

## OUR "VARNISHED" ANCESTORS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MY WIFE'S BRIC-A-BRAC," ETC., ETC.

I CAME, I am proud to say, of honest New England ancestors. My forefathers were among the first to flee from persecution abroad, though they did not arrive in the Mayflower exactly, and consequently did not bring over any of those impossible tea-pots, and stiff-backed chairs, with which that craft seems to have been exclusively freighted. The Joneses were always frugal, honest, and God-fearing; ready to shed their blood, if need were, for their country, or their faith. They fought in King Philip's war, at Louisburg, and in the struggle for Independence. I never hear the commonest fifer playing "Yankee Doodle," that my blood does not beat the quicker; for I remember it was to that tune, my great-grandfather, Colonel Zebediah Jones, mustered his men, with their old, flint muskets, and marched up to Bunker Hill.

I have a sister-in-law, however, who thinks differently. To be descended from honest "forbears," who never watered stock, issued false certificates, or figured in divorce cases, or other scandalous ones, is not sufficient for her. Perhaps this is because she is so frightfully rich. She was an heiress, and heiresses, somehow, consider themselves superior to the "rest of mankind." At any rate, Sophronia, for that is her romantic name, has conceived the notion that the Joneses are descended from one Jones ap Jones, who lived in Wales, about A. D. 910, and distinguished himself, like the Bashi-Bazouk that he was, by robbing unprotected travellers, and slitting the throats of people he did not happen to like.

One morning, making a call on Sophronia, I found her poring over a big, bulky volume, bound in red, which I discovered, afterwards, to be "Burke's Peerage," or, as the wits irreverently call it, "The Bible of The British Snob." My sister-in-law looked up, full of animation, as I came in.

"It's all here," she said. "I always felt that the Joneses were something above the common."

"What is all here?" I answered, a little puzzled as to her meaning, but of course glad to hear that I, as one of the Joneses, was "something above the common."

"That we have real aristocratic blood in our veins." For, you see, she regarded her marriage as making her a Jones, not only in name,

but in lineage, also. "That we came from one of the most ancient families in Wales."

"Really! And not from Adam? From something better, of course."

"You are enough to provoke a saint," cried Sophronia. "If I was Jemima Jane—"

She stopped, out of breath; and I shall never know, alas! what dreadful thing, or things, she would have done to me, if she had been my wife.

"Never mind," I said, laughing, "about Jemima Jane; 'sufficient unto the day, is the evil thereof;' but tell me about this happy discovery."

"As our name is Jones, and we came from Wales, we must belong to the Joneses there," she began.

"All Joneses come from Wales, as all macaroni comes from Italy. Worthy of Chillingworth."

"And if from the Joneses, then from the Ap Joneses, also. We must be cousins, you see, to Sir James Ap Jones."

I could hardly restrain a smile. But I answered gravely: "my dear Sophy, what difference does it make, where we came from? Let us be content with our honest, New England blood, and make no foolish pretension to, what you call, aristocracy."

"Don't talk nonsense!"

"But it is not nonsense. Emerson, in one of his essays, well remarks, that we Americans ignore, too generally, what is really noble in our character, and worship the worn-out political and social fetishes of Europe—"

"Emerson!" interrupted Sophy, with ineffable contempt. "What does *he* know about society? He is one of those 'literary fellows,' isn't he?"

Literature is not my sister-in-law's strong point. She can tell a Worth, or Pingat, dress, in a moment; and a Virot bonnet; but I do not believe she ever read a play of Shakespeare through, and she probably knows no Longfellow but the great racer, of whom she has heard club men talk. Her idea of a "literary fellow," is the old Grubb street one, a sloven, who sleeps in a garret, and haunts taverns to borrow money for his dinner.

I heard no more of "our ancestor," old Ap Jones, for some weeks. But one day, Jemima showed me a daintily perfumed envelope, with a



glaring coat of arms, all blue and gold, stamped upon it.

"That's Sophy's," she said, laughing, "arms of the Ap Joneses. Older than the Conquest, she says."

"Older than fiddlesticks! Don't the goose know that coat-armor didn't come into use till a century and more after the Conquest?"

"Oh! it's no 'good,' as she would say, to tell her that. I hinted something like it, but she cut me short, saying that the Ap Joneses had coats-of-arms centuries before anybody else."

"Poor Jim!" I answered; Jim was the brother who had married Sophy. "What a snob people must think him."

"As for that," said Jemima, philosophically, "she's no worse than others. Of the hundreds, here, in New York, who sport their coat-of-arms, how many, I wonder, are entitled to display them?"

"If she must make a fool of Jim, by setting up a coat-of-arms," I cried, half angrily, "why didn't she have it, at once, a toad under a harrow, on a field of green? That would, at least, have been appropriate."

That following summer, Jemima and I went to Europe. Sophronia and her husband were to be of the party, but Jim was detained, by business, at the last moment. So Sophy sailed alone with us.

From the very first, my sister-in-law gave out that she wished to see Wales particularly. So, one day, we found ourselves in a miserable inn, in a dirty village called Llanarthgolly.

As we rose from one of the worst dinners I had ever eaten, I turned to Sophy, and said, "Now, perhaps you can tell us, my dear sister, what brings us here? There really seems to be nothing to look at, not even an old, tumble-down church. The best we could get to eat has been bacon and eggs—"

"Why," retorted Sophy, affecting surprise, "didn't you know? It's here, or close by, that our cousin, Sir James ap Jones, the baronet, lives."

"Our cousin!"

"Well, then, our relative. And I—I, at least, am anxious to see our ancestral halls."

"Oh!" I answered; and there the matter dropped, at least till the morning.

But in the morning, nothing would do but that I should hire a "fly," as it was called there—a "cab," as we would say in America—and drive out to Llanarthgolly Hall, some five miles distant. We drew up at a rickety lodge, from which an old woman, in a man's hat, emerged.

I stated our object, civilly, and asked if we

might drive through the gates. We were told, in reply, that we could not; if we wished to see the house, we must alight and walk. "How far was it?" I ventured to inquire. About three-quarters of a mile, was the answer. I looked at the ladies, doubtfully; but Sophronia said she didn't mind the walk a bit, indeed, she would rather prefer it; my wife nodded a pitying assent: so we got out of our "fly," and entered the grounds.

As we trudged up the avenue on foot, we passed an old yellow chariot, that had evidently been built when George the Fourth was king, if not earlier. Two persons were inside of it. One was a fat, blowsy woman, apparently about fifty years old, in whose *outré* dress all the colors of the rainbow were conglomerated. The sides of her mouth were drawn down, and her nose cocked up in the air, with that self-complacent expression with which the British matron, who keeps a carriage, looks down on anybody on foot. She regarded us, now, in this manner, evidently convinced that we had never ridden in a coach, ourselves, or beheld such an overpowering equipage as her old, canary-colored chariot. Her companion was a tall, thin, shrivelled man, of about sixty, with an almost idiotically small head, and a face whose half-cruel look suggested a wrinkled old rat. He gave the ladies a prolonged stare, that, in America, would have been considered impertinent, holding his glass close to his eye, and leaning quite out of the carriage.

The Hall lay in a hollow, that was evidently insufficiently drained. It was even more ramshackle and tottering than the chariot. When the housekeeper, a sour-visaged virgin of fifty, or thereabouts, who came forward to conduct us through the rooms, told us that the mansion was three hundred years old, I quite believed her; for, even in the broad day-light, I heard the rats scurrying behind the wainscoting; and the show apartments, which apparently were never opened, except when strangers were being paraded through them, smelt as musty as churchyard vaults. "Ugh!" I said to myself. "What a hole! I shouldn't wonder, if they have fever and ague here all the year round, and typhus monthly, like butcher's and baker's bills."

Sir James Ap Jones, it was plain to be seen, was not rich. The signs of a straitened income were everywhere. Outside, the grounds were running to weeds; inside, all things were going to decay. Mildew reigned lord paramount. I shivered, as I was led from one low, dark room to another, the brightest of them dusky, even in that sunny July morning.

"And this is really the chamber," said Sophronia, gushingly, to the housekeeper, "in



which Queen Elizabeth slept? Dear me, to think of it. Don't it vivify the past to you, Jemima?"

Or, "Is this actually the bed where William of Orange lay? But why did they call him William of Orange, when he was a Dutchman? That is his portrait, you tell me. Wonderful!"

After awhile, we reached the picture gallery, and here my sister-in-law's transports rose to a climax; for the gallery was filled with likenesses of defunct Joneses, male and female. The housekeeper told off each portrait, as an auctioneer tells off his catalogue. She had learned the thing by rote, and went over it, in her sing-song way, just as she had gone over it for scores of others, before.

"Portrait of Sir James Ap Jones, knight, by an unknown artist," her grammar was always at sixes and sevens. "Painted just before he marched to Bosworth field, where he fell, fighting for his royal master, Henry the Seventh. Mark the very striking lines of the countenance."

Very striking, indeed, they were! The portrait was so ghastly, it looked as if Sir James had been buried for a week, dug up, and then made to sit for his picture.

"Portrait of his grandson, James Ap Jones, gentleman of the bedchamber to Henry the Eighth. By Holbein. Observe the grace and majesty of the figure."

Now I know something about Holbeins. I think I can tell a Holbein whenever I see one. In spite of the stiffness, which Holbein has, in common with all the German artists of that day, there is something about a Holbein different from the common. And if that scare-crow portrait was a Holbein. Well—!

"Portrait of his son, also knighted, like his great-grandfather. Knighted by Queen Elizabeth for bringing her home, from the Continent, a dozen of knit silk hose. By Zucchero."

Or, again, "Portrait of his next heir, his nephew; he having," here her grammar again got mixed, "died childless. Member of Parliament."

So it went on. There were ladies in stiff farthingales, ladies in Henrietta Marie costume, ladies *a la Lely*, ladies in vast hoops of the last century. Side by side with them were their husbands or sons, in velvet dress, in full-bottomed wigs, in vast coats and waistcoats with buttons even more vast. These pictures, according to this yellow and wrinkled Sybil, were all by the great masters of their day, Vandyke, Lely, Kneller, Hogarth, Gainsborough, Sir Joshua. Two or three of them were, perhaps. But the Vandyke was the most transparent fraud, and so were the Sir Joshuas and the Gainsborough. One and all

the faces represented were hideous. There was not a gentleman-like man among them, or a pretty woman. The men were all either brutal-looking, or half-idiotic. The women had invariably the same silly simper, and only differed in being, this one scraggy, and that one fat. But Sophronia raved to the housekeeper, at every picture; of its high-bred look, if that of the husband, of its beauty, if that of the wife. To her they were Joneses, and that was enough. Jemima, with that thorough-bred politeness, which always distinguishes her, listened and sympathized, dear, good soul—or pretended to sympathize.

But I grew tired, at last, and thinking one martyr in the party was enough, walked off to a window. The prospect of the neglected grounds outside was not inviting, but it was lovelier than this chamber of horrors within. Suddenly, I heard the housekeeper's shrill tones, again, speaking quite close to my ear.

"Portrait of the first baronet, the father of the present one, made a baronet by Mr. Pitt, for his distinguished services, at the time of the wicked French revolution."

"Ah, ha!" I said to myself. "A vile, old borough-monger. Bought his baronetcy by some base job, doubtless, as so many did at that time." And I did not even turn my head.

The tour of the house was finally completed. In justice to the housekeeper, I must say that she hurried us through the rooms, as rapidly as was consistent with the rehearsal of her stereotyped story. Suddenly, she flung open a side door, and courtesied a dismissal. I gave her the invariable half-crown, and then she made another courtesy, and slammed the door in our faces.

I looked blankly at Jemima Jane and my sister-in-law, for it had begun to rain, and none of us had umbrellas. I turned to ring the bell, thinking I might borrow; but there was no bell to ring. Neither was there any knocker. Evidently the door was one where people were summarily ejected, after being fleeced of their half-crown, not one where people were ever let in.

The ladies, fortunately, had parasols. But in spite of this, they were pretty thoroughly drenched, before we reached the lodge gates. As for me—but that doesn't matter—we men are always expected to be the martyrs.

Half way down the avenue, we met the yellow chariot, returning; and two faces looked out on us, as before; the woman, superciliously regarding us over the top of her nose, the man eyeing us like a hungry rat. Both seemed to enjoy our drenching hugely.

When we were safely housed at the inn, and Jemima Jane and Sophronia were putting on dry



garments, I sought out our landlord, and endeavored to extract some information about "our cousins," as my wife insisted on calling the Ap Joneses.

"Oh, yes! Sir Jones is poor enough," said the man, who proved to be a sort of radical, and had evidently read and thought a good deal, especially for one in his station. "Has run through everything he could. His son, Sir Launcelot, that will be, is in a marching regiment, and will have nothing but the title and the old hulk of a house. Yes, he'll have, in addition, a lot of dingy portraits, that are heir-looms, and can't be sold, and wouldn't fetch anything if they could. Sham Holbeins and Vandykes, every one of them." And he laughed, grimly.

I ventured to express my surprise at the freedom with which he spoke. I had always been told, I mildly suggested, that the retainers of great families were devoted to them.

"I am no retainer," was the bluff reply. "I own this little bit of freehold, and they can't get rid of me, though they'd like to, as I well know, for I speak my mind pretty freely. My father bought the house of the baronet, when he first began to get hard up, a matter of thirty years ago. And the old dog has been gittin' harder up ever since," he added, with another grim laugh, as he stopped to fill his pipe.

"Yes," he continued, after this process had been finished, "people, that have to live on great families, are naturally at their beck and call, as you say. But I hold, that a man's a man. A handle to his name don't make him any better; in fact, it generally makes him worse. Now take these Joneses. Call them great? Why, bless me! they've been, from father to son, as far back as anyone can remember, the meanest dogs about. Everyone a spendthrift, and some of 'em black-legs; horse-racing, dicing, drinking, all that's bad. Always trying to restore their fortunes, too, by marrying heiresses. Ha! ha! That's why you see such a precious lot of silly women in their rickety old portrait gallery; for no girl with brains would marry into such a set. If Old England, God bless her! had to depend on such, she'd soon go to the bottom. If it wasn't for the new men, she'd be ruined. That," with a snap of the fingers, "for the aristocracy. Old families, indeed! But, thank God, their waste and folly are impoverishing them pretty fast; their lands are passing into the hands of fresh and more vigorous blood. Would you believe it, sir, that half of the property, hereabout, has changed owners, in my life-time, and most of the other half would have gone, too, if it hadn't been entailed?"

"You ought to live in America," I said, as I rose; for I saw the "fly" coming up, that was to take us to the railway, and I heard Jemima Jane's step descending the staircase. "You talk so well, you'd soon get into Congress."

He was immensely gratified at this; he took it for a compliment, poor fellow; and so we parted, the best friends in the world.

My sister-in-law, after that walk in the rain, did not seem to be so enthusiastic about her "cousins." I began to hope, in fact, that she was cured. But I was destined to be undeceived.

We had been home about a month, when, one day, making a morning call on her, I found the hall littered up with something like a dozen pictures, that had just been unpacked; the boxes and straw still lying about. On looking at the pictures, I saw they were portraits, each in a bran-new gilt frame, and each resplendent in new paint, and newer varnish.

"What does all this mean, John?" I said, addressing the man-servant, who had just placed the last portrait against the wall.

But at that moment, my sister-in-law came into the hall, from the library.

"Don't you recognize them?" she asked, with an innocent air. "They are the portraits of our ancestors—from Llanarthgolly, you remember."

"Ah, yes! Ahem! I see," I stammered. "But how did you come by them? They can't be the originals of course. Rather highly varnished, too, don't you think, eh?"

"Yes, beautifully framed and varnished," she replied, with a triumphant air. "How did I come by them? Well, that day at Llanarthgolly, while you were looking out of the window, I saw a pile of photographs, at the other end of the room; and the housekeeper told me they were views of the house, and copies of the portraits, and that, sometimes, when people seemed very much interested, as I was, they were sold, as a great favor. So, as they were small, *carte de visite* size, mostly, and could be put into my pocket, I bought quite a number. When we went up to London, I discovered an artist, who was said to know the styles of all the old masters, and got him to copy them, full size. I did not tell Jemima even, for I wanted to surprise you. I think the man did wonders, don't you? That Zucchero is admirable, and so is the Holbein;" Sophy had picked up a smattering of art, when abroad, "but the gem is the portrait, by an unknown artist, of the time of Richard the Third. I intended them for James; it is his birth-day, you know; and I've been in agonies, for a week past, lest I shouldn't get them through the custom-house in time."



I went home, and told Jemima Jane, adding: "She will hang the portraits up in the dining-room, where poor Jim will see them everyday, and she will tell everybody they are the portraits of our ancestors—oh! Lord."

My prophecy proved correct. All this happened several years ago, but the portraits still hang in Sophy's dining-room. The other day, we dined there with young Lord Donjon, fifth son of the Duke of Plantaganet, of one of the old historic houses of England, as everybody knows. My sister-in-law is never so happy as when she can secure a title at her table, and Lord Donjon was the very pink and quintessence of aristocracy, and looked down with contempt on all modern peerages.

During the meal, Sophy turned to her guest, and waving her hand to the portraits on the wall, said:

"We are not all plebians, my lord, in this country; some of us have a long line of illustrious ancestors to show."

My lord screwed his glass into his right eye, took a deliberate survey of the portraits, let the glass drop, and then answered, languidly; for he always talked as if talking was a bore:

"Dessay."

"We think, also," continued Sophy, smiling on him, with her sweetest smile, "that the English aristocracy is the only real one, after all. The rest are shams."

"Dessay."

"High-hearted, long-descended, noble in every sense."

"Now, do you know, do you know, that you are really too kind?" said Lord Donjon, bowing to her.

"Too kind, my lord?"

"We are not all, you know, noble in every

sense, you know," with a little chuckle. "Just before I came away, there was a terrible scandal."

"A terrible scandal!"

"Yes. Baronet arrested, and locked up in jail. Obtained money under false pretences, you know. One of Pitt's pinch-beck baronetcies. Father had lived somewhere down in Wales. Estate mortgaged up to hub. When the son succeeded, you know, nothing left. Extravagant dog, in spite of it; at last, got to be a tout for gamblers. Now how much do you think he came to grief for, at last?"

My lord, as he drawled out these words, looked around the table, quite animated for him, eyeing each of us in succession through his glass, stuck in his right eye.

"I'm sure I can't tell," said Sophy, speaking with an effort, and looking as if she would sink through the floor; for, doubtless, she divined, as the rest did, who the culprit was. "Ten thousand pounds, perhaps."

"Dessay," with a slight laugh, and a bow, all round, to the company, "it would have been that, if he'd been a New Yorker. It was three sovereigns. Went to jail for three sovereigns," with the same low chuckle. "But then it was only one of Pitt's pinch-beck baronetcies, you know. Sir Lanelet Ap Jones—fine name for a swindler—son of Sir James Ap Jones."

I do not think that, then, or ever after, my lord remembered that the name of his hostess was Jones; he only knew her as "somebody I dined with, you know." He was too obtuse, even, to see the sensation he created, but went on eating his little bit of game, chuckling to himself, and repeating, unconsciously: "one of Pitt's pinch-beck baronetcies, you know."

We have not dined at Sophy's since. But there still hang OUR "VARNISHED" ANCESTORS.

## STANDING IN THE SNOW.

BY MAUDE MOORE.

TARRY awhile, my lady!

'Tis a cold, cold winter's night.  
Look abroad on the starry sky,  
And the dead earth, robed in white.

Go back to the fire, my lady!  
And shutters and curtains close.  
Sit 'neath the glare of your brilliant,  
Fresh as the heart of a rose!

Think of the poor, my lady!  
The beggars that pass your gate.  
See where they stand, with outstretched hand,  
Stand at your door, and wait.

Though you may care, my lady,  
I hope you may never know

How the cold chills to the heart of those  
Who stand with their feet in the snow.

Humanity poor, my lady,  
Made in the image of God!  
Whether they sleep in downy beds,  
Or on the snow-covered sod.

Do not forget, my lady,  
Riches may take to them wings!  
But a free heart, or a generous hand,  
Much joy to the giver brings.

Sit by the fire, my lady!  
And bask in its ruddy glow!  
But do not forget the many that wait,  
And shivering stand in the snow!