

great events may be little things in themselves; and so I could not see how important a part these minute iron-tinted specks — the work of a microscopic fungus — were to enact in British history. The old soothsayers professed to read the destinies of the future in very unlikely pages, — in the meteoric appearances of the heavens, and in the stars, — in the flight and chirping of birds, — in the entrails of animals, — in many other strange characters besides; and in the remoter districts of my own country I have seen a half-sportive superstition employed in deciphering characters quite as unlikely as those of the old augurs, — in the burning of a brace of hazel-nuts, — in the pulling of a few oaten stalks, — in the grounds of a tea-cup, — above all, in the Hallowe'en egg, in which, in a different sense from that embodied in the allegory of Cowley,

“ The curious eye,
Through the firm shell and the thick white may spy
Years to come a-forming lie,
Close in their sacred secundine asleep.”

But who could have ever thought of divining over the spotted tubers? or who so shrewd as to have seen in the grouping of their iron-shot specks Lord John Russell's renunciation of the fixed duty, — the conversion to free-trade principles of Sir Robert Peel and his Conservative ministry, — the breaking up into sections of the old Protectionist party, — and, in the remote distance, the abolition in Scotland of the law of entail, and in England the ultimate abandonment, mayhap, of the depressing tenant-at-will system? If one could have read them aright, never did the flight of bird or the embowelment of beast indicate so wonderful a story as these same iron-shot tubers.