

THE LADY GWENDOLEN EPISODE.*

By Robert Barr.

THE Earl of Stobcross was O! so haughty. He was also proud, and went about with his chin in the air. Earls cannot always be recognized by the altitude of their chins. An American visitor to England once expressed his regret to me that the notables of the British Isles did not go round with large printed labels on their backs, telling who they were, so that a stranger would not be compelled to follow the example of Theodore Hook, who, meeting a distinguished-looking man on the Strand, went up to him and inquired if he was anybody in particular. The American plaintively said, when I remarked that the nobility might object to being labelled, that it would merely be reverting to an old custom, which had been allowed to fall into disuse. In ancient times the swells carried their labels on their shields, drawing pictures thereon, because, as a general rule, they were not able to write. Then, when you met a knight out in London, all you had to do was to consult your illustrated catalogue of the titled families, for the year 1492, for instance, and you spotted your man at once, and knew whether it was better to take to a side street or not. As a rule, if you had any valuables about you it was safer to make a hasty move elsewhere. He suggested that if the House of Lords would consent to wear large numerals on their manly bosoms, and if some publisher would issue a numbered catalogue for sixpence, to be sold at all respectable bookstalls, the arrangement would be a great convenience to the tourist. I said that if the tourist would merely take the trouble to study trigonometry a little he would have no trouble.

A plain knight wears his chin at a

certain angle, easily ascertainable by a man who mixes in good society; a baronet holds his three degrees higher; an earl five degrees higher than the baronet; a duke is again ever so much more elevated than an earl, and thus comes our phrase, "As drunk (i.e. as elevated) as a lord." My American friend thanked me cordially for my information, and getting some further instructions on angles, acute and obtuse, he went forth on the streets to test his newly-acquired knowledge, all of which brings me back to where I started, that the Earl of Stobcross held his chin so high in the air that his nose pointed straight up to the zenith. Captious readers may say, "How then could a duke hold his head higher?" To explain the matter I must refer to the history of the Earl. Whilst most of our duke's ancestors came over with William the Conqueror, the first Earl of Stobcross was dropped off on these islands by Noah as the ark was passing the peak of Skiddaw. The archives in Stobcross castle inform us that, although Noah booked the first Earl for the entire voyage, the ancient mariner could not put up with the Earl's pretensions, who insisted on sitting at the head of the table, while Noah held that this chair was the captain's place. His lordship grumbled so much about the food, and complained so bitterly that there was no smoking room on the boat, that Noah was glad to get rid of him, and when the marooned Earl threatened him for breach of contract, Noah replied that he had his remedy at the law courts. When the waters subsided the Earl went down the hill and seized all the land he could get his hands (or feet) on, and so founded Stobcross manor. He brought suit against Noah, but the latter had

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