

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO.¹

DUELLING.

DUELLING, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, was very prevalent, nor has it abated in King James's. It is one of the sincerities of Human Life, which bursts through the thickest-quilted formulas; and in Norse-Pagan, in Christian, New Christian and all manner of ages, will, one way or the other, contrive to shew itself. 5

A background of wrath, which can be stirred up to the murderous infernal pitch, does lie in every man, in every creature: this is a fact which cannot be contradicted;—which indeed is but another phasis of the more general fact, that every one of us is a *Self*, that every one of us calls himself *I*. How can you be a *Self*, and not have tendencies to *Self-defence*! This background of wrath,—which surely ought to blaze out as seldom as possible, and then as nobly as possible,—may be defined as no other than the general radical-fire, in its *least* elaborated shape, whereof Life itself is composed. Its least elaborated shape, this flash of accursed murderous rage;—as the glance of mother's-love, and all intermediate warmths and energies and genialities, are the same element *better* elaborated. Certainly the elaboration is an immense matter,—indeed, is the whole matter! But the figure, moreover, under which your infernal element itself shall make its appearance, nobly or else ignobly, is very significant. From Indian Tomahawks, 10
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¹ Found recently in *Leigh Hunt's Journal*, Nos. 1, 3, 6 (Saturday 7th December 1850, et *seqq.*). Said there to be 'from a Waste-paper Bag' of mine. Apparently some fraction of a certain *History* (Failure of a History) of *James I.*, of which I have indistinct recollections.—(Note of 1857.) 25

from Irish Shillelahs, from Arkansas Bowie-knives, up to a deliberate Norse *Holmgang*, to any civilized Wager of Battle, the distance is great.

5 Certain small fractions of events in this kind, which give us a direct glance into Human Existence in those days, are perhaps, in the dire scarcity of all events that are not dead and torpid, worth snatching from the general leaden haze of my erudite friend, and saving from bottomless Nox for a while.

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NO. I.

HOLLES OF HAUGHTON.

15 John Holles Esquire, or to speak properly, Sir John Holles of Haughton in Notts; the same Sir John whom we saw lately made Comptroller of the Prince's Household;—an indignant man, not without some relation to us here. John Holles indignantly called it 'political simony' this selling of honours; which indeed it was: but what then? It was doable, it was done for others; it was desirable to John also, who
20 possessed the requisite cash. He was come of London Citizens, had got broad lands and manors, Haughton, Erby and others; had wealth in abundance,—'his father used to keep a troop of players': he now in this epoch, for a consideration of 10,000*l.*, gets himself made Earl of Clare. We invite our readers to look back some two score years upon his history, and notice slightly the following circumstances there.

25 John Holles Esquire of Haughton in Notts, a youth of fortune, spirit and accomplishment, who had already seen service under the Veres, the Frobishers, by land and sea, did in 1591, in his twenty-sixth year, marry his fair neighbour, Anne Stanhope,—Mistress Anne
30 Stanhope, daughter of Sir Thomas Stanhope in those parts, from whom innumerable Chesterfields, Harringtons and other Stanhopes extant to this very day descend. This fair Anne Stanhope, beautiful in her fardingales and antiquarian headgear, had been the lady of John Holles's heart in those old times; and he married her, thinking it no
35 harm. But the Shrewsburys of Worksop took offence at it. In his Father's time, who kept the troop of players and did other things, John Holles had been bespoken for a daughter of the Shrewsburys;

and now here was he gone over to the Stanhopes, enemies of the house of Shrewsbury. Ill blood in consequence; ferment of high humours; a Montague-and-Capulet business, the very retainers on both sides biting thumbs at one another.

Pudsey, a retainer on the Shrewsbury Worksop side, bit his thumb at Orme, a retainer on the Holles Haughton side; was called out with drawn rapier, was slain on the spot like fiery Tybalt, and never bit his thumb more. Orme, poor man, was tried for murder; but of course the Holleses and the Stanhopes could not let him be hanged; they made interest, they feed law-counsel,—they smuggled him away to Ireland, and he could not be hanged. Whereupon Gervase Markham, a passably loose-tongued, loose-living gentleman, sworn squire-of-dames to the Dowager of Shrewsbury, took upon himself to say publicly, That John Holles was himself privy to Pudsey's murder, "That John Holles himself, if justice were done——!" And thereupon John Holles, at Haughton in Notts, special date not given, presumable date 1594 or '95, indited this emphatic Note, already known to some readers:

‘FOR GERVASE MARKHAM. 20

‘Whereas you have said that I was guilty of that villainy of Orme in the death of Pudsey, I affirm that you lie, and lie like a villain; which I shall be ready to make good upon yourself, or upon any gentleman my equal living.—JOHN HOLLES.’ 25

Gervase Markham, called upon in this emphatic way, answered, "Yes, he would fight, certainly;—and it should be in Worksop Park, on such a day as would suit Holles best." Worksop Park; locked Park of the Shrewsburys! Holles, being in his sound wits, cannot consent to fight there; and Markham and the world silently insinuate, "Are you subject to niceties in your fighting, then? Readier, after all, with your tongue than with your rapier?" These new intolerabilities John Holles had to pocket as he could, to keep close in the scabbard beside his rapier, till perhaps a day would come. 30

Time went on: John Holles had a son; then, in 1597, a second son, Denzil by name. Denzil Holles, Oliver Cromwell's Denzil: yes, reader, this is he; come into the world not without omens! For, at his christening, Lady Stanhope, glad matron, came as grandmother and 35

godmother; and Holles, like a dutiful son-in-law, escorted her home-
wards through the Forest again. Forest of merry Sherwood, where
Robin Hood and others used to inhabit; that way lies their road. And
now riding so towards Shelton House, through the glades of Sher-
wood, whom should they chance to meet but Gervase Markham also
5 ambling along, with some few in his company! Here then had the
hour arrived.

With slight salutation and time of day, the two parties passed on:
but Holles, with convenient celerity, took leave of his mother-in-law:
10 “Adieu, noble Madam, it is all straight road now!” Waving a fond
adieu, Holles gallops back through Sherwood glades; overtakes
Markham; with brief emphasis, bids him dismount, and stand upon
his guard. And so the rapiers are flashing and jingling in the Forest
of Sherwood; and two men are flourishing and fencing, their intents
15 deadly and not charitable. “Markham,” cried Holles, “guard yourself
better, or I shall spoil you presently;” for Markham, thrown into a
flurry, fences ill; in fact, rather capers and flourishes than fences; his
antagonist standing steady in his place the while, supple as an eel,
alert as a serpent, and with a sting in him too. See, in few passes, our
20 alert Holles has ended the capering of Markham; has pierced and
spitted him through the lower abdominal regions, in very important
quarters of the body, ‘coming out at the small of the back!’ That,
apparently, will do for Markham; loose-tongued, loose-living Gervase
Markham lies low, having got enough. Visible to us there, in the
25 glades of ancient Sherwood, in the depths of long-vanished years! O
Dryasdust, was there not a Human Existence going on there too; of
hues other than the leaden-hazy? The forest-trees looked all leafy
blossomy, my erudite friend, and the Life-tree Igdrasil which fills this
Universe; and they had not yet rotted to brown peat! Torpid events
30 shall be simply damnable, and continually claim oblivion from all
souls; but the smallest fractions of events not torpid shall be welcome.
John Holles ‘with his man Acton,’ leaving Markham in this sated
condition, ride home to Haughton with questionable thoughts.

Nevertheless Markham did not die. He was carried home to
35 Worksop, pale, hopeless; pierced in important quarters of the body:
and the Earl of Shrewsbury ‘gathered a hundred retainers to appre-
hend Holles,’ and contrariwise the Earl of Sheffield came to Haughton
with fifty retainers to protect Holles:—and in the meanwhile Markham

began to shew symptoms of recovering, and the retainers dispersed themselves again. The Doctor declared that Markham would live; but that,—but that— Here, we will suppose, the Doctor tragi-comically shook his head, pleading the imperfections of language! Markham did live long after; breaking several of the commandments, but keeping one of them, it is charitably believed. For the rest, having ‘vowed never to eat supper nor to take the sacrament’ till he was revenged on Holles, he did not enjoy either of those consolations in this world.² Such doings went forward in Sherwood Forest and in our English Life-arena elsewhere; the trees being as yet all green and leafy.

NO. II.

CROYDON RACES.

Sardanapalus Hay and other Scotch favourites of King James have transiently glanced athwart us; their number is in excess not in defect. These hungry magnificent individuals, of whom Sardanapalus Hay is one and supreme Car another, are an eyesorrow to English subjects; and sour looks, bitter gibes, followed by duels within and without the verge, keep his Majesty’s pacificatory hand in use. How many duels has he soldered up, with difficulty: for the English are of a grim humour, when soured, and the Scotch too are fierce and proud; and it is a truculent swashbuckler age, ready with its stroke, in whatever else it may be wanting.

Scotch Maxwell, James Maxwell, Usher of the Black or some kind of Rod, did he not, in his insolent sardonic way of which he is capable, take a certain young tastefully dizened English gentleman by the bandstring, nay perhaps by the earring and its appendage, by some black ribbon in or about the ear; and so, by the ribbon, *lead* him out from the Royal Presence,—as if he had been a Nondescript in Natural History; some tame rabbit, of unusual size and aspect, with ribbon in its ear! Such touches of sardonic humour please us

² The above facts are given in Gervase Holles’s Manuscript *Memoirs of the Family of Holles* (in *Biographia Britannica*, § Holles); a Manuscript which some of our Dryasdust Societies ought to print.

little. The Four Inns of Court were in deadly emotion; and fashionable Young England in general demanded satisfaction with a growl that was tremendous enough. Sardonic Maxwell had to apologize in the completest manner,—and be more wary in future how he led out fashionable young gentlemen.

“*Beati pacifici*, Happy are the Peacemakers,” said his Majesty always. Good Majesty; shining examples of justice too he is prepared to afford; and has a snarl in him, which can occasionally bite. Of Crichton Lord Sanquhar from the pleasant valley of Nith,—how the Fencingmaster accidentally pricked an eye out of him, and he forgave it; how, much wrought upon afterwards, he was at last induced to have the Fencingmaster assassinated,—and to have himself executed in Palace Yard in consequence, and his two assassin servants hanged in Fleet Street, rough Border servingmen of all work, too unregardful of the gallows: of this unadmirable Crichton the whole world heard, not without pity, and can still hear.³

This of Croydon Races too, if we read old *Osborne* with reflexion, will become significant of many things. How the races were going on, a new delightful invention of that age; and Croydon Heath was populous with multitudes come to see: and between James Ramsay of the Dalhousie Ramsays, and Philip Herbert of the Montgomery Herberts, there rose sudden strife, sharp passages of wit,—ending in a sharp stroke of Ramsay’s switch over the crown and face of my Lord Montgomery, the great Earl of Pembroke’s brother, and himself capable to be Earl Pembroke! It is a fact of the most astonishing description: undeniable,—though the exact date and circumstances will now never be discovered in this world. It is all vague as cloud in old *Osborne*; lies off or on, within sight of Prince Henry’s Pageant; exact date of it never to be known. Yet is it well recognisable as distant ill-defined *land*, and no cloud; not dream but astonishing fact. Can the reader sufficiently admire at it! The Honourable Philip Herbert, of the best blood of England, here is he switched over the crown by an accursed Scotch Ramsay! We hear the swift-stinging descent of the ignominious horse-switch; we see the swift-blazing countenances of gods and men.

³ State Trials.

Instantaneous shriek, as was inevitable, rises near and far: The Scotch insolence, Scotch pride and hunger, Scotch damnability! And ‘a cripple man, with only the use of three fingers’, crooked of shape, hot of temper, ‘rode about the field with drawn dagger,’ urging in a shrill manner that we should prick every Scotch lown of them home to their own beggarly country again, or to the Devil,—off Croydon Heath at least. The name of this shrill individual, with dagger grasped between two fingers and a thumb, was ‘John Pinchback’ or Pinchbeck; and appears here in History, with something like golden lustre, for one moment and no more. “Let us breakfast on them at Croydon,” cries Pinchbeck, in a shrill inspired manner, “and sup on them at London!” The hour was really ominous. But Philip Herbert, beautiful young man, himself of infirm temper and given to strokes, stood firmly dissuasive: He is in the King’s service, how shall he answer it; he was himself to blame withal! And young Edward Sackville is with his young friend Bruce of Kinloss, firmly dissuasive; it is the Bruce whom we saw at the Chapel-door stepping out a new-made knight now here with Sackville,—dear friends these, not always to be friends! But for the present they are firmly dissuasive; all considerate persons are dissuasive. Pinchbeck’s dagger brandishes itself in vain.

Sits the wind so, O Mr Pinchbeck? Sydney’s Sister, Pembroke’s Mother: this is her son, and he stands a switch?—Yes, my shrill crook-backed friend, to avoid huge riot and calamity, he does so: and I see a massive nobleness in the man, which thou egregious Cock of Bantam wilt never in this world comprehend, but only crow over in thy shrill way. Ramsay and the Scots, and all persons, rode home unharmed that night; and my shrill friend gradually composed himself again. Philip Herbert may expect knighthoods, lordhoods, court-promotions: neither did his heroic mother ‘tear her hair,’ I think, to any great extent,—except in the imaginations of Osborne, Pinchbeck and such like.

This was the scene of Croydon Races; a fact, and significant of many facts, that hangs out for us like a cloud-island, and is not cloud.⁴

⁴ Francis Osborne’s *Traditional Memorials on the Reign of James the First* (Reprinted in Sir Walter Scott’s *History of the Court of James I.*, Edinburgh, 1811), pp. 220-227.

NO. III.

SIR THOMAS DUTTON AND SIR HATTON CHEEK.

5 His Majesty, as I perceive in spite of calumnies, was not a ‘coward;’
 see how he behaved in the Gowrie Conspiracy and elsewhere: but he
 knew the value, to all persons and to all interests of persons, of a
 whole skin; how unthrifty everywhere is any solution of continuity, if
 it can be avoided! He struggled to preside pacifically over an age of
 10 some ferocity much given to wrangling. Peace here, if possible; skins
 were not made for mere slitting and slashing! You that are for war,
 cannot you go abroad, and fight the Papist Spaniards? Over in the
 Netherlands there is always fighting enough. You that are of ruffling
 humour, gather your truculent ruffians together; make yourselves
 15 Colonels over them; go to the Netherlands, and fight your bellyful!

Which accordingly many do, earning deathless war-laurels for the
 moment; and have done and will continue doing, in those genera-
 tions. Our gallant Veres, Earl of Oxford and the others, it has long
 been their way; gallant Cecil, to be called Earl of Wimbledon; gallant
 20 Sir John Burroughs, gallant Sir Hatton Cheek,—it is still their way.
 Deathless military renowns are gathered there in this manner; death-
 less for the moment. Did not Ben Jonson, in his young hard days,
 bear arms very manfully as a private soldado there? Ben, who now
 writes learned Plays and Court-masks as Poet Laureate, served man-
 25 fully with pike and sword there, for his groat a day with rations. And
 once when a Spanish soldier came strutting forward between the
 lines, flourishing his weapon, and defying all persons in general,—
 Ben stept forth, as I hear;⁵ fenced that braggart Spaniard, since no
 other would do it; and ended by soon slitting him in two, and so
 30 silencing him! Ben’s war-tuck, to judge by the flourish of his pen,
 must have had a very dangerous stroke in it.

‘Swashbuckler age,’ we said; but the expression was incorrect,
 except as a figure. Bucklers went out, fifty years ago, ‘about the
 35 twentieth of Queen Elizabeth;’ men do not now swash with them, or

⁵ *Life of Ben Jonson.*

fight in that way. Iron armour has mostly gone out, except in mere Pictures of soldiers: King James said, It was an excellent invention; you could get no harm in it, and neither could you do any. Bucklers, either for horse or foot, are quite gone. Yet old Mr. Howe, good chronicler, can recollect when every gentleman had his buckler,—and at length every serving man and City dandy. Smithfield,—still a waste field, full of puddles in wet weather,—was in those days full of buckler duels, every Sunday and holiday in the dry season; and was called Ruffian's Rig, or some such name. 5

A man, in those days, bought his buckler, of gilt leather and wood, at the haberdasher's; 'hung it over his back, by a strap fastened to the pommel of his sword in front.' Elegant men shewed what taste, or sense of poetic beauty, was in them, by the fashion of their buckler. With Spanish beaver, with starched ruff and elegant Spanish cloak, with elegant buckler hanging at his back, a man, if his moustachios and boots were in good order, stopt forth with some satisfaction. Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard; a decidedly truculent-looking figure. Jostle him in the strait thoroughfares, accidentally splash his boot as you pass,—by Heaven, the buckler gets upon his arm, the sword flashes in his fist, with oaths enough; and, you too being ready, there is a noise! Clink, clank, death and fury; all persons gathering round, and new quarrels springing from this one! And Dogberry comes up with the Town-guard? And the shopkeepers hastily close their shops? Nay it is hardly necessary, says Mr. Howe. These buckler fights amount only to noise, for most part; the jingle of iron against tin and painted leather. Ruffling swashers strutting along, with big oaths and whiskers, delight to pick a quarrel; but the rule is, you do not thrust, you do not strike below the waist; and it was oftenest a dry duel,—mere noise, as of working tinsmiths, with profane swearing! Empty vapouring bullybrooks and braggarts, they encumber the thoroughfares mainly. Dogberry and Verges ought to apprehend them. I have seen, in Smithfield on a dry holiday, 'thirty of them on a side,' fighting and hammering as if for life;—and was not at the pains to look at them, the blockheads; their noise as the mere beating of old kettles to me!⁶ 10 15 20 25 30 35

The truth is, servingmen themselves and city apprentices had got bucklers; and the duels, no death following, ceased to be sublime.

⁶ Stow's Chronicle, and Howe's Continuation, 1024, &c.

About fifty years ago, serious men took to fighting with rapiers; and the buckler fell away. Holles in Sherwood, as we saw, fought with rapier; and he soon spoiled Markham. Rapier and dagger, specially; that is a more silent duel, but a terribly serious one! Perhaps the
 5 reader will like to take a view of one such serious duel in those days; and therewith close this desultory chapter.

It was at the Siege of Juliers, in the Netherlands wars, of the year 1610;⁷ we give the date, for wars are perpetual, or nearly so, in the
 10 Netherlands. At one of the storm-parties of the Siege of Juliers, the gallant Sir Hatton Cheek, above alluded to, a superior Officer of the English Force which fights there under my Lord Cecil, that shall be Wimbledon; the gallant Sir Hatton, I say, being of hot temper, superior officer, and the service a storm-party on some bastion or demilune,
 15 speaks sharp word of command to Sir Thomas Dutton, the officer under him, who also is probably of hot temper in this hot moment. Sharp word of command to Dutton; and the movement not proceeding rightly, sharp word of rebuke. To which Dutton, with kindled voice, answers something sharp; is answered still more sharply, with
 20 voice high-flaming;—whereat Dutton suddenly holds in; says merely, “He is under military duty here, but perhaps will not always be so;” and rushing forward, does his order silently, the best he can. His order done, Dutton straightway lays down his commission; packs up, that night, and returns to England.

25 Sir Hatton Cheek prosecutes his work at the siege of Juliers; gallantly assists at the taking of Juliers, triumphant over all the bastions and half-moons there; but hears withal that Dutton is at home in England, defaming him as a choleric tyrant and so forth. Dreadful news, which brings some biliary attack on the gallant man, and reduces
 30 him to a bed of sickness. Hardly recovered, he despatches message

⁷ Siege began in the latter end of July 1610; ended victoriously, 4th September following; principal assaults were, 10th August and 14th August; in one of which this affair of ours must have taken rise. Siege commanded by Christian of Anhalt, a famed Protestant Captain of those times. Henri IV. of France was assassinated while setting-out for this siege; Prince Maurice of Nassau was there; ‘Dutch troops, French, English and German’ (Brandenburgers and Pfalz-Neuburgers chiefly, *versus* Kaiser Rodolf II. and his unjust seizure of the Town) ‘fought with the greatest unity.’ Prelude to the Thirty-Years War, and one of the principal sources of it, this Controversy about Juliers. (Carl Friedrich Pauli: *Allgemeine Preussische Staats-Geschichte*, 4to, Halle, 1762, iii. 502-527.)
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to Dutton, That he will request to have the pleasure of his company, with arms and seconds ready, on some neutral ground,—Calais sands for instance,—at an early day, if convenient. Convenient; yes, as dinner to the hungry! answers Dutton; and time, place and circumstances are readily enough agreed upon. And so, on Calais sands, in a winter morning of the year 1610, this is what we see,—most authentically through the lapse of dim Time. Two Gentlemen, stript to the shirt and waistband; in the two hands of each a rapier and dagger clutched; their looks sufficiently serious! The seconds, having stript, equipt, and fairly overhauled and certified them, are just about retiring from the measured fate-circle,—not without indignation that *they* are forbidden to fight. Two Gentlemen in this alarming posture; of whom the Universe knows, has known and will know nothing, except that they were of choleric humour, and assisted in the Netherlands wars! They are evidently English human creatures, in the height of silent fury, and measured circuit of fate;—whom we here audibly name once more, Sir Hatton Cheek, Sir Thomas Dutton, knights both, soldadoes both. Ill-fated English human creatures, what horrible confusion of the Pit is this?

Dutton, though in suppressed rage, the seconds about to withdraw, will explain some things if a word were granted. “No words,” says the other; “stand on your guard!” brandishing his rapier, grasping harder his dagger. Dutton, now silent too, is on his guard. Good Heavens: after some brief flourishing and flashing,—the gleam of the swift clear steel playing madly in one’s eyes,—they at the first pass plunge home on one another; home with beak and claws; home to the very heart! Cheek’s rapier is through Dutton’s throat from before, and his dagger is through it from behind,—the windpipe miraculously missed; and in the same instant Dutton’s rapier is through Cheek’s body from before, his dagger through his back from behind,—lungs and life *not* missed: and the seconds have to advance, ‘pull out the four bloody weapons,’ disengage that hell-embrace of theirs. This is serious enough! Cheek reels, his Life fast flowing; but still rushes rabid on Dutton, who merely parries, skips; till Cheek reels down, dead in his rage. ‘He had a bloody burial there that morning,’ says my ancient friend.⁸ He will assist no more in the Netherlands or other wars.

⁸ Wilson (in Kennet), ii. 684.

Such scene does History disclose, as in blazing
hellfire, on Calais sands in the raw winter morning; then drops the
blanket of centuries, of everlasting Night, over it, and passes on else-
whither. Gallant Sir Hatton Cheek lies buried there, and Cecil of
5 Wimbledon, son of Burleigh, will have to seek another superior of-
ficer. What became of the living Dutton afterwards, I have never to
this moment had the least hint.