

SOMETHING OF THE PAST.

Some time about the year 1836 or 1837,—at all events, in the early part of Sir John Franklin's Government, and when I was a boy, the last of the aborigines were captured, or rather brought in from the country by the singularly persuasive faculties of a Mr. George Augustus Robinson, who was employed by the authorities for that purpose, but whose worth and benevolence were never properly appreciated by the men of power in those days. There were about 50 or 60 of both sexes, if I remember aright, and they were lodged in that queer roofed two story brick house, which even now stands unaltered, just opposite James's brewery on the New Town Road. Amongst the number I saw then was the head chief or king of the north part of the island; and one of his fellow captives was his only daughter, a little curly headed naked girl about six years old. I had then seen, but as many snows on the top of Mount Wellington, but well do I remember with what a glowing interest I stood by and gazed at the sable family, as they squatted on the floor and ate their oatmeal porridge out of tin plates, while each had a great kangaroo dog, or a mongrel of some sort or other in close attendance, with a lop-ear and watchful eye, anxiously waiting for his accustomed share of the evening meal. One day, when dear old Lady Franklin paid a visit to the establishment, the chieftain's baby attracted her attention, and as there were no little picaninies at Government House at that time, it was in some way arranged that an addition should be made to the family at home, and so it was ordered that the little wild girl should take her place as one of the family at the house below. So she rolled down in the vice-regal carriage, from her father and the brick building before mentioned, to Sir John's residence, which stood at that time where his statue stands now, just opposite the Commercial Bank in Macquarie-street. Although a princess of the purest of lineage, the king's daughter carried no dowry with her, save, indeed, a single kangaroo skin, a rush basket, a shell necklace or two, a pet opossum, and—her name—that was Mathinna. This pretty sound means in the language of her fathers, "Pretty Gully" or "Beautiful Valley." And how beautiful that meaning! Yet, we called them savages and shot them down over their bush fires, while the men slept and the women suckled their babes at the breast. Oh, fair Tasmania, how do these lines apply to thy case!

"When the loud cry of trampled Hindostan
Arose to Heaven in her appeal from man,
His was the thunder—His the avenging rod,
The wrath—the delegated voice of God!"

Byron's Monody on Sheridan.

But to return. Filial affection is alike in strength in all creatures; but in Mathinna's case the broken link of love was soon repaired when she became the adopted daughter of the lady of the great navigator. In a few days who should we see in the Governor's carriage but our charming little heroine, standing up as straight as a sasaparilla plant, dressed in a short bright scarlet frock, while her head, arms, and legs were quite unclad, and presented a black and shining, yet strange and pleasing contrast, with her new attire. There she stood, and stands

her new attire. There she stood, and stands now in my mind's eye, just like a queen. I see her, quickly turning her head this way and that, as her infant mind fed nervously and curiously upon the strange sights of houses, horses, bullocks, and carts, whitemen with funny clothes on, and a thousand things she had never seen before, and which naturally bewildered the senses of one so recently reclaimed (ah! what a mock-word) from her own native home in the mountains of the north. Well, time rolled on then as it does now, and made all the differences that we still see creep on, in every move of nature. Mathinna afforded no exception to the general rule, and she grew to be a tall, graceful girl—and here I am at a loss to describe perhaps one of the grandest specimens of our kind that ever nature smiled upon. She stood, when I saw her last, about five feet eight inches high, was very erect, with a quick, thoughtless, or perhaps, thinking, if you please, toss about her head now and then. Her hair still curled short as before, but seemed to struggle into length, and was blacker than black, bright, glossy, and oh! so beautiful! Her features were well chiseled, and singularly regular, while her voice was light, quick, yet sighed like, and somewhat plaintive. Whenever she spoke to you, her thoughts seemed to be somewhere else, and her full and restless eyes ever and anon rested for a moment—or rather travelled along what we call Mount Wellington and the mountains that reach away in the dim distance beyond. But as I fail to say what I would, let me steal a line from the brain of the immortal Byron whose statue by-the-by, chiseled by the Greeks from the purest marble, the British public kicked about the dockyard at Plymouth, only forty years ago, whilst a poor creature, whose highest abilities never could have qualified him for a shoeblick to the post, is now enjoying the patronage of the boat of England's Queens, and consequently—but only so, thank God—of the English people. Here is the extract which I think is the only description that could be given of the peerless Mathinna—

"And in her air
There was something which bespoke command
As if she were a lady in the land.

Her eyes
Were black as death, their lashes the same hue,
Of down cast length, in whose silk shadow lie
Deepest attraction; for when to the view
Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies,
Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew;
'Tis as the snake late coil'd, who pours his length,
And hurls at once his venom and his strength."

I am reluctant to go on any further with this tale, because my heart sickens as I think of what I have yet to tell. But having written thus far, and as it is a matter in the history of our—nay, not ours—but of the island we have stolen from those who had a grant of it from Heaven, and who were shot down and murdered man by man, woman by woman, child by child, until, as our parsons say, the will of God was accomplished, I feel that I ought to proceed to the end of my story. When Sir John's period of Government had expired, Lady Franklin determined upon taking her protegee to England with her, but the girl being naturally weak in the chest, and perhaps inclined to be consumptive—as in fact the whole race were after the red handed white man had hunted them out of their mines and commenced the work of butchery and murder now carried on after the same

minia and commenced the work of outchery and murder now carried on after the same style under the British flag in New Zealand—she was advised by Dr. Bedford, her ladyship's physician, that a removal to a climate so much colder than her own would, most probably, be followed by fatal results, and consequently, poor Mathinna was transferred, sobbing and broken hearted, from the tender care of one who had always proved far more than a mother to her, and the luxury and grandeur of Government House, to a cold stretcher in the dormitory of the Queen's Asylum. And now her sorrows and her death began. Being naturally high-spirited, and having been always indulged in every whim, perhaps to a fault, by her noble benefactress, she could not brook the taunts and gibes of the other girls as to her colour and such like; and that nature which had never been aroused since her infancy was often excited, and, knowing no other correcting hand than her forster mother's, she could not submit to punishment; so she soon fell sick and took to her bed in the hospital. Poor girl! She had no friends then, save one, who sleeps with her now. All those fawners about Government House who used to say kind things, and pretend to be proud to take her hand in the ball-room, because it pleased Lady Franklin, had all disappeared, and, as her wan fingers beat upon the wall, she sighed and thought of days gone by, and of that flock of summer friends who revelled in the sunshine of the hour, but vanished with its splendour.

In the meantime, about 1847, I think, those of the aborigines who had not died out at Flinders Island were removed to Oyster Cove, where the old convict station was turned into account for their accommodation, and a certain Dr. Milligan appointed Superintendent of the Establishment, at a salary of three hundred pounds a year; and Mathinna, having somewhat recovered from her illness, was ordered off to the Cove, and hurried into that state of former existence which her education and kindly treatment at Government House had taught her to forget. Too soon, alas! she fell into the habits of the rest, and as they were permitted to wander about in the bush in all directions, amongst sawyers, splitters, and characters of the deepest depravity, the reader may guess for himself what my pen refuses to write. One night, however, Mathinna was missing, and, although cooey after cooey resounded from mountain to mountain, and from gully to gully, no tidings were heard of the lost girl. In the morning the search was continued, till at length the wanderer was found—the little wild girl with the shell necklace and the pet opossum—the scarlet-coated, bare-headed beauty in the carriage—the protégée of the noble woman—the reclaimed daughter of the native chief—had died, abandoned by every virtue, and — in the river.

OLD BOOMER.