

## THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER AT OXFORD.



OWN and Gown rows, once looked upon as time-honoured institutions which might in nowise be neglected, are at Oxford fast becoming things of the past—mere traditions preserved in the pages of a few chroniclers, and recounted year by year as the famous day comes round.

Town has apparently discovered that it possesses a surer and more satisfactory method of revenging itself upon Gown through the medium of business transactions; while it would seem that Gown has at length come to the conclusion that to receive a black eye at the hand of a sturdy labourer, or a broken nose from a missile cast by an errand-boy, is not, after all, the most romantic method of covering oneself with glory. Light has also broken in upon the authorities. They nowadays recognise that, for the gentlemen placed under their care with a view to being trained in the flowery paths of learning, and who are therefore supposed to spend their evenings in "turning the page of wisdom o'er"—for these to engage in pugilistic encounters with roughs of the lowest order is not a state of things that should exist.

In fine, common sense appears to be gaining a victory, and one more custom more honoured in the breach than the observance is passing away.

But it is not dead yet. Timorous gownsmen have still some cause to avoid being out alone on the evening of the fateful Fifth. Bands of roughs, composed for the most part of youths of immature years, gather here and there in secluded spots, and occasionally venture to set upon any solitary undergraduate who may pass that way. The result of this is not always harmless. It is not so very long ago since a commoner of St. John's received serious injuries from being struck on the temple by a stone in one of these encounters.

By a portion of the undergraduate element the decay of "the good old custom" is lamented with touching earnestness. Year by year, when the month comes round, the Fifth, with its old method of celebration, becomes the topic of conversation over dinner in hall. The stories of doughty deeds are told again, and the prowess of college heroes are lauded to the skies as of old. Fired by these accounts, the freshmen join in lamenting the present strait-laced times, and long for an opportunity of distinguishing themselves in some hard-fought contest. In imagination they see themselves one of a noble band encountering hostile forces of vastly superior numbers. They mentally pass through a struggle of doubtful issue, perform prodigies of valour, and at length return with honourable wounds to recount their exploits to the less daring.

But inasmuch as general engagements of the old order are now extinct, the adventurous gownsmen

anxious to give evidence of the spirit within him must seek other means of doing so.

Accordingly, he undertakes to sally forth alone, to parade the town, thread certain by-streets, and comport himself like a valiant Oxonian in any emergency that may arise.

There is a story told of a somewhat boastful freshman who attempted to earn distinction in this manner. His scout had for an assistant a boy, to whom this freshman had made himself peculiarly obnoxious, probably by objecting to having his beer consumed on the stairs and his marmalade pots explored by unclean fingers. Upon the evening of the Fifth the boy overheard the object of his hatred announcing to a select audience his intention of setting out at a certain hour in search of adventures. Upon this, he left the college at the first opportunity, and speedily collected together a considerable band of juveniles. With these, all duly armed, he prepared in the path of the offending one a cunning ambush, and then bided his time. True to the declaration, the unsuspecting freshman came upon the scene, and found himself in the midst of foes. Ruthlessly assailed on all sides, he did not stay to face them, but at once turned and fled, vigorously pursued by the enemy. Only a short distance had to be traversed, and he was soon safe within the shelter of the college walls. Thereupon he repaired to the rooms of a friend, and detailed to an excited audience the manner in which he had been assailed by a horde of roughs, had for a time valiantly resisted them, and finally effected an orderly retreat, pursued by the relentless enemy.

But although the old animosity between Town and Gown is fast dying out, a certain section of the undergraduates refuse to allow the Fifth of November to pass without some sign of recognition. Any satisfactory reason for their conduct is not readily found. Perhaps it is most charitable to suppose that on that day a temporary fit of insanity in a mild form comes over the rioters.

At this moment the proceedings of a Fifth of November not so very long past come vividly before my mind.

A body of adventurous malcontents had resolved that the day, or rather the night, should be marked by some stirring deed. They laid their heads together, and concerted a plan of action. In accordance with this, each conspirator bound himself to bring to the centre of the quad at a given hour whatever inflammable materials he could lay hands on.

Eleven o'clock struck, and all was quiet, save for such noises as may be always heard in college during the early hours of the night.

But presently, from the staircases on all sides, silent figures emerged. Each bore an armful of some material, and all sought the centre of the quad. In a short time a considerable crowd had gathered. Conversation was carried on in low tones, and measures were being concerted for bringing from the

Don's garden a statue for cremation, when the porter appeared on the scene.

"The Dean requests that all gentlemen will retire to their rooms."

Upon this a brief consultation ensued, and then the conspirators, carrying with them their burdens, retired in a peacefully obedient way that might have aroused suspicion.

"The mighty Tom" had tolled the midnight hour. The porter had gone his rounds, and put out the gas-lights, and all was quiet, save for an occasional laugh or shout from some room where revelry was still going on.

But before the first quarter sounded from St. Mary's solitary figures began as before to issue stealthily from each doorway, and to draw silently together in the centre of the quad. One after another came forth and joined the fast-increasing group, all carrying burdens of some description. The faint rays of the moon struggling through clouds soon disclosed the conspirators in the act of raising a kind of pyre. Small packing-cases, hampers, fagots, and other materials were being piled together in a most careful manner. Around the base the edges of newspapers and ends of straw peeped out.

Presently four of the stoutest workers departed to procure the before-mentioned statue of some college dignitary renowned in years gone by. Time, the weather, and other agencies had operated so effectually upon this, that facetious young gentlemen were in the habit of pointing it out to strangers as a curious example of ancient Greek art brought from the neighbourhood of Corinth.

With this upon their shoulders, the messengers were soon descried returning through the darkness. Aloft upon the pile they place the unoffending statue, which, with its uplifted right hand, appeared as though reproving them for their conduct. Then a demand was made for a cap and gown, and in search of these a conspirator was despatched. He darted into one of the doorways, entered a room (N.B.—It was not his own) and soon returned with the required articles. These were duly arranged upon the figure, and all was then ready.

The ringleader was kneeling, and in the act of igniting the pile, when a cry was raised.

"The Dean!" shouted one, at the same time taking to his heels with remarkable celerity.

"The Dean!" cried others, emulating his example.

Yes; there was the Dean, accompanied by the porter, advancing with rapid strides towards the scene of action.

The flight became universal. But the Dean was neither swift in pursuit nor keen of vision. He only saw retreating figures, coat-tails vanishing around corners, and lights being put out; heard the slamming of "oaks," and found himself and the porter masters of the field.

One capture alone he made. An unlucky individual, guiltless of participation in the affair, came down from his rooms to see what was going on. Upon him the irate Dean pounced, delivered an extempore lecture upon the folly of such actions, and finally, notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, "gated" him for a week on the nominal charge of being out of his rooms after midnight. Somewhat mollified by this capture, the Dean retired, leaving the porter to remove the pile and superincumbent effigy.

When this had been done, some of the evil-doers again came forth, for in flight they had rushed into the nearest rooms, without regard to ownership. The spirit of mischief was not yet dead within them, and they worked off what yet remained of the rabies in various ways. One party dragged a garden-roller to the top of a staircase on which many reading-men had rooms, and set it rolling down; others repaired to the rooms of a man who had refused to join in their deeds, and screwed up his "oak," or outer door. By these means he was effectually confined to his room until his scout could borrow a screw-driver the next morning and set him at liberty.

At length even amusements of this nature palled, and tired out by their exertions, the heroic perpetrators of these daring deeds retired to the privacy of their own apartments, and there found the repose so much needed for their weary frames.

It must be confessed that conduct such as this is very foolish, and is what might be expected from school-boys rather than from members of the University. But it is a mistake to regard those who still retain a taste for such exploits as anything more than school-boys. Of a surety the credit of our Universities would not suffer were this taste for childish pursuits to become a thing of the past. Certain events of recent date do not make us sanguine as to an early change of feeling; but still, on comparing present with past, a gradual reformation may be discerned. Perhaps the next generation may come to look upon the screwing up of an obnoxious "Don" as a relic of barbarism happily extinct, and upon all ungentlemanly actions in general as naturally unbecoming members of a great University.

A. R. BUCKLAND, B.A.

