barn Hill to a wonderful old garden, wherein I was shown inscriptions cut by Stukeley in praise of flowers and blessed peace, in thanksgiving for the Culloden victory, in honour of the doctor who had the privilege of curing the antiquarian's gout; and as I loitered in and about the gravel paths, one of my companions told me the following authentic ghost-story, which it pleases me to think may possibly be new to you.

It seems that there are two rows of old red brick houses at Hampstead, forming an avenue to the church, which houses, built on ground which once belonged to a monastery, are continually troubled by the most unaccountable noises, in one or two cases the inhabitants declaring that the noises which they can bear have been further supplemented by the appearance of apparitions which they cannot. Not long ago one of those possessing the worst of reputations was taken in all innocence by some people who, till they had been in the place some time, were left unmolested. But very soon steps pattered up and down stairs in the dead of night; doors, previously locked, unaccountably flew open; often there was a feeling, even in the broad daylight, that one was being watched (said my informant) by invisible eyes, touched by invisible fingers. The maids gave warning continually, the children occasionally were frightened, but as months went on without anything actually being seen, the footsteps and rustlings, growing monotonous, were at last almost unheeded, and the household settled down with the firm determination, annoying enough to the ghost, to ignore its presence altogether, a resolution not always strictly kept. One afternoon, a November or two ago, the lady of the house sat by the fire in a small drawing-room, shut off from a larger one by folding doors, reading fairy tales to her little daughter, and as she read she heard someone walking overhead, in a room from which the ghost always started on its peregrinations. She glanced at the child—who was staring at the flames, absorbed in the history of "The Snow Queen," and who, wisely enough, had no ears for anything else,—and continued the story without a pause. Soon on each of the shallow oak stairs sounded the well-known pit-a-pat of high-heeled shoes, till the steps, staying a second at the smaller drawing-room, went on to the larger room, the door of which opened and shut with a bang; but nothing disturbed the little girl. As her mother read on, someone behind those folding doors was turning the handles softly, pacing up and down the floor, moving chairs and small tables, till at last the reader became so nervous she thought she even should have screamed. Instead of that, however, she made some excuse of resting for a moment, gave the book to her daughter, and taking up a lamp went bravely to the threshold of the other room and looked in. The footsteps ceased suddenly, but peer as she might into every corner, nothing could she see. Just as she was turning back to "The Snow Queen" and the fire, the child ran towards her. "Why, mamma," she said, pointing to a window-seat, on which the stream of lamplight fell brightest, "who is that pretty lady?"

Since then Mrs. S., who is a Catholic, has had that restless ghost laid (this is the nineteenth century, eight miles from Charing Cross), and with bell and book the priest and the acolyte have done their best to restore peace to No. — Church Row, the consequence being that after that afternoon, spent in sprinklings and prayer, the pretty lady has altogether ceased her visits.

WALTER POWELL.

It is now quite certain, according to London *Truth*, that the promised biography of Mr. Delane, once editor of the London *Times*, about which there was considerable talk a few years ago, will never appear.

MONTREAL LETTER.

AS the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the muscular actions we perform are the principal elements which decide the tone and texture of our physical nature, so it may be broadly asserted that the most potent factor in the formation of our mental and moral character lies in our occupations, our daily conversation, and our industrial routine. One step further brings us to the admission that this mental and moral character, which is the development of our surroundings, is, in turn, the parent of our theories, civil, religious, and political. If this be true, it is not surprising that with the disappearance of navigation and the fall-trade down the Gulf, the financial mind of Montreal should immediately revert to the idea of resolving that the inevitable rigour of our winter shall hereafter be a profitable investment. Long before the most distant announcement of frost or snow, and while the wharves were still alive with all sorts of human and other merchandise, committees were busy on their rounds canvassing for stock in the thermometer. An event which at one time promised to become the National Festival of Canada, and one which, in the unique and picturesque, might have thrown out a friendly challenge to the world, is likely to degenerate into a Joint Stock Speculation with its shareholders and annual dividends. We are to have our Carnival, but it is shorn of its glory and robbed of its beauty. Its Ice Palace and Railway, its Snow-booths and Slides, its hospitality, the possibility of its very existence have all been discussed and decided from their profit and loss in bank accounts. Social and religious exclusion, tyrannical in all else, insists upon immediate abdication in favour of prospective windfalls. Roman and Anglican, Jew and Gentile meet here on common ground. For once on earth they enjoy a foretaste of millennial fraternity. The plan of the castle is an object of keen contest in the West; and in the East, subscriptions to the Railway on the river are increased on the assurance that it is not a parade of the Siberian severity of our climate, but an exhibition of the unlimited fertility of our natural resources. Public subscriptions are taken, given, and advertised. Men persuade themselves that they are securing a few shares in the future life, and then turn round to count the marbles they will gain in this. The right hand provides a programme of hospitable intentions, and the left a census of the victims with a calculation as to the profits of the consumption.

In the harbour the last ship of the summer is left riding alone, impatiently testing the mercury. On the heels of the break in the Cornwall Canal, the closing freight is being pushed through. Sheds are folding up; the gates of the new dyke are swinging round for the winter; the harbour police are disbanded; the days are gone when the idler can lounge on the quays; and the river, calm in its leaden staidness, though shivering with unknown dread, is awaiting its fate.

The irrepressible Scot looks out for the idler. St. Andrew's Home, St. Andrew's Sermon, St. Andrew's Day, and St. Andrew's Ball fill the air with the earliest snow-flake. The first smack of frost which seals the river opens the purse-strings of patriotism. To provide a haggis and a bag-pipe for himself, and oatmeal for his less fortunate brother, the Scot will sing himself to death on Halloween, and dance himself to death on "The Day" at five dollars a-piece. Ruskin says, Sir Walter's "Bride of Lammermoor" should not be read by the Scot. It is too sad for him. The sage's criticism savours of sarcasm. At least it can hold good only in the fitful foggy weather of the Scot at Home. The Scot Abroad is made of sterner stuff.

The churches, too, are organizing for the winter's campaign against sin and suffering. Fairs and Bazaars have not yet departed this life, although their enfeebled systems have been reduced to all sorts of expedients to preserve soul and body together. Without the bolster of a fresh patron or the stimulant of a new feature, not one could hobble through the drag of its weary life. The latest novelty in tonics is a Feast of Days. Upon my exit from my last Church fair I had solemnly vowed that not only was it my last, but that it should remain so. But incorrigible hankerings after some confirmation of a theory of my own on the Lost Tribes spurred my drooping faith. I entered this Feast of Days; but behold! no rebuilt Temple! no revived sacrifice! Only a Hall, a crowd, a bustle; a booth for Monday, another for Tuesday, and a third for Wednesday. Before I had arrived at Saturday night my calculations of the Days of the Feast and my balance in hand had vanished contemporaneously.

The thaw of those few days has brought disappointment to the frequenters of skating-rinks, whose skates had been polished and whose hopes had been raised by the early and severe frost of last week, when the mercury had dipped to 4° above zero. Snow-shoe tramps (really not figuratively), have been cancelled, and umbrellas are once more in requisition. Citizens generally hesitate between two opinions—to walk or to drive; whilst the horse-railway is busy ploughing up our streets, and the corporation is energetically smoothing them down. We have laws, and unfortunately a few people obey them. If everybody would only be induced persistently and conscientiously to disregard them, we should know how to regulate the day's engagements. Few things are more disconcerting than the straggling and struggling efforts of a few to set a good example. However, our mayor being absent in England on municipal business, his Deputy has become devoured with a zeal for authority. Long may it continue—the zeal, and not the devouring!

The educational institutions of the Province are by law exempt from municipal taxation, but the Roman