

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

THE ORACLE OF ZOROBABEL.

[Josephus, Antiq. Jud. XI. V. 3.]

I.

Wine is strong, and strong is the King whom all men obey,
But the beautiful face of a woman is stronger even than they.
'Twas she that bare the king and his delicate limbs caressed,
And the men that plant the vine she fed from the milk of her breast.
All things which the wide earth gives do pass through her hand,
The waves of the running sea and the mellow fruits of the land.
'Tis she who weaveth the robes whereby we are fenced from the air,
And the cosy cells of our homes are left to her motherly care.
From the face of men we may wander, but never, ah! never away
From the witching smile of a woman, or the glance of her eye can
[we stray].
We pile up silver and ingots of gold and precious jewels that glow,
And plan a myriad devices which joyance on earth can bestow.
But at sight of the beautiful woman these trinkets we thought-
[lessly leave,
Our lips stand gaping with wonder, and our eyes on her counte-
[nance cleave.
And e'en from the gains of our toil we are willing for ever to part.
If thus we may follow the maiden we love and win her into our
[heart].
Our father, our mother, our friends, and the bountiful paps of the
[earth
From which we have fed, we abandon for the sake of feminine worth.
Far into the innermost lands, far out on the stormiest seas,
We wander for her, and coming with smiles, we lay at her knees
The fruits of our danger and toil—yea, e'en for her sake,
Dashing all hopes of the morrow, our life we foolishly stake.
Nay, even Darius the King, from what these eyes have seen,
Was ruled by the white-faced Apamé, that was not his queen.
She smote him upon the cheek, she plucked the crown from his head
And set it upon her own, while the king looked on in dread.
When she smiled, he smiled; when she was angry, he sighed.
And he bent like the crost of the cedar at every whim of her pride.
And all her wayward passions were the rule of the kingly place,
For her every fault was hidden in the light of her beautiful face.

II.

Wine is strong, and strong is the king, and woman is stronger still,
But strongest of all is Truth that lieth in God's will.
The earth is broad, and the heavens are high, and the course of the
[sun
Is swift from the east to the west, but all these things are done
By the power of God, who is good and true, and therefore the might
Of Truth is greatest of all, because it is grounded on Right.
All things else are hollow and nether, and the core of their strength
Must wither, because they are finite and weak, but the length
Of the power of Truth is eternal, and the beauty thereof
Will endure, though the earth and the solid heavens may move.
Its freshness no changes of seasons or cycles can mar,
Its richness will last thro' the sunshine of peace and the darkness of
[war].
For God is Truth, and Truth is God, and happy the man
Who sets his heart upon it, instead of on woman.

JOHN LESPERANCE.

THE PAUPER'S DRIVE.

MODERNISED AND MONTREALISED.

(See page 284.)

I.

There's a grim one horse cart in a jolly round trot,
From the churchyard some old bones are going. I wot,
The road it is rough, and the cart has no springs.
And hark to the dirge that the glad driver sings:—
"Rattle their bones, over the stones,
They're only some paupers, whom nobody owns."

II.

Oh! where are the mourners? alas! there are none;
They have left not a gap in the world, now they're gone,
Not a tear in the eye of child, woman, or man—
Away with such "refuse" as fast as you can.
"Rattle their bones, over the stones,
For they always were paupers, whom nobody owns."

III.

What a jolting and creaking, and swearing and din,
The bones—how they smell! the wheels—how they spin!
How the dirt, right and left, o'er the hedges is hurled,
The pauper at length makes a noise in the world.
"Rattle his bones, over the stones,
He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns."

IV.

You bumpkin, who stare at your brother conveyed,
Behold what respect to your brother is paid,
And be joyful to think, when by Death you're laid low,
You've a chance to be chucked in the river below.
"Rattle his bones, over the stones,
He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns."

V.

What of that, if her girlish hair wouldn't decay,
That from her fair face, e'en the worms turned away,
What of that, if she hadn't yet turned into clay?
Pitch her into the cart, boys, let's be off and away.
"Rattle her bones, over the stones,
Hurs only a pauper, as nobody owns."

VI.

But a truce to this strain—for my soul it is sad
To think that a heart in humanity clad
Should make, like the brute, such a desolate end,
And depart from this world without leaving one friend!
"Deposit their bones, beneath turf and white stones,
E'en the dust of a pauper, our Maker still owns."

Montreal, April, 1871.

"SENDING-IN DAY."

It was finished at last. I could do nothing more for it.
Good or bad, there it was—done. I became fully alive to the
important fact only by gradations of consciousness. I stood
before my picture—my first serious essay, my first bid for a
footing on Fame's ladder. I felt hot and giddy somehow—
beset by tremendous impulses to run in again and add further
touches—to blend—tone down in places—fetch out high
lights. I was only stayed by an overpowering suspicion that
I might do more harm than good; that it would be better to
leave off and stand by what I had done, than to peril my

chances of success by nervous hap-hazard work at last. I
stood in a rapt attitude—petrified; a disordered sheaf of
brushes, like a classical representation of Jove's thunderbolts,
grasped in my left hand, and my right clutching at my shirt-
front, or grasping my forelock, or hung up wildly above me.
I am not sure where it was.

Was it really a good thing? Let me put away my art-
instruments, and sit down calmly and consider the matter.
The frame looked well, certainly. It was a grand complica-
tion of bright and dull gold. The picture? Let us come to
that. Does the nimbus eclipse the saint? But my eyes have
seen nothing else for so long. Day and night has that canvas
been before them; they are perfectly drunk with it; they are
not capable of taking care of themselves, or of forming a cor-
rect opinion on the subject. At one moment, they decide that
one of the finest works that art has ever given birth to—now
decks my easel; at the next moment, they—well, they don't
give nearly so flattering a verdict.

But then I know too much of the secret history of the work.
I have been behind the scenes. The public will only see
Desdemona. I see something more, or something less—I see
Miss Larkins the model. Though I did all man could to pale
her, and to quench her, and to sentimentalise her, still she
seems to me to be shining through Desdemona in rather a
dreadful manner. It is like the copper appearing on every
edge of an old plated spoon. I know whose are those curving
lips, fruity in colour and aspect, which can disclose such
pretty pearly teeth, and permit the escape of such deformed
grammar. I know whose are the green-gray sparkles of those
eyes (altered in the picture to a violet hue, to suit buyer's
prejudices). I know well the green and orange tawny of the
floating locks. I know the Larkins complexion, which is
perhaps even clearer than the Larkins character. I know the
set of the Larkins neck on the Larkins shoulders; and the
Larkins pose and action altogether. They are all in the pic-
ture—all but the Larkins hand; for the Larkins bites her
nails. And Brabantio. Mayhap the public will regard him
as a fine specimen of the venerable Venetian senator. I know
that he is not so. I know him to be old Begbie the model,
whose Roman-nosed, hungry-looking, lean, yellow face is
anybody's property at any time, at the rate of one shilling per
hour. And Othello, waving his dusky hands as he relates
"the story of his life from year to year," and captivates the
gentle lady listening—I know the origin of that glowing
brown face. I can only see in it my swarthy friend, Arna
Chella Saubanputty, the Madras coolie, whose whilom occu-
pation it was to sweep the crossing and sell hymns round the
corner. He was the best match I could get, but he was not
very much like a Moor. How hard, how hard I toiled to paint
out of his face his unfurnished, inane, ignoble expression!
How strenuously I endeavoured to kindle in him some sense
of grandeur! It was like lighting a fire with green wood. I
could only arrive at a fizz, a splutter, or a dull smoke; not a
generous blaze. I even, on one occasion, went so far as to
make him drunk, in the hope that he might emit in that state
some sparks of savage sensibility—some aboriginal emotion,
however evanescent. It was all in vain. I could have for-
given him if he had gone mad; but he stopped short at idiosy.
A whining imbecility broke out in him; tears came into his
eyes; a feeble laugh, like the neighing of a consumptive filly,
quavered on his lips. His complexion clouded, and became
opaque; and, ultimately, he collapsed altogether in a hope-
lessly degraded state. I know, too, the thorough sham of the
mise en scène. I know that some humiliation lurks behind
each incident of the picture. I can detect readily—too readily
—that a remnant of an old muslin curtain has sat for Othello's
turban; that a dish-cover assisted at the painting of the ar-
mour in the background; that the leg of a veteran mahogany
fourposter aided in the delineation of that elaborate wood-
carving; that a red table-cloth abetted the painting of Bra-
bantio's robes; that the Moor's yataghan has often before pre-
sented itself to the public gaze in a transpontine hippo-drama.
All these facts glare out and strike at me from the picture each
an individual and staggering blow. The result is heating,
depressing, disagreeable.

Nevertheless, Mrs. O'Dwyer, my housekeeper, has pro-
nounced the thing "first-rate." She ought to know something
about it; she has had some experience in art. Have not ar-
tists been sojourning in her house for these last thirty years?
ever since she was left a "lone, lorn widow," as she says.
Lisbeth, the housemaid, she too has seen it, and approves
cordially; declaring, moreover, Desdemona to be the "very
himage" of her deceased niece of precocious attainments,
whose name was Betsy Jane, and whose earthly career meas-
ured out to prematurely at the age of ten. She decides, too,
that Othello is "bootiful." Can it be that she has a furtive
tenderness for Saubanputty, and that love is warping her
criticism?

"Can you lend a fellow some turps?"

It was a deep, ophicleide kind of voice. I recognised it at
once: no one in this world but Tom Maule possesses such an
organ.

"Come in."

"How are you? Hollo! finished!"

He was looking at the picture.

"Othello's tale to Desdemona. Bravo, young 'un!"

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them."

(He pealed out the quotation in a very bass, tempestuous
way, like the sound of distant thunder.)

"It's not bad; it isn't! You've had Larkins for
Desdemona."

I winced.

"You've improved her nose, I think. Begbie, of course,
for Brabantio—I recognise the old fool; and the nigger—that
fellow must be making a hatful of money."

"Sit down. Can you suggest anything? There's but a
few hours more, and then it must go—good or bad!"

"Exactly;

No reckoning made, but sent to its account
With all its imperfections on its head.
O horrible—

All right! don't be nervous—I don't mean the picture."

He had certainly a fine blank-verse voice.

He sat down at the picture with a demoniac scowl upon his
face; it was an expression he always wore when he wished to
be or to seem critical; his style of proceeding altogether was
of a rather marked character. He inhabited the second floor;
I was on the first. By profession, he was an artist; by taste,
I should say he was an acrobat. He was upwards of six feet

high, and rather broader than he should have been in propor-
tion. He delighted in feats of strength, and was for ever
tumbling about in a violent manner in his rooms above me;
I lived in a perpetual fear lest he should some day come
crashing through the ceiling. He could bend a poker on his
arm; he could throw I don't know how many pounds' weight;
it was almost certain death to play at single-stick or to spar
with him; he hit so hard; he could turn somersaults and
"do the splits." It was a fancy of his to imitate the violent
deaths in vogue on the stages of minor theatres, consisting in
sudden falls backward on the floor. I think his tastes alto-
gether were exaggerated and theatrical. When he painted,
he completely acted a part even in dressing for it: he assumed
flowing Titianesque velvets, with a Rubens hat, and wore al-
ways a Michael Angelo beard, glowing orange in colour. I
cannot help thinking that he was rather a sham; but he was
so grand withal, that the sham was merged and lost in the
grandeur.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

"Hollo! here's Buzzard."

"How are you, Buzzard?"

He was a little, ascetic-looking man, with a semi-bald head,
dim eyes, a feeble moustache, and a yellow complexion. He
was colourless and wan—some said from study; some, from
smoke.

"How are you two fellows? Cold for April, isn't it?"

"Art keeps me warm," said Maule; "art and sparring."

"I'm going a round—seeing the pictures for the Academy.
I've just come from Bayswater."

"Good?"

"Awful—that is, not much."

"What's Chrome got?"

"Achilles and Hector. Such a thing! Drawn by a baby,
coloured by a madman."

"What an infamous criticism! Chrome, if not the
greatest—"

"And Dibbler?"

"The Death of the Knight Templar. His studio's is an
awful mess. He's had a dead horse there for a fortnight.
Gamey—no end. The fume's affecting his brain: he's mad
to paint a battle-field—talks of nothing but carnage and
carrion."

"He's a nice man."

"The best thing I've seen is Byles'."

"Oh, of course you praise him," growled Maule; "he's one
of your set."

"What's the subject?"

"Delicious! a child playing at cat's-cradle with his blind
grandfather, who is a pauper lunatic. Colour and drawing
marvellous—all poetry. The painting of the old man's high-
lows is full of the highest feeling. Have you seen the new
model?"

"What's her name?"

"Flip."

"Oh, I know her. One of the scraggy sort you fellows are
always painting," says Maule. "Give me flesh and blood—
bone and muscle." And he went into a fighting attitude.

"May we smoke?"

"By all means. Here's the Birdseye. You'll have some
beer?"

"Bitter," from Buzzard.

"Stout," from Maule.

These arrangements were made satisfactorily.

"Is this your picture for the Academy?" and Buzzard stood
before my easel.

"I shall go," cries Maule; "Buzzard's going to break
out into art-criticism; I know it by the billous sparkle in his
eye."

Maule did not stir notwithstanding; in fact, he only wanted
to kindle Buzzard.

"Of course," said Buzzard, not regarding Tom in the least,
and in a withered, husky voice—"of course, if men will paint
in this way, I can't help it."

"You don't like it?" I said timidly.

"That's a mild way of putting it. I'm not a man to
talk—"

("Oh!" from Tom.)

"I don't talk my views on art; I paint them. I get abuse,
but I shall paint that down. You've seen my works? You
can judge, then, whether I am the man to like such a picture
as this."

I was rather crushed. Maule came to the rescue. He
stamped on the floor, and every article in the room trembled.

"Buzzard, you talk bosh; you paint it too. I don't know
whether I would rather not hear you, or not see your works.
Talk about your painting! I know what your picture is this
year, and—"

"I can't send the large one," said Buzzard; "I could not
get it done."

"I hope you never may. It's got no name—only a quota-
tion from Keats, which doesn't apply. It represents a gleaner
woman in a scarlet dress, asleep in a pea-green field, with an
orange sky at the back. She's awfully ugly. Her hair is red
worsted stuck on in skeins; her face is all freckled, as
though she'd been peppered. He has painted each individual
freckle."

"It's not true."

"Her feet are two feet long each. I'm not joking. He
counted her eyelashes before he painted them: she has twenty-
nine on the right, and twenty-six only on the left eye, be-
cause it's rather in perspective. She has blue stockings, and
her ankles—O my! There's no concession to popular notions
about prettiness there. On her nose is perched a bluebottle;
splendidly painted, I will say that. I never saw such a good
blue-bottle out of a butcher's shop. It is said he went to
Newgate market expressly to paint it."

"You're talking nonsense, Maule!"

"No, I ain't. Do you know what it all means? You'd
never guess: it's got some precious deep metaphysical inten-
tion about it—deuced subtle, and that sort of thing; I can't
give it you all. It's something about the human soul stagnat-
ing in the golden fields of life, roused from the stupor of
normal existence, which is sleep, by an accidental sting from
a fly, which represents the slight suffering which rouses the
human understanding to consciousness of its own worthlessness.
It's rather beyond me, but it's something like that."

"You are too absurd to be contradicted."

"All right. It's a great country. Fancy artists being in-
sane enough to paint such things. Fancy an Academy pre-
suming to hang such things! O how lucky there is not a
public idiotic enough to buy such things!"