

AN OLD SONG.

"God hath chosen the weak things of the world."

It was an old and once familiar strain,
A distant echo from the years gone by;
And now we heard its melody again
Beneath a foreign sky.

A company of strangers, met to part,
Spending an evening in the same hotel,
And soft as dew upon each weary heart
The sweet notes fell.

She was a fair and gentle maid who sung,
Who summers seventeen had scarcely told,
And deftly from her practised hand and tongue
The music rolled.

We hushed our busy talk to hear her sing,
The earnest student laid his book aside,
While memory bore us on her noiseless wing
O'er ocean wide.

To that far distant land beyond the sea,
Which we had left on foreign shores to roam,
The music bore us on its pinions free
Back to our home;

Back to the land which we had left behind,
The land of love, and hope, and faith, and prayer,
And showed the faithful hearts and faces kind
That loved us there.

And one there was who heard that soothing song,
Whose heart was heavy with its weight of care,
Embittered by a sense of cruel wrong
No friend might share.

Silently, proudly, had he borne his pain,
Crushed from his wounded heart each softening
thought;
But the sweet tones of that forgotten strain
New feelings brought.

Strange longings rose once more to see the place
Which in his boyhood he had held so dear,
To see once more his aged father's face,
His voice to hear;

To meet again his gentle sister's smile—
(It was she who used to sing this self-same song),
Would not her love his thoughts from sorrow wile,
And soothe his wrong?

How would their faithful hearts rejoice to greet
Their prodigal's return from distant shore,
And bind his heart to many a welcome sweet
To roam no more!

Thus he resolved that, when the morning came
He would arise and homeward wend his way,
And, heedless of the harsh world's praise or blame,
No more would stray.

Little the singer guessed the power that lay
Beneath the accents of her simple song;
Her soothing words should heal him day by day,
And make him strong.

The lengthening twilight stole into the room
And wrapped us in its mantle cold and grey;
But from the listener's heart the deeper gloom
Had passed away.

The song was ended, and the singer rose,
And lights were brought, and books and work re-
sumed;
His spirit tasted longed-for repose
By hope illumed.

And when the morning dawned he homeward turned
Back to his father's house beyond the sea,
The dear old homestead where his spirit yearned
Once more to be.

O happy maid! Go singing thus through life,
Bidding the lost return, the weak be strong;
Thine is a gift with heavenly comfort life,
The gift of song.

Sunday Magazine.

LYDIA HARRIS.

MILLY DOVE.

II.

It was a pleasant June day. Through the open window in Milly's little room a mingled stream of sunshine and the breath of flowers rolled in, filling the chamber with light and perfume. The spiders dived in the crevices of the panelled walls, while their aerial webs shone like delicate threads of silver. The high-shouldered chairs sidled off into the corners, as if they were ashamed of their age, and the great panorama, which stood on one side of the door, glared with its huge, eye-like lens at the green window, like a species of four-legged Cyclops. Milly, as usual, was sitting in the sun. Nestled into that great, high-backed chair, which was a world too large for her, she worked absently at some intricate feminine fabric—a fabric it was that I believe would have driven me crazy if I had been set down to learn its mysteries. There were dozens of strings pinned to various portions of the unhappy old chair. More strings trailed on the floor, whose courses, if followed, would be found to terminate in numberless little balls, that kept continually rolling off into the corners and disturbing the spiders that lived on the first floors of the panels. Then each string had to be unpinned every second minute, and juggled with after some wondrous fashion, until, having been thrust, by a species of magic known only to Milly, through an interminable perspective of loops, it was solemnly repinned to the chair, and then the whole process began again.

Whether it was owing to the complication of this terrible web, or to the preoccupation of her own thoughts, no Penelope ever made so many blunders as Milly Dove, on that June morning. Every now and then the web would come to a stand-still; a minute investigation of certain curious knots would result in the discovery of some heart-rending error. Then the vagrant balls would have to be hunted up in the corners, and the pin would have to come out, and with a pettish toss of the head and a little pouting of the under lip, the child would tediously unravel all the false work and begin again.

Sometimes she would let it drop altogether,

and gaze absently through the open window, as if she were watching the humming-birds that hung before the golden-lipped tubes of the trumpet-honeysuckle; or she would turn toward the desolate panorama, that seemed to gaze reproachfully at her with its single eye, and ponder over the propriety of taking another peep at that bloody Battle of Prague, or the extraordinary representation of the Israelites gathering the manna in the desert,—which said manna seemed to have been made into very respectable and well-baked quatern loaves before it fell.

Milly's reveries, whatever they were, were interrupted by the entrance of Master Dick Bobb, the eldest son of Judge Bobb, who was the richest and greatest man in the village. Master Bobb had acquired—probably by inheritance—the sum of half a dollar, and immediately upon coming into possession of his property had set off for Milly's shop, uncertain as to whether he would purchase her entire stock or simply confine himself to the acquisition of a stick of molasses candy. Milly, with her pleasant smile, was behind the counter in an instant, awaiting the commands of the young squire.

"What's them guns apiece, Miss Milly?" inquired Master Bobb, pointing to a couple of flimsy fowling-pieces that stood in the corner.

"Six dollars apiece, sir."

"I guess you'd take half-price for them if a body was to buy both!" said the young millionaire, half inquiringly, as if he had only to put his hand in his pocket and pull out the money.

"Well," said Milly, "I didn't buy them; they were here when father died, and as they've been so long on my hands, I'd be glad to sell them cheap. You can have them both for seven dollars and fifty cents, if you want them, Master Dick."

"O, I don't want them; only father might, if his own gun was to burst. What's the price of them skates, Miss Milly?"

"A dollar fifty, sir. They are capital skates, and came all the way from York. But what do you want of skates this weather, Master Dick?"

"O, I didn't know but I might lose my own skates next winter, you know, so I thought I'd ask. Are you going to the circus show this evening, Miss Milly? for if you'd like to go, I can get tickets from father, and I'll take you." And Master Dick looked admiringly at the pretty little maiden.

"Thank you kindly, sir; but I don't think Mr. Compton would like me to go. He says the circus is a bad place."

"He don't know nothing," answered Master Dick, surlily; "but if you won't go, I know one who will. Give me an ounce of molasses candy, and half an ounce of peppermint, Miss Milly."

Milly had just opened the drawer containing the confections demanded by Master Dick, and was about measuring out the required quantity of molasses and peppermint, when she saw something through the window that made her suddenly stop. A gentleman was marching slowly down the street. He appeared to be lost in reverie, for his head was thrown back, and his eyes were fixed on vacancy, while he moved on apparently unconscious of the existence of everybody, himself included. He was a pleasant gentleman, too, and seemed to be occupied with pleasing thoughts, for a sort of half-born smile played around his thin lips, seeming always on the point of becoming a laugh but never fulfilling its promise. This gentleman had just arrived opposite to Milly's door, when his reverie was suddenly and most unexpectedly interrupted by a big stone. This big stone was a stone of infamous habits. It lurked under a specious coating of clay, seemingly soft and elastic in its nature, but all the while turning up one sharp and treacherous edge, that to the foot of the tight-booted and unwary pedestrian caused unutterable tortures. It was a Tartuffe among stones,—hypocritical, velvety, inducing confidence,—but woe to the toe that lit upon its venomous edge!

Well, of course this thoughtful gentleman marched straight upon this assassin of a stone. Tschut! A terrible "thud" of toes against the treacherous edge, a wild flinging out of arms in a vain attempt at equilibrium, a convulsive ejaculation which I hope nobody heard, and our pedestrian measured his length in the dust. He rose in a moment, looked reproachfully at the stone as if to upbraid it for its misconduct, then, recalled probably by some unusual sensation, he looked down at his legs. Alas! across his left knee there was a great gaping split in his trousers, through which a wide vista of linen was visible. The poor gentleman gazed ruefully at this scene of destruction; looked around, and then again at his knee; then tried to walk a step or two; stopped, looked at his knee once more, and seemed to meditate profoundly on his position.

While rapt in this painful reverie, the victim of that abominable stone was startled by a very sweet little voice at his elbow. This voice, belonging to Milly Dove, said, "Please, sir, if you will step into the shop, I will mend it for you."

The gentleman turned round, and gave a rapid glance at the sunny, girlish face that looked up into his with such a frank, easy expression, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should fall, and that she should come out and offer to mend his trousers.

"Thank you, child!" said he, simply. "I am very much obliged to you. What is your name?"

"Milly Dove, sir."

"And this is your father's shop, I suppose?" And the stranger glanced round as he entered, with a half-smile at the varied assortment of goods that it contained. It was quite deserted; for Master Dick Bobb, left alone with the candy, had, I regret to say, helped himself and departed.

"No, sir; it's mine!" answered Milly, poking in her pocket for her needle-box.

"Yours! why, you are young to be at the head of an establishment."

"I was sixteen my last birthday, sir. Will you come into the inside room, if you please, so that you may put your foot upon a chair?"

The stranger did as he was bidden, and Milly's nimble fingers were soon busily drawing together the jagged edges of the gaping rent in his injured trousers. He looked down upon her with a wondering gaze.

"I suppose some of your relations live with you here?" he said, after a pause, during which he had been studying her features intently.

"No, sir; I am alone."

"Alone!"

"No; that is—not exactly alone. Mr. Compton lodges up-stairs."

"Mr. Compton?" said the stranger, a sort of dark shadow falling across his face like a veil. Who is Mr. Compton? A young man?"

"A friend of my mother's, sir. He lives here all the year round, and is a dear, pleasant gentleman. He's quite young, too; not more than fifty-six."

"Ah!" and the Knight of the Rueful Breeches seemed to breathe more freely. "That is young indeed! How long have you been keeping shop?"

"Two years, sir. My mother died about that time, and the neighbours were all very good to me when I began. I think it will do now, sir."

"Thanks! thanks!" replied the stranger, scarce giving a glance at the neat seam across his knee. "You are an excellent little work-woman." And as he spoke he seated himself deliberately in Milly's high-backed chair, much to that young lady's surprise. "You have a pretty room here," he continued, looking round him approvingly. "A very pretty room! The sunlight gushing in through that window, and parting, as it were, to make its entrance, the honeysuckles that wave before it, has a charming effect. Is it you who take care of the flowers out there?"

"O, there's not much to do now," said Milly, modestly. "Mr. Compton made the garden, and now I help him a little. They grow there so nicely, the flowers do." And in the spring I freshen up the beds a little, and weed the walks, and clip off the dead branches, and I think the sun and the rain do the rest."

"Hum! that's prettily said!"

Poor Milly grew scarlet at the tone of easy assurance in which this approbation was uttered. This gentleman seemed to have an air of the world about him that somehow alarmed her, she knew not why,—his walk, his way of speech, his manner, were all so different from those of the loutish villagers to whom she had been accustomed. He was even unlike Mr. Compton, who to Milly, until then, had been the highest type of human perfection.

"I'd like to live in a room like this!" muttered the stranger half aloud, gazing round him with evident pleasure. "It has a sweet, thoughtful air; and that garden outside would fill me with poetry. I'd like very much indeed to live here!"

"Then why don't you come?" was on the tip of Milly's tongue; but she suddenly recollected herself in time, and so was silent.

"Did you ever read, Miss Milly Dove?" was the next question, as the visitor turned abruptly to the young maiden.

"No—yes—that is—sometimes," was the alarmed reply.

"Which means that you do not read at all?" said the stranger, gravely.

Milly looked as if she was immediately about to tuck the end of her apron into her eyes, and weep herself away.

"Well," continued he, "that can be remedied; but Mr. Compton should have given you books."

"Sir," said Milly stoutly, quick to espouse her friend's cause, though unable to defend her own,— "Sir, Mr. Compton knows a great deal more, in fact, than any one I ever saw, and everything that he does is right."

The stranger laughed. "You are a chivalrous but illogical little maiden, said he, in a tone of insufferable patronage.

"I may not read much," said Milly, flushing up, "but I have a panorama."

"O, you have a panorama! A panorama of what? Let us see this wonder that supplies the place of books."

"Shall I show it to you, sir?" asked Milly timidly.

"Certainly; but before profiting by your kindness, I must introduce myself formally. I am Mr. Alexander Winthrop, a poor gentleman, with enough for his appetites, and too little for his desires. I am fond of travelling, books and thinking. I am only twenty-five years old, although I look thirty. I live close to New York, and am at present at Blossomdale on business. Now, you know all that I intend you to know about me; so we will go on with our panorama."

This off-hand introduction was delivered with such gravity that poor Milly did not know what to make of it. At first, she thought he was laughing at her, but on looking at his eyes

she could not detect the slightest twinkle of merriment; so she nodded her little head to Mr. Alexander Winthrop, as if to say, "All right, I know you," and then proceeded to introduce him to the panorama.

"This," said Milly in a solemn voice, as she made him put his eye to the peep-hole, and proceeded to pull the strings that lifted the pictures, "this is the invasion of Mexico by the Spaniards. The man in the big boat is Cortes, a very cruel man indeed; and the man on the shore is Montezuma, the King of Mexico, who may be known by his red skin."

"Hem!" coughed Mr. Alexander. "How do you know this this is the invasion of Mexico?"

"Mr. Compton told me, sir."

"O, Mr. Compton told you! Then it's all right, of course. But," he continued, muttering to himself, "if Mr. Compton is right, Cortes is dressed exceedingly like William Penn; and Montezuma would make a capital North American Indian."

"This picture," continued Milly, pulling another string, "represents the great Pyramids of Egypt, built by various kings to serve for their tombs. The ancient Egyptians were far advanced in civilization, while the rest of the globe was plunged in the obscurity of ignorance. Their chief god was Osiris, and the priesthood was so powerful that the government, in truth, was an ecclesiastical one. The ancient Egyptians were in the habit of placing a skeleton at the head of the table when they feasted, for the purpose of reminding them of their mortality, and it is believed that from them first sprang the art of embalming bodies. They were a highly commercial people, and found large markets for the products of their industry and art, in the ancient cities of Greece and Rome."

"Why, child, where did you learn this?" exclaimed Mr. Alexander, going with astonishment on the little maiden, who ran off this farago of learning with the glibness of a lecturer on ancient history, looking all the while exceedingly proud of her knowledge.

"Mr. Compton told me," she answered proudly.

Mr. Alexander could no longer contain himself, but burst into a shout of laughter that made Milly's ears tingle. Her round cheeks flushed, and the tears rose to her eyes. Poor little thing! She thought this Mr. Alexander Winthrop exceedingly rude, yet she could not feel angry with him.

"Well, what's the next picture?" he asked, as soon as he had recovered from his mirth, and without making the slightest apology for his improper behaviour.

"It's the Battle of the Nile," answered Milly, rather sullenly, for she did not exactly like the merciless laugh of her new friend.

"I was there all the while," chimed in Mr. Alexander.

"You couldn't. It happened ever so long ago," answered Milly quickly, delight at finding Mr. Alexander out in a fib.

That gentleman was on the point of going off into another fit of merriment, when a wild prelude on a piano wavered harmoniously through the window. After wandering up and down the keys for a short time, striking out fragments of melodies, and fluttering uncertainly from one to the other, as a butterfly roams from bud to bud, not knowing which to choose, the performer at length struck on a theme that seemed to enter him, and then poured out his entire soul. That it was a voluntary, one could discern in an instant, from the occasional irregularity of the rhythm, and lack of proper sequence between the parts; but it was so wild, so original, so mournful, so full of broken utterances of passion, that one might have imagined it the wail of a lost angel, outside the gates of that paradise which he saw but could not enjoy.

"This is a great performer," said Mr. Alexander, rising. "I must go and see him."

"It's Mr. Compton," cried Milly, eagerly; he does not like to be disturbed. You must not go now."

"I don't care," said Mr. Alexander, very coolly. "Where's the stairs? O, here!—all right!" And before she could detain him, he had bounded up the stairs, and was gone.

"I make no apology for coming in here in this way," said Mr. Alexander, as he pushed open Mr. Compton's door, "because, if you don't want people to rush in on you unannounced, you should not play so well, nor improvise such original themes."

"You are an artist, then?" said Mr. Compton, rising in some surprise at this sudden intrusion. "All such have a right to enter here."

"Enough of an artist to comprehend you," said the young man, bluntly. "You are an artist, Mr. Compton, and have never done any thing but toy with art. More shame for you!"

"Who is my lecturer?" said Mr. Compton rather sternly.

"My name is Alexander Winthrop."

"What I he who—"

"Hush!" cried the young man, lifting his finger; for at that moment Milly appeared, with flushed cheeks, on the threshold of the door. "I am only Alexander Winthrop. I tore my trousers by a fall opposite to this house. This little fairy," pointing to Milly, "mended them for me. I heard you playing; I ran up stairs. Now you know all about me."

"Then you must be the stranger of whom Milly has so often spoken to me, as passing the door every day," said Mr. Compton, with a bland ignorance of the incaution of his remark, and totally heedless of Milly's agonized telegraphings to make him stop.