

Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,  
Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor.

I must confess to being keenly disappointed with "The Banner of Blue." It is well enough as an ordinary story, but it is not fit to be called a tale of the Disruption by Crockett. We expected something worthy of the author and worthy of the subject.

But I am not halfway through the books yet. Here is the worn little copy of "The Play-actress," a story we cannot read aloud without tears in the voice. "Mad Sir Ughtred" is beside it, a clever book maybe, but it does not appeal to ordinary folk like the other. "Sweetheart Travellers" is delightful, and a fairy tale that older people can enjoy as much as the children. In "Bog-myrtle and Peat" there are some capital sketches of Galloway character and scenery. "The Minister of Dour," "The Cry across the Black Water," and the description of the Scottish Sabbath, are very good. "Lochinvar" is a tale of stirring times, and tells us of the further adventures of Wat Gordon and others whose acquaintance we made in "Men of the Moss Hags." Of your later books I think "Kit Kennedy" is the best, but the history of the "Black Douglas" is also a favourite. "The Silver Skull" is an interesting story of brigand life. They are good sort of men these brigands, and that is a fine scene where the chief gives his life for the girl, who has grown up in his home like a sister, but whom he loves with more than a brother's love.

There are other books I would like to speak of, but, as I told you at the first, I am no critic. If a story is well written and interesting I enjoy it without any thought of criticising it, and I am glad of this opportunity of thanking you for the many pleasant hours you have given me and mine. If an ordinary story-reader like myself might give you a word of advice it would be, "Ca Cannie! don't write too much, and your books will always find a welcome."

In this age, where so many books are published that smell of the sewer, and of the unclean places and people whence they come, we are proud to think that among the

stalwart sons of Galloway there is one whose name is known all over the world as a writer of books as pure and wholesome as the moorland air that blows through them.

South View,  
South Shields.

M. BARBOUR.

### The Flower of Coronation

His Majesty the King and Queen Alexandra and the members of the Royal Family have each of them individually a special preference in flowers, at any rate for wearing, whether as "buttonhole" or spray. Common to all is the love of the rose, but ranking after that truly royal flower comes, in various degrees of favour, the gardenia, which is King Edward's choice; the Souvenir de la Malmaison carnation, Queen Alexandra's; the violet, the Prince of Wales; and lilies of the valley, the Princess of Wales.

Of these, the Queen's favourite has a somewhat special claim to be, after the rose, the Flower of the Coronation, for time was when carnations were called "coronations." Spenser speaks of them by that name and so does Ben Jonson, and in the herbals of the sixteenth century we find both coronations and coronations. The name takes us, through its Latin specific *coronata*, to old Rome and the days, as Pliny tells us, when the carnation was one of the chief "crowning flowers," the flowers used for chaplets and garlands.

Why then should not Queen Alexandra's favourite, the Malmaison, be the Flower of the Coronation? Next to the rose, what is there sweeter or more appropriate for the great crowning-day?

### How Runjeet Singh got the Koh-i-Noor

Chief among the jewels of the "Imperial State Crown of England" have been hitherto the great ruby, which was given to the Black Prince by Don Pedro, King of Castile, in 1367, and the sapphire which is said to have been once set in Edward the Confessor's ring.

But in the crown of King Edward VII. these splendid gems can no longer hold pride of place, for his Majesty has had the famous diamond, the Koh-i-Noor, added to his diadem, and no jewel in the world can compare in celebrity with this, the "stone

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