



REBECCAISM IN WALES.

ABOUT half a century back a small band of Welsh dissenters, in their fondness for Bible quotations, chose their name from Genesis xxiv. 60, where, speaking of Rebecca, it is said, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those who hate them."

Thus a secret society of "Rebeccaites" was formed for redressing in their own fashion the grievances that then existed in the excessive number of turnpike gates throughout South Wales.

About that time, and shortly before the introduction of railways, the magistrates in these districts had set themselves to make new roads, as well as to widen and improve the gradients of the old ones, and to pay the cost of this they had increased the turnpike gates so much, that there was not a small town or scarcely a village that was not ap-

proached by a gate. This multiplied the tolls so much as to cause a heavy tax upon travellers going long distances, as was often the case in those days, especially on farmers and dealers frequenting fairs, or going from Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Breconshire, or Radnorshire into the midland counties. Dressed as women, sometimes armed, and riding good horses, this band made a clean sweep of such gates as they thought objectionable, tearing down the houses, throwing the gates into the rivers, and creating quite a panic in these usually quiet districts. The police were powerless, and the military were called out, but not a single "Rebecca" could be taken. The gates were no sooner reinstated than "Rebecca" and her daughters re-demolished them.

The attention of Government was called to the question, and, thanks to the able handling of the subject by the then representatives of South Wales, an Act

of Parliament was passed, called "The South Wales Turnpike Act," which has proved an inestimable benefit to South Wales. Its chief provision is that no gate shall be erected within seven miles of another, unless they free one another. Power is given to raise money on easy terms to pay off existing debts, and a system of Government control and inspection is adopted, in addition to a well-constituted County Roads Board, in each county.

The result has been in every way satisfactory; the heavy debts have disappeared, splendid roads everywhere distinguish South Wales, and the road rates are not oppressive.

"Rebecca" and her children disappeared from the scene as if forever, but a few old men survived, and a new grievance having sprung up, very much after their own hearts, young recruits were not wanting when the enforcement of the law for the protection of salmon by the Board of Conservators made their autumn and winter sport of salmon-spearing a grave offence.

It soon became the popular thing among the town and village populations to turn out at night on the banks of the Wye and its tributaries to see "Rebecca lighting the water;" and picturesque it undoubtedly is to see in midstream half a dozen stalwart young fellows, dressed to the waist in white, with bonnets or handkerchiefs over their heads, and with disguised faces, some with flambeaux on poles, and the others with spears, all standing in a line across a gravelly ford. The poor emaciated salmon, disturbed from his boring in the gravel by the unexpected light, runs like a moth into the candle, and is transfixed by the unerring aim of "Rebecca." Tossing it high in the air with a shout of triumph, speedily taken up in responsive echo by the sympathising crowd on the bank of the river, often numbering more than a hundred persons, it is then thrown into a bag, or, as too

often is the case now, wantonly left on the river-side, a prey for carrion crows. Perhaps in the midst of the fun there is a cry of "Water bailiffs!" and then the lawless part of the business comes out in strong relief. "Rebecca" on the river-bank flings a volley of stones, and often fires off a gun in the air by way of warning; the crowd jostle, chaff, and sometimes add their threats against the intruders, who, if plucky enough to make a dash at their men, nearly always are worsted, and have to retire with broken heads or sore ribs from nailed boots, and the poachers triumph.

Shortly, what "Rebecca" says is this: "I used to be able to have a fish (salmon) when I liked; I could catch him with rod and line, or spear, from the commons adjoining the river for many a mile, or on neighbour Jones's land, and a kippered fish in winter was my greatest luxury. I could catch as many samlets as I chose, and my lads could do the same, and it kept them out of mischief. There were plenty of salmon and to spare in those days, and my landlord never interfered nor ordered me not to do it. No keeper interfered with us. They were generally good hands at spearing themselves, and taught my lads the art. Now we are not allowed to look at a salmon, much less take one. To use a spear is unlawful, and the possession of one dangerous. My old fishing-ground, the commons, has been taken away from me by Inclosure Acts, and has gone to the large landowners. I dare not use a rod and line for a salmon without payment of a heavy annual license. It is equally unlawful for me or my lads to catch a small samlet or laspring as long as my finger, although there are thousands on the streams below my house, and my wife says they are the sweetest little things she ever tasted. There are strange men parading the river night and day, like spies, daring us to touch what we always thought we had a right to take. There are scores

of fish there under our eyes, but they belong, they say, now to the Duke, or somebody else, and we have to look on and see them preserved for him, or others for whom we care nothing. Our landlords are not much better off than we are. We are told that the Duke's tenants catch thousands, and that they, and the people below Hereford, are allowed by law to net night and day, except on Saturday and Sunday, and that this prevents any fish coming into our streams until the breeding season begins. We will stand this no longer. We

upset the bad law about gates, and we will upset these unfair laws about salmon. We are a God-fearing people, and wish to respect the laws, wherever just and fair, but the salmon were sent us as our lawful food, and no board shall deprive us of them."

The result is easily told. The Wye, the most beautiful salmon-river in England or Wales, is being denuded of its breeding-fish, steadily but surely, and the number of sporting-fish that reach the upper waters in the fishing season is also diminishing every year.

THE

CAPTURE OF THE CONFEDERATE PRESIDENT.



AFTER leaving Washington (says Mr. Jefferson Davis) I overtook a commissary and quartermaster's train, having public papers of value in charge, and, finding that they had no experienced woodsman with it, I gave them four of the men of my small party, and went on with the rest. On the second or third day after leaving Washington, I heard that a band of marauders, supposed to be stragglers and deserters from both armies, were in pursuit of my family, whom I had not seen since they left Richmond, but of whom I heard, at Washington, that they had gone with my private secretary and seven paroled men, who generously offered their services as an escort, to the Florida coast. Their route was to the east of that I was pursuing, but I immediately changed direction and rode rapidly across the country to overtake them.

About nightfall the horses of my escort gave out, but I pressed on with Secretary Reagan and my personal

staff. It was a bright moonlight night, and just before day, as the moon was sinking below the tree-tops, I met a party of men in the road, who answered my questions by saying they belonged to an Alabama regiment; that they were coming from a village not far off, on their way homeward. Upon inquiry being made, they told me they had passed an encampment of wagons, with women and children, and asked me if we belonged to that party. Upon being answered in the affirmative, they took their leave. After a short time I was hailed by a voice which I recognised as that of my private secretary, who informed me that the marauders had been hanging around the camp, and that he and others were on post around it, and were expecting an assault as soon as the moon went down. A silly story had got abroad that it was a treasure-train, and the *auri sacra fames* had probably instigated these marauders, as it subsequently stimulated General J. H. Wilson to send out a large cavalry force to capture the same train.

For the protection of my family, I