

of fate," "the talisman of Empire." It would fill a bulky volume were the wanderings of the Koh-i-Noor, "the mountain of light," to be told, and romance itself would seem dulled by the glittering terrors of its changeful story.

Much, of course, has been written about this marvellous diamond, but none of the writers, tempted to the bright theme by the Coronation, seem to have known how the penultimate owner of this precious stone became possessed of it or how he disposed of it. This was Runjeet Singh, the one-eyed "Lion of the Punjab," the extraordinary chief who conquered Cashmere in order to adorn his zenana with certain beautiful girls of that country, who fought a bloody campaign to possess himself of the incomparable horse Leila, and who intrigued with neighbouring chiefs till he entrapped as his guest the ex-Ameer of Afghanistan in order to rob him of the Koh-i-Noor.

Poor Shah Sooja was an exile, and allured by Runjeet Singh put himself in his power. His host promptly demanded the diamond. Shah Sooja refused to give it up, so Runjeet proceeded to starve him and his family to death; but finding that the Shah really seemed to prefer death to giving up the gem he gave him food, but beset him with every species of indignity and petty cruelty. The Shah then protested that he had not got the Koh-i-Noor. "Very well," said Runjeet, "I shall go on worrying you till you do get it!" And after three months of this torture the unfortunate guest gave in, and said his host should have it. So Runjeet went to his victim's quarters, and for a whole hour the two princes sat facing each other in solemn silence. The one would not ask for the diamond, the other would not give it up till asked for it. So there they sat. Then Runjeet got impatient and told his only attendant to remind the Shah what he had come for. He did so, and then Shah Sooja signalled to a rascalion of a menial, who produced a little roll and laid it down on the carpet exactly mid-way between the two chiefs. "Open it," said Runjeet, and lo! there before his eyes lay the longed-for "world's desire," the "mountain of light." At the sight of it Runjeet's self-possession and manners suddenly deserted him and he

pounced upon the diamond and without a word hurried off with it!

Thus did the ruler of the Punjab become master of this wondrous gem. By-and-by came the day when Runjeet Singh lay dying and his thoughts were on the Koh-i-Noor. To leave it to his son was, he knew, to tempt his neighbours to fight him for it, his family to assassinate him for it. So, to the amazement of those around him, he gave it to the priests of the temple of Juggernath! But they never got it. Within a few years one successor after another was murdered, and then the Sikhs challenged the English army, and our soldiers in a startling campaign of rapid victories conquered the Punjab, and before anybody had time to think of running off with the Koh-i-Noor it was in Lord Dalhousie's pocket!

And so to Windsor and Queen Victoria, and now to the Imperial State Crown of England. There, humanly speaking, this superb and terrible jewel, whose change of ownership has signalled the downfall of so many Oriental dynasties, has found a final resting-place. "What do you value the Koh-i-Noor at?" asked Runjeet Singh of Shah Sooja. "*At good luck*," replied the Shah. And so may it henceforth and for ever prove. P. R.

### Reminiscences of the late Mr. Bret Harte

THE death of Mr. Bret Harte awakens memories of the time when he was American Consul in Glasgow, and when I had the privilege of being on somewhat intimate terms with him. He was at once interesting and peculiar. Unlike Americans, who usually lay themselves out to be attractive and are ever ready for conversation, cultivating it as a fine art far more than we do, Bret Harte had to be interested before he became interesting. He was morose in uncongenial society, and was at little pains to conceal the fact if he felt bored. But when he was at home with people he liked he was immensely entertaining, bright, frank, and unaffected. When I first called upon him I found him in a bad humour. I fancy he suspected that an editor must always be on the prowl for copy, and so his reception was worse than reserved; for he began indulging in a diatribe against the bad manners of my fellow countrymen

and fellow citizens especially, who, I am sorry to say, do sometimes lay themselves open to misunderstanding on the part of those who judge by outward bearing. "I find the people here the worst mannered in Europe," he said, without apparent consciousness of offence. Except for the measure of politeness I still retained I was on the point of putting the query: "What, worse than the Dutch?" for I recollected how Mr. Augustus Hare once described that people to me in the very terms employed by Mr. Harte in reference to our Lowland Scotch—who in this connection may be distinguished from the Highlanders, of whom the Queen used to say, "Every one of them is a gentleman!" But I forbore the interruption, and he went on—"Why, it is marvellous. Here in this lodging of mine even the table-girl cannot hand me a plate except in the spirit of aggression!" Some other instances of similar aggressiveness were related that were simply ludicrous.

I came afterwards to see a good deal of him, for he used to have me to lunch with him when he had removed from the sphere of the aggressive table-girl to a civilised hotel, and many a pleasant chat I enjoyed with him while we smoked American "green" cigars, of which he had a frequent supply. It was in this kind of *tête-à-tête* that he was at his best, for there was undoubtedly a vein of Bohemianism in him which often made him appear at a disadvantage when he was a guest at some formal dinner-party, and would perhaps be guilty of the sin of aggressiveness which he condemned in others. But when he was alone he was a delightful talker and a polished gentleman.

He had another amusing quarrel with the Scotch. "When drunk they are like no other drunk people I ever saw. I have watched them over and over again in the street. There is no gaiety, no brilliancy, no sense of enjoyment visible, but a stern, stupid, aspect of business in it all, as if they were intoxicated from a sense of duty!"

We had at that time in Glasgow a series of science lectures, delivered by the most grave and learned representatives of the scientific world. They were intended to be educational, and the audiences which filled

our largest hall showed how much they were appreciated. But the committee in charge thought it would be a delightful variety to get Mr. Bret Harte to undertake a lecture. He did so, and of course steered at once away from anything which could possibly be mistaken for science, and launched out in a brilliant description of the "Trek" into California some decades previously. The lecture was full of characteristic humour, subtle and delicious, but the audience long remained absolutely grave and evidently puzzled as to where the expected science was to come in, till the loud laugh—well known to his friends—of a genial professor broke the spell, and the necessary surgical operation having been thus completed, the people perceiving the joke of it all joined heartily in the fun, and a delightful hour was passed. I afterwards walked home with Bret Harte, and on remarking, "It was some time before your hearers found your bearings," he replied, "Yes, it put me in mind of Wendel Holmes, who once went to lecture in a Wesleyan Chapel in some out-of-the-way place. He cracked his best jokes, but it was no use. Nothing could disturb the deep solemnity of his audience. Thoroughly depressed by his experience he was hurriedly passing through the crowd in the street to reach his hotel when he overheard one man say to another: 'Wa-al, do you know once or twice it was all I could do to keep from smiling!' The remark amply rewarded him." THE EDITOR.

### London's Yearly Losses

As compared with the figures for 1899 the property lost in 1900 showed an increase of fifteen hundred articles; the said increase, however, is practically confined to the item "umbrellas," which more than hold their own as the most losable article ever invented, the number of other articles most frequently lost proving to be practically constant.

Of those items showing an increase we note that four more bags were garnered into the Yard in 1900 than in 1899, and instead of a paltry 2662 as in 1898 the total stood at 2813.

Whether cabs are freely utilised as dressing-