

Literary Extracts, &c.

General Washington.

Who does not love to list the old wife's tale
Of former days, told in her rambling way,
And full of repetitions—yet most rare,
And worthy of the ear of listening youth,
Father'd about the rousing winter's fire.

I love to talk with old people, who remember the revolutionary war, and hear them tell those little stories of domestic heroism, of solitary and patient suffering they have treasured in their memories, and which escape the notice of the historian. It is from these rural chronicles, that we often gather little incidents, that let us into the true characters of illustrious men, who, when in public act before the great audience of nations, but who, in the solitary farm-house, or rural village, among people too lowly to be any restraint upon their actions or deportment, appear in their night gown and slippers. The little drama thus simply exhibited in the unstudied narrative of talking age, to me is far more interesting than pompous details of fallen empires, or dethroned kings, whose weakness or ambition, whose follies or crimes, drew down upon them the ruin they deserved.

Besides exhibiting more of the real picture of human life than a hundred pompous biographies of dead or living heroes, these traditional narratives combine the simplicity of truth with the interest of romance, and the beauty of poetry, which is indebted to this source for a great portion of its most charming incidents. There is also another advantage in this legendary lore, which history seldom possesses: The relators tell what they themselves have seen or suffered; and all must have observed the interest excited by the descriptions or narratives of an eye witness. History is, for the most part, hear-say; tradition, like the witness in a court of justice, relates what it has seen, and the impressions communicated to the listener, are those of the actor or spectator himself.

In one of the romantic and sequestered scenes that abound along the banks of the Hudson, resided, a few years ago, an old woman, who, though above four score, had retained all her faculties, and especially the faculty of speech. The house in which she lived had been the quarters of General Putnam during that gloomy winter in which our army lay in the highlands, and had often been honored with the presence of Washington.—Having nothing remarkable in its appearance, it is hardly worth a description. It was a large farm-house, that having never been contaminated by paint, retained a truly quaker like simplicity, and was so little an object of respect to the tenants of the farm-yard, that the chickens made no ceremony in coming in and picking up the crumbs that fell from the good-man's table. It was of considerable length, one story high, and its whole appearance accorded with the homely, careless simplicity which still characterizes the establishment of an honest, independent American farmer.

Before the door ran a mountain-brook, which, in its rapid course towards the river, had ploughed a deep ravine, whose sides were covered with grass, and skirted by a row of English cherry-trees, almost a century old. Here hundreds of chirping birds came to steal cherries, and sing their merry madrigals undisturbed, for the old lady had more than she wanted, and so had her neighbors, so that there was enough for birds and all.—Below the house the brook became a torrent, and forced its way among immense masses of rocks, shadowed with dark hemlocks, and solemn pines, with now and then a wild flower trembling on the brink of the steep, and by a succession of cascades, at length tumbled into the river, forming a little cove of alders, and all the tribes of shrubbery that love the fresh water side.

The whole landscape was shut in by lofty mountains, woody and waving, like all our mountains, at whose foot rolled the majestic stream, which was seen here and there like a cluster of little lakes, reposing in the cool shadows of the hills. Within about a half-mile of the house, was a singular looking

church; which, though neither picturesque, or magnificent, or antique, gave a cast of still more dignity to the scene, by connecting the glorious works of the Creator with the grateful homage of his humble creatures. I remember going there one Sunday morning, some years ago, and being struck with the rustic simplicity, not only of the church, but also the preacher, the service, and indeed the whole congregation. But what most excited my attention was the good dame, who is the heroine of this story. She sat in a pew close by an open window which looked into a corner of the burial-ground, where, under more than a dozen grave stones, reposed the remains of all that portion of the family which she had survived. Here lay her parents, her children, and her grand-children; here she could receive a sad impressive lesson of the inevitable fate of all that breathe; and here she doubtless reconciled herself to her own, by the cheering hope that she was going to meet more dear friends than she would leave behind her when she died.

Being accustomed to visit an old and hospitable friend, whose mansion is not far from the place I have been describing, I formed an acquaintance with the worthy dame, by often stopping in my rambles to rest myself, and listen to her stories about Washington and Putnam, and other revolutionary heroes of lesser note. For fear my frequent visits may excite some little scandal among some of my gossiping readers, I may as well take this opportunity to mention, that she had a husband at the time of which I am speaking, who was older than herself. He died a few years ago, and all that I remember of him is, that he was a little old man, with a head as white as the snow on the tops of his native mountains; and that, at the age of eighty, he used to turn out of a frosty morning to cut up a load of wood, by way of exercise.

My chief pleasure in the society of this aged dame, consisted in hearing her talk of the great names that frequented her home "in the war time." I would give much if I carried in my memory some, even remote, recollection of how Washington walked, and looked, and smiled, and danced, for he was accustomed, during his arduous struggle for the freedom of his country, to relax from his weight of overwhelming cares, by often going down a sprightly country dance. I am acquainted with a lady who was frequently his partner, and whom I look upon with peculiar veneration on that account, since to have been in habits of social intimacy with that man, is, in my mind, to give dignity to his surviving cotemporaries. Nay, I freely confess I have sometimes found in my heart to envy even the worn-out, ragged, and crippled soldier of the revolution, on witnessing the honest pride with which he boasted of having fought for the liberties of his country, by the side of George Washington. Having once in my life had an opportunity of visiting Mount Vernon, since the death of him whose presence has consecrated every spot around, and given to the very trees and blades of grass a nameless value, I paid particular respect to the old German gardener, who boasted of having raised cauliflowers for the General, and got out of the carriage at the park gate, on purpose to shake hands with the gray headed old negro who opens it, because he told me he remembered master George when he was a little boy.

Such being the nature of my feelings on this subject, I used to listen with silent interest to the rambling traditions of this sybil of the Highlands. Her family, I ought to have mentioned, had been, for more than half a century, the tenants of a gentleman who joined the royal standard at the commencement of the troubles, and forfeited his estate in consequence. Though warmly attached to the cause of freedom, it was natural for the good dame to lament, as she often did, the worthy landlord, who had always been sociable at the house, and treated her and hers with those little attentions which cost nothing to those above, yet are so gratifying to those beneath. She would occasionally sneer at the upstart pride of those who had succeeded him; and I remember her once pathetically

alluding to the period when the parson never began the service till the lord of the manor made his appearance. In short, she still cherished in her heart, unknown to herself, a latent spark of torism, and while she missed no opportunity of telling a story to the credit of Washington, could never be brought to use any other Prayer Book than one given her by the old landlord, which contained all the prayers for king George and the royal family.

But, for all this, Washington was her hero. She had a picture of him hung up just below

her best looking-glass, and whenever she looked that way, it reminded her of something the general said or did, or some events of those doleful times, when the foot of an enemy passed almost every threshold in the land. She would look at the picture with the affection of a mother, and exclaim—"Ah! he was a good man: I remember he used to come over sometimes, nay, very often, to talk over matters with General Putnam, who had his quarters here. If ever man loved his country, it was General Washington. I could tell, but I am old, and lose my memory every day—I could tell of his perplexities, his watchings, cares, and sufferings of mind and body, which I believe he never let any one see but myself; and I shall never forget his kindness when I lost my youngest son. My boy was quite a hero among the young men of the hills, and night after night used to go out with parties of militia, beating up the plundering *Yagers* that came from below, and carried away every thing they could find, to the ruin of many of our poor people, who staid between the lines because they were old, and knew not where else to go."

"One night—it was the 20th of January—I can recollect that—in the dead of night, my son and his little troop were surprised in turn, by a party from below, while warming themselves in a house, which the enemy surrounded in dead silence, and then set on fire. In attempting to escape, they were all butchered by the *Yagers*, who hacked them down, though they begged for quarter. The next day, while I was out at a neighbor's house, my son's body was brought home by some people who knew him; and when I returned there I saw it, with the blood frozen in the gashes, with which he was covered.

"I don't remember what became of me, till I found myself sitting in our old arm chair, and the General standing just by, with his hat in one hand, and the other resting on the back of the chair. 'Mother,' said he, when he saw I was come to myself—'Mother'—and the word made me so proud I almost forgot what had happened—'Mother—you have given a son to your country—a brave man to his God. Go now to your room, I will see every thing done.' I went, for no one could say nay to him when he soothed or commanded, and they buried my boy like a soldier. The troops fired, while the General himself stood over the grave, and the pride of a mother almost overcame her affection. Time, hardships, and more sorrows, that succeeded each other for years afterwards, drove away the bitterness of this sad accident, although when the floor was washed, or the sun shone bright upon it, we could see the stain of blood where the body had lain. I can talk of these things now, for when I think of the death of my son, I remember also that he died in the service of his country, and his country's father followed him to his grave."

SALMAGUNDI.

On Omens.

The following amusing article was written in England and alludes only to the vulgar prejudices of Great Britain, but it may remind the reader of some lucky or unlucky signs, of which he has been told to take notice; for we are not without our gossips.

In the days when the belief in omens flourished in England, the following were deemed lucky; if on setting out on a journey a sow with pigs were met, the journey would be successful; to meet two magpies portended marriage; three, a successful journey; four, unexpected good news; and five, that the person would soon be in the company of the great. If in dressing, a person should put his stockings on wrong side out, it was a sign of good luck; but the luck would be changed, if the stockings were turned the right

way. Nothing could insure success to a person going on important business more effectually than throwing an old shoe after him, when he left the house. If a younger sister were married before the elder ones, the latter should dance at her wedding without shoes, otherwise they will never get husbands. To find a horseshoe is deemed lucky, and it is still more so, if it be preserved and nailed upon the door, as it thus prevents witchcraft.

In England, and more particularly in Wales, according to Pennant, it is a good omen, if the sun shines on a married couple, or if it rains when a corpse is burying. According to the old distich,

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,
Happy is the corpse, that the rain rains on."

The unlucky omens in England are, to see one magpie, and then more; but to kill a magpie is a terrible misfortune. It is also unlucky to kill a swallow, or more properly the house martin. If, on a journey, a sow crosses the road, the person, if he cannot pass it, must ride round about, otherwise bad luck will attend his journey. If a lover presents a knife or any thing sharp to his mistress, it portends that their loves will be cut asunder, unless he take a pin, or some other trifling article in exchange. To find a knife or razor portends disappointment: a piece of coal, starting from the fire, of a hollow form, portends death. To spill the salt, or lay the knife and fork across each other at table, is very ominous: if there be in company thirteer, which is called the devil's dozen, some misfortune will befall one of them. The noise of the small insect called a death-watch, foretells death; and the screech-owl at midnight, some terrible misfortune.

If the cheek burns, or the ear tingles, it is a sign that some person is talking of one; and the coming of strangers is foretold by what is called 'a thief in the candle.' Friday is an unlucky day to be married, and yellow is an ominous colour for an unmarried woman to wear; in plucking a 'a merry thought,' the person who gets the largest share will be married before the other.

In the Highlands omens are numerous; it is unlucky to stumble at the threshold, or to be obliged to return for any thing forgot. To step over a gun or a fishing-rod, spoils sport. If, when the servant is making a bed, she happens to sneeze, the sleep of the person who is to lie in it will be disturbed, unless a little of the straw (with which most beds in the Highlands were, till very lately, filled) is taken out, and thrown into the fire. If a black cloud, on New Year's eve, is seen, it portends some dreadful calamity, either to the country, or to the person over whose estate of house it appears. The day of the week on which the third of May falls is deemed unlucky throughout the year. Friday is considered as unlucky for many things, especially for digging peat, or taking an account of the sheep or cattle on the farm. Under the persuasion, that what ever is done during the waxing of the moon grows, and whatever is done during her waning decreases and withers, they cut the turf which they intend for fences, and which, of course, they wish to grow, when the moon is on the increase; but the turf which they intend for fuel, they cut when she is on the wane, as they wish it to dry speedily. If a house take fire during the increase of the moon, it denotes prosperity; if during her wane, poverty. In the island of Mull, the first day of every quarter is deemed fortunate; and Tuesday is the most lucky day for sowing their corn. The lucky omens in the Highlands are not many, and in general they are the same as those in other countries: one, however, seems peculiar to them, it is deemed lucky to meet a horse. In the Orkneys, Friday, which in most other places is reckoned an unfortunate day for this purpose, is generally chosen for marriage; next to it, Thursday is fixed upon; and the time when the moon is waxing is the most fortunate. When an Orkney fisherman is setting off from the shore, he takes especial care to turn his boat in the direction of the sun's motion; if he neglected this, he would not expect good luck. In the lowlands of Scotland, good or bad fortune throughout the year is thought to depend greatly upon the person who is first seen on New-Year's morning, or the 'first foot,' as it is called; if the 'first foot' be that of a friend, and fortunate person, the subsequent year will be fortunate. Under this idea, as soon as ever twelve o'clock at night announces the commencement of the New-Year, it is customary even in Edinburgh, to secure a lucky 'first foot' to one's friends, even though it should be necessary to enter their chamber when they are just asleep.

THE DAVIDIES TO THE LADIES.

While folly's shrine attracts the fair,
Blame not the beaux who worship there;
If gods for you took meaner shapes,
No wonder we descend to apes.
Let beauty shine on worth alone,
And fools and fools will scarce be known.