



INTRODUCTION.



IT was my good fortune to attract the attention of Dr. Dixon some years ago by a paper I wrote in a Boston journal, entitled "A nook in the north." An old friend of mine, an American, living now in Manchester, had written a letter to this journal about a visit he had made to Bolton and Ilkley, in which he hinted that the latter place was "no great shakes," as we say over here, and so, as I was in some sort an adopted son of Ilkley, and was disposed to think of my town as those who love to gird at Boston say Bostonians think of theirs—as 92,000,000 miles from the sun and turning on its own axis once in twenty-four hours—I took up the gauntlet without parley, and proceeded to show that so far from Ilkley being what my friend had described, it was the very choicest spot in my opinion anywhere under the wide heavens—beautiful for situation, rich in human and historic interest, and the choicest gem in the diadem of beauty clasped about by the hills of Craven. This paper was reprinted in England and brought me a long and very interesting letter from Dr. Dixon, to which I made such reply as I was able to make, and from that time we became fast friends, though he would not for a moment allow I was right in calling Ilkley the "gem" of Craven, but thought the upper reaches of the Wharfe from Bolton far superior to anything below.

In this and a later letter Dr. Dixon made a little sketch of his life and ancestry which I venture to copy. He says: "I am a member of an old Yorkshire family whose pedigree is in Thoresby's *Ducatus*, the Dixons of Beeston, and am connected with America. My grandfather, Major James Burnside Wassels, was in the service of Geo. III., and his mother was a Burnside. I am descended from the Bruces also, for my ancestor, John Dixon, of Hawkshead, married Margaret de Roos, grand-

daughter of King David Bruce, and daughter of Lord de Roos. Another of my progenitors, he says, was the Rev. Samuel Wright, the Puritan, who founded the Carter Lane Meeting-house in London. His only daughter married a Dixon of Beeston, and I am descended from that marriage. Dr. Wright was of an old family in Thetford, where he was a clergyman until he left the Church to become a Dissenter." The doctor gives me many details also of his sunny life in Switzerland—his neighbours, friends, and recreations; of his interest in botany, and, of course, in antiquities, and in Craven above all. He makes a very pretty apology, too, for dwelling on his high ancestry, "merely as a matter of curiosity and antiquarian interest;" but I think he was very proud of it, after all, as he had a perfect right to be, and was very much like the brother a little wide of Addingham, who used to cry himself down so steadily in the class-meeting, that one day his wise old leader said, "I will tell thee what's t' matter wi' thee, John; thou's noan sa humble as thou maks out. Thou's just a little bit proud, John; *thou's proud of thy humility.*" So I felt that, quite unaware to himself, my dear old friend had a real pride in his descent. It was a good deal more to him than "a matter of curious interest;" but it sat beautifully on him as the bending of a rare lily towards the grass.

Dr. Dixon's book will speak for itself—it is wine which needs no bush, and will win its own way. Dunham Whitaker's great History of Craven is probably the best book of the kind in the English tongue, but the author was not quite the man to heed the Apostle's word, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." It is a work for scholars, for persons of wealth and taste, and of more than an average education. But these "Chronicles and Stories" make up in a very charming way for Dr. Whitaker's short-coming, and, beside this, will be welcome to thousands of Craven men who cannot get hold of the great book, or make much of it if they could.

Those who love the beautiful region, as we do who are so far away from it, may well hope also that other men will be stirred by it to gather new sheaves of historic and romantic wealth where so much lies still unreaped

and waiting for the reaper. In looking over the Calendars of State Papers now being published, I have more than once found hints and touches of the old life in Craven, and especially about Skipton, which will be well worth gleaning, and Mr. Froude has indicated other stores to be ransacked by those who have leisure and the taste for them in the M.SS. still unprinted. Dr. Dixon just hints at the name and place of one poor fellow who had to face the doom which fell on the Nortons for the part they took in the Pilgrimage of Grace. I found the record of three more the other day. It is grim reading after three centuries of time.

“ xxii. die Jan., 1569.

“ Men of Craven to be executed nyghe the townes where they dwelled.—Threshfeld, Robert Araye; Rylleston, Richard Kaley; Hanlith, William Scranston. I will that you Henry Gyrlinton, Thomas Rolandson, George Unes, and Richard Garthe do see to the execution of these above-named in some place nyghe the townes where they dwelled. Hanlith, William Lawson is to be hangman and so discharged.

“(Signed) GEO. BOWES.”

Poor Lawson saved his neck by breaking those of his old comrades, and one thinks that before he went to his own place there would be days when he would fain have changed places with those he had slain. God help him! It is to be noticed also how we would still get into trouble a hundred years later when trouble was abroad. John Field, of Thornton, is a mighty Royalist, I notice, and must needs take more than was good for him one June day, and then because “when t’ drink’s in t’ wit’s oot,” must yell, “The devil confounde Cromwell and all his partakers, for he is a traitor. I drink a health to his confusion, and you are all traitors that refuse it.” John’s words took him to York Castle, as did those of John Ellis, yeoman, of Burnsall, who was on the other side, and also on a June day must declare that the old queen had several children in the absence of her husband; one at Pontefract, for John must needs give chapter and verse, and as Charles II. was by this time on the throne, the old yeoman must needs add, “he also mynds nothing but women.” So Ellis was hauled up to answer.

I notice also that in these days we are busy with the witches. Ann Greene, of Gargrave, is in court Feb. 16, 1663, for this crime. John Tatterson, of the same town, has been to see her about a turn he has got to "worship the enemy," together with a frightful ear-ache. Ann recommended black wool for the ear, but she does not seem to have ventured on the other trouble. John was bound, however, to have some more heroic remedy than mere black wool, so she crossed his ear with a string three times, and evil matter ran out, whereat his ear did amend. And Ann Greene, being questioned, saith "she doth sometimes use a charm for ear-ache, and used it over John Tatterson: she crosses her garter three times over the place, and sayeth 'Boote a god's name' nine times over; she can also cure paines in the heade, but meddles not with other diseases." There is great store of matter of this sort scattered through out-of-the-way books and M.SS. which can and should be gathered to light up the fast fading life of the old days in Craven.

I find myself wishing also that Dr. Dixon had written one more chapter for us—a chapter containing a picture of a genuine old Craven homestead and its inmates, because no man could have done it so well. I have such a picture in my mind. It is almost half-a-century old. It is a picture of a sturdy, low thatched house, in which the first thing that attracted my child eyes was a wonderful bedstead of black oak, built up all round with oaken boards for curtains, pannelled and carven, with a door through which you went to find the piled-up feathers, shutting and bolting it after you, so that, if the burglars came, you could get ready for a fight. Then there was a settle of black oak, with a very old date on it, and a chair to match, of a discomfort equal to Calvin's chair in Geneva. A quaint old clock in the corner, with a face of brass on which there was a picture of the sun of such a rotund jollity that it has touched the original with lines of laughter to my mind through all these years. The great "fleaek" for the oatbread comes out next, and the flitches of beef and bacon hanging from the black beams. Then the flagged floor with fine sand for a carpet, and the great peat fire with its aromatic pungency; the rack against the wall with its splendid store of pewter plates, the great oaken dresser, under it, and a carven "kist" where it was whispered the old man kept his "brass." He was



a man of the real old Craven breed. I used to think he could not speak in level tones, but must needs address you as if you stood at some distance, a habit caught, I suppose, from talking in the teeth of the wind which blows for ever across the Craven uplands. I use one of his words now and then, or a sentence, when the humour takes me, and the Scandinavian maid who waits on our table is apt, I notice, to understand that better than the modern English; she tells my daughter some of the words are the same they use in Denmark. His dress was but slightly altered from that of the peasants in Chaucer's time. He cut his grass with a scythe, and his grain with a sickle, and hated the French, though he could not tell you why. It was the smouldering hate, no doubt, of 800 years, kept alive ever since the Conqueror laid Craven waste, so that the dead lay on the highways and in the houses unburied, and "*waste*," "*waste*," "*waste*" comes into Domesday perpetually for the sign he had set almost twenty years before on our land. His good wife saved a bit of the old yule-log, wrapped in white linen, to kindle the new withal, and would let no fire go out of the house during the days between "owd and new Kersmas." The old man believed fervently in witches and t' gy-trash. He belonged to the church at Bolton, and slept there in my time with great regularity, especially under the Curate, for "Parson Carr" was not so easy with that fine old habit of getting through a sermon as good Mr. Umpleby. He was, in truth, as I think of him now and remember his queer ways, one third pagan, one third catholic, and the rest was little better than veneer,—I imagine, dating from the Reformation. So he lived as his fathers had lived time out of all mind. They were there on the moor side—the warm side dipping well toward the meadows and woods in Earl Edwin's time; saw the Percies and Romillies and Cliffords come and go, while they still held on eating their brown and oaten-bread and bacon, and drinking their milk and "honey drink" and beer. They will last to the crack of doom. I was quite a boy when the old man's time came to die, and it comes back to me how "he gave commandment concerning his bones," and would have everything done "i' t'owd way." I think, indeed, he had a dim idea that he would be there as a sort of silent spectator, and

might be troubled if things went wrong. So he would have no wine and biscuit served at the funeral—"nēa nut he." They must brew plenty o' drink and bake plenty o' spice cēak and cut it thick, and hand it round at least three times, and everybody must eat and drink their fill. How one hungry growing lad did enjoy that funeral, to be sure; but he wist not, any more than the old man in his coffin, that it was the last long-lingering echo and refrain of the funeral feasts of his pagan ancestors a thousand years ago. And I can remember how they decked his shroud very much as if Ophelia had been there to direct them. There were violets and pansies, columbines and daisies, sweet thyme, rosemary, and rue, for that was the ancient way; and he must be laid away as he had lived, with all the old rites and observances about his dust. Then as they bore him to his burial along the green shadowy lanes to Bolton they sang old funeral chants Job might have written, and Jeremiah set to music, they were so shorn of all that sheds a new radiance on death and the grave.

There is good gleaning also, if the traditions still hold, among the Craven parsons and clerks of the old days. I do not find that capital story of the parson of "t' lang church e' Crēaven," who when his wardens went to him on a Saturday night and asked that he would say the prayer for rain, answered, "To be sure I will; but it will be no use while the wind stays in this quarter." And of his clerk, who, being a poet, was minded to turn a psalm into metre when the Bishop came to hold a Visitation, and submitted what he had done to the parson, of which only this verse, I believe, remains—

"Ye little hills why do ye skip
And wherefore do ye hop?
Is it because that ye have come
To see my Lord Bishōp?"

The psalm was never sung, I think. There are good gleanings, too, among the old race of local preachers. "Locust" preachers, my old friend remembered they were sometimes called. The writer of this chapter was *in* and *of* their rank in Craven more than thirty years ago, and learned from them the first simple lessons in the art of preaching, and

still thinks—as he thought then—that Flesher Bland, of Addingham, who was a local preacher in those days, but is now in the front rank of preachers in Canada, was one of the finest and most impressive pulpit orators it was ever his good fortune to hear. I do not see the story in Dr. Dixon's collection of the brother we raised who felt he had "a call," and being put forward to try his fortune, took for his text, "I am the light of the world," but made so very poor a job of it that one ancient sister got out of all patience, and groaned, "Naay, naay, lad, if thoos the light of the world thoo needs snuffin." But I must stop somewhere, and so will stop here, lest my readers should also be of the old dame's mind.

ROBERT COLLYER.

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