

S O L O M O N ' S T E M P L E .

DEAR MR EDMOND.—Allow me a word or two about "Solomon's Temple," which I think you smart "Special Contributor" knows very little about. I was born in it; and I can tell you, among other things, as the result of many years' experience, that it was the best place in the town for the games of "tig" and "spy-eye," provided you could escape poor old James Magee and his much dreaded whip. I'll give you a few things, by and by, about James Magee; at present let me dot down what I can remember of the ownership of this old building—"my first and dearest home."

I can just remember it as the property of Dr Robinson, a gentleman who collected his own rents, and took good care that no disreputable person got into his property. He was as careful to set himself against dirty people as against rogues; and though there was always (since I can remember) a midden-stand in front of Solomon's Temple, there was less fever and disease in this building than in almost any other part of Whitehaven. It was no "perennial fever bed," where disease ran riot, and every epidemic abroad was sure to stop and claim its victims. I am not writing a fine paper, Mr Editor; I am telling you what I know.

You are perhaps not aware that Solomon's Temple formed only one of the three sides of a quadrangle the centre of which was the much talked of midden-stand. As you stood with your back to the "Bar racks" the right hand row of houses was "Temple Lane." The left entry was "Martin's Arch"—we had called it that at any rate; and a comfortable place it was for telling stories under on a wet night. In front of you was "Solomon's Temple."

Now, walk round the lanes with me, sir, if you have time, beginning at "Martin's Arch." Mr Martin was a black and white smith, and one of the cunningest workmen of his craft. He was at least the third of his line of that trade; they were all capital workmen, and I believe no one ever charged them with being bad neighbours or unfair tradesmen. Martin's Arch, from the line of Catherine Street to the front of Solomon's Temple, was all their own. Edward Martin, the last blacksmith of his race, was a little man of extraordinary sharpness, and when he got a glass too many you cannot imagine how funny he could be. His eldest son was my old playmate and friend, Tom; and if these lines should meet Tom's eye I am sure he will forgive me the few kindly reminiscences of old times. I was rather a favourite with Mr Martin; and, accordingly, on a particular Saturday morning that I shall never forget, I was deputised by a lot of our comrades (Tom's and mine) to go, in a well behaved manner, to the door, and ask "if Tom might come out to lake." Do you know what "lake" means, Mr Editor, or have you forgotten it in these now-fangled days of Whitton? Well, if you don't know you ought to know, so I'm not going to tell you. I did as I was commissioned; knocked at the door, and said—"If you please may Tom come out to lake?" Mr Martin was on his high horse at the time, and poor Tom had had very little chance of getting out. But his deliverance was at hand. The old gentleman seized on me, dragged me forward to an arm chair, in which he somewhat unceremoniously set me; then he drew another chair opposite to me, and for four mortal hours held me there, whilst he preached to me from his well-known text of "Martin's Arch!" Rocks of Gibraltar, Golden Mice and Silver Tea Pots," &c. You need not bother to imagine my vexation; take the fact, and let me add that Martin's Arch and house, and even the blacksmith's shop, wore as clean as "tip." You cannot find such a shop as Mr Martin's in these days.



Between the house and ship there was a Dame's school—a gem of a school—kept by old Mrs Wise; and there, sir, you might have seen a pretty little girl, your humble correspondent's first sweetheart. Ah! sir, you should have seen her, in her nice clean "slip," making Dame Wise's school like a little Paradise. We (the lads) were all in love with her. For her approval we tried our best to learn the alphabet from A to Z, and spell "cat" and "dog," and many even more difficult words. To her we made our daily contributions of "sweet marbles"—Kitty Quah sold excellent sweet marbles, at six for a halfpenny, and none of us little wrothins ever thought of fasting them till we had offered the first-fruit of our purchase to our little "te-ta-ha-a-t, Agga Dizé." Shall I translate for you, sir? "Te-ta-ha-a-t" was our best equivalent for "sweetheart," and "Agga Dizé" was all we could make of "Agnes Wise." That was her name, sir. Poor thing! she has long been laid beneath the green sod. She visited Whitehaven, after a long absence, worn almost to a skeleton; and in Temple Lane—in Solomon's Temple—dirty, much abused Solomon's Temple—I had the pain of taking for the last time the all but dying hand of my dear little "te-ta-ha-a-t, Agga Dizé." Her other most unwavering admirer, and my old friend, George Tierney, had long been dead. Miss Wise had for several years been Mrs Somebody whom we never knew, and she had come home to die. Peace be to her memory, and to the memory of all our schoolfellows and her sweet-hearts who have got away before us to the long home!

At the bottom of Martin's Arch was Robert and William McDonald's weaving shop, as respectable a shop as ever was anywhere; and then, at the corner of Solomon's Temple—in a house always "as clean as a new made pin," lived James and Jane Magee. You remember, sir—you must remember—James Magee? Don't you see his erect form, and hear his seraps of French, picked up while he was wounded and in hospital in France after the Battle of Waterloo? "Ah! French did that day?" Then you remember, sir, how James Magee made his stories all the sweeter to us youngsters by the nice bits of "Spanish" (some of your fine words for me) he carried in his pocket; and how he made his presents in appropriate French terms, which no mortal, French, or English, or high Dutch, ever understood. And then, surely you know how he spoiled our games at "tig," and "spy-eye," and "sooks" with that much dreaded whip? Oh! yes, you must know all these things; I am sure you must.

And old Abraham Howens, too, the man-o'-war's-man, who lived close to James Magee, but at last went away to Chelsea Hospital to grope out his few remaining days? And, just over the head of James Magee, you cannot have forgotten the respectable family of Wise—nearly related to my little sweetheart. You may be thankful, sir, that you were apt present, as I was, when that family was broken up by the death of father and mother, and when the poor little children were taken away to the poor house. I shall never forget that,—if I live till I am a hundred years of age. Driven at once from comfort and kind parents to the poorhouse—Oh! Mr Editor, I hope you will never hear such a wail of woe as I heard that day.

I fear I am taking up too much of your time, but I want to photograph for you Solomon's Temple, as it was, before any one could say of it—what your correspondent said last week. May I go hurriedly round the lane?

I'm sure you knew old Betty Kew the washer-woman. Anybody—the highest in the town—would have entrusted Betty with clothes to wash; and she told the funniest of all stories, with which to keep you alive at nights, when the work was done. There were people, too, in Temple Lane and Solomon's Temple who had lived neighbours for forty years and more. You will remember Mrs Simpson and Mrs Waugh, and many others. And you know "Tumblety's Alo-house, three doors from the top of the lane, and Anthony Sowell's, and Edward Tierney's. You perhaps don't remember my little friend George; I have a letter of his yet—the only letter he ever wrote. You don't know how much I think of it, though it is now old and yellow, and as faded as many of my early hopes. He was brought up a Catholic, and I a Protestant; and one day, before I knew what he was doing he sprinkled me with holy water, to "keep the bad man from getting me!" We were very young then—rivals for "Agga Dizé;" but, sir, that holy water did no good! It has often helped me to remember that, Catholic and Protestant, we are all and ought to be brothers. I followed my friend to a lowly grave; I heard a service I did not understand; I have never touched holy water from that day to this, but I hope I shall ever feel that no creed should stand any more between living human hearts, than our different creeds did, between George Tierney's and mine. We were rivals and friends; why cannot you newspaper editors be brothers?

One thing more, sir, did you remember "Old Snip," the sugar boiler? Your correspondent of last week talks about the sugar boiling; does he know anything of Old Snip? It used to be rare fun to ring at the sugar yard gates, and bring the poor old beggar up from his house at the bottom of the yard; and then about "Old Snip," and run away to the music of the old gentleman's maledictions.

I shall say a great deal more on these subjects some day. Let it suffice for the present to remind you that Solomon's Temple did not always deserve the bad name your correspondent has given it. I hope it was never quite so bad as he makes it, but at all events it never was so in my early days; never till it became the property of the Earl of Lonsdale. I remember it, as it was; I know there was scarcely a dirty house in it. I am sure there were some houses in it that could not be surpassed for cleanliness in any town in England. I know it was not the habitation of vagrants and thieves. I remember kind old neighbours and friends, ready to run in a moment, night or day, to each other's help, when affliction fell, as affliction does fall on the poor. I remember the old man who came round every Saturday with his two asses, to sell clean sand for the clean floors; I remember the many rides I had as a child on those asses, and how when the old man died I was only pacified by being taken day after day to seek my "cuddies" on Harris Moor.

You will judge, then, how I felt when I saw your correspondent's letter. I said to myself—"Is this to be the funeral oration—this the final did only chronicle of the home of my early childhood, where lived and died some of the warmest hearts that ever beat in human breasts?" I resolved it should be. I don't say your correspondent intends no ill, but he does not know Solomon's Temple as I remember it from the days forever gone. He cannot see there, as I can, one old friendly family friend, occupied by friends the nearest and dearest of all. If he could, he would, I am sure, touch a poor man's home with a gentler and kinder hand. I suppose he thinks that Solomon's Temple, as it lately was, is fair game for any one who wishes to draw a picture; a place for lady visitors and town missionaries, a place to be talked about at Sunday school ten parties. But I could point him to higher things in connection with Solomon's Temple. A thousand old pictures and memorise rise before me to-night, under the influence of your correspondent's letter, and if they have made me a little angry, they have also calmed me, and left only one large picture full of peace and kindness to all mankind at the close.—I am, sir, your obedient servant.