

From the Forget Me Not.

THE GRAVESTONE WITHOUT A NAME.

By the old Sailor.

"They raised a pillar o'er her grave,
A simple mass of naked stone,
Hewn with such art as sorrow gave,
Ere haughty sculpture yet was known.
There Childhood, as it wandered near,
Gazed with uncertain look of fear,
And checked its noisy sport awhile,
To whisper by the mossy pile."

For neat rural villages and pretty cottages there is, perhaps, no county in England that surpasses the county of Kent. The same remark will apply to its village churches, as they rear their antique heads above the dwellings of honest industry; and, while the finger of the ancient steeple-clock tells of the rapid flight of time on earth, the humble spire, pointing to the bright and glorious heavens, directs the mind to those mansions of the blest within the boundless round of an Eternity.

I dearly love a country ramble, away from the noise and bustle of the busy town: my heart never expands with more benevolence towards all created beings than when standing on some green eminence, with a prospect all around of woods and streams, and sunny vales and spots of rustic beauty; it is then delightful to feel the irrepressible stirrings of nature in the breast; the soul swells with gratitude and praise to the Creator, and the sweet bond of union is expressed:—"My FATHER, OUR FATHER, made them all!"

It is now some few years since duty required my departure from the metropolis, to attend "on his majesty's service" at that famed key to the continent, the town of Dover; but, as the business did not require haste, I determined to "chance the road," walk when I felt inclined, and get a lift when I was weary. The weather was most delightful for the undertaking; it was neither too sultry nor too cold; there was warmth enough to be pleasant, but not sufficient to be oppressive; and thus, meeting with many curious adventures, I pilgrimaged as far as the city of Canterbury; and, after a night of refreshing sleep, sweetened by healthy toil, the early morning saw me traversing away from the main road by a cross-country route towards Waldershire Park, the seat of the Earl of Guilford: a charming place, endeared to me by old remembrances, which cannot even now, though blunted and deadened by time and circumstances, be wholly effaced from the mind. I had passed many happy hours there, hours on which the memory loves to dwell without any other regret than that they flew away too soon.

The sun had reached its greatest altitude, when I stopped to rest and refresh at a village that seemed to stand apart from all the world—so silent and so retired, that Solitude herself could not have selected a more suitable place for habitation: the cottages were small, and almost hidden amidst foliage and flowers that grew in rich luxuriance, mantling the walls with clematis and roses. There was no inn or public house, but I obtained from a kind-hearted dame a draught of new milk, for which she would accept no remuneration, and then entered the hallowed precincts of the church-yard. Death had fulfilled his mission even here: the white stones and the green grass mounds all bore witness to the frailty of human existence.

There is, perhaps, no contemplation better calculated to harmonize the mind and to fill it with holy sentiments than that which is held among the habitations of the dead; it is the link which unites Time with Eternity. Here man, while reading the records of mortality, feels humbled in his pride. Here envy, hatred, and malice, become powerless; for, who could nurture these against his brethren of the dust, with the certainty before him that all must soon mingle with the clods of the valley? It teaches the importance and value of time; for how many are cut down in youth! It shows the swiftness of its flight; for here are memorials of distant generations, who are buried in one common grave. It instructs us in the principles of love and charity to all our fellow creatures, for man is like a thing of nought; his days pass away like a shadow, and "the place which once knew him will know him no more for ever." Yes, even in this delightful spot, Death had been busy; and a hoary-headed grave-digger was forming another receptacle for the body to moulder into dust, as I walked among the tombs and read the memorials engraven on them. But, there was one without a name; it stood in a lone corner, overshadowed by an old elm-tree: there was not even a letter or a date, yet the turf that covered the remains of those who slept below was not neglected. The odoriferous violet and the pale primrose breathed forth their sweet perfumes, looking beautiful amidst the verdant grass that trembled with each wind, as it lightly swept over its surface like a gentle sigh of sorrow.

"And whose is yon nameless grave?" inquired I, addressing the old man, as he stood resting on his spade; "the tomb-cutter has forgot his duty."

"Nay! not so," returned the aged man, mournfully shaking his head; "it was her own request, and the minister complied with it."

"It was a curious whim to wish for a head-stone without a record on it," said I.

The old man smiled, but it was a smile of melancholy musing, and, after a short pause, answered: "You may call it what you please, sir, but, it is a long story, and I've no time to tell it you seeing that I have this grave to finish by the afternoon. But the minister knows all about it; and, as I live, there he is, coming across the stile."

I looked in the direction pointed out, and saw a venerable man approaching, whose countenance was the very emblem of mildness and meekness. A bow from each was a sufficient introduction: in a few minutes we were deeply engaged in conversation relative to the tenant of the lonely grave; and, perceiving that I took very great interest in the circumstances, he invited me to his residence. After dinner, he kindly furnished me with oral information and written memorandums, the result of which I now lay before my readers.

In the romantic village of —, resided a widow lady with her only daughter; it had been their residence for several years; indeed, Ellen Courtney had known no other home, for, in very early life, the death of her father, and the consequent diminution of income, had induced her mother to retire from the world to this secluded but beautiful spot, and here she grew like a simple but lovely flower in purity and in peace. The cottage they inhabited was but of small dimensions, when compared with the mansion in which she had been born, but there was sufficient space for comfort, and they enjoyed that happiness which springs from contentment of mind. An aged domestic, who had lived through a long life in the service of the family, and a maid-servant of younger years, for a considerable length of time made up the whole of their establishment; but, when Ellen had attained the sixteenth anniversary of her birth, a maiden aunt, (who was reported to possess the gift of second sight) came to take up her abode with them. She was a tall, gaunt figure, but with a mild expression of countenance betokening benevolence; and it was only on certain occasions that her features underwent a change at once terrible and terrifying; her eyes assumed a flashing wildness; her cheeks were wrinkled up, as if withered by a sudden blast; her mouth was distended, and showed the decayed teeth, which more resembled the tusks of some carnivorous animal than seemed to belong to a human being. Her cap, thrown off, displayed her long grey hair, descending over her face and shoulders; and the constant variations of look and manner made the spectator shudder as his imagination deemed her to be the creature of a world unknown, or some wretched maniac escaped from the custody of her keepers. She had been well educated; her understanding was richly stored with knowledge, and in all but one thing Ellen found a most able and willing instructress. This was her story.

In her eighteenth year she became acquainted with a young man of splendid acquirements and of unexceptionable person. To her young mind he appeared the model of perfection; his speech was ever in praise of virtue; his conduct was respectful, but affectionate; without pretending to learning or talent, he constantly displayed both; and he seemed to take great pleasure in imparting by the most diffident manner information and instruction to all who listened to him. Margaret de Vere knew that he had been educated for the church, and, a Protestant herself, she thought of no other church than that established by the law of the land. They were much together; and, as Margaret was then in the full vigour of youth and beauty, a mutual attachment very soon grew into that deep, strong, deathless passion, which lasts a whole existence.

Still Albert Hammond spoke not of love, though his looks betrayed how deeply it was rooted in his heart. Thus stood affairs when the devoted maiden ascertained that the object of her soul's regard was of the Catholic faith, and destined to the service of his Creator; that in a short time he should be wedded to his celestial bride, and that even now it was impious on his part to indulge in thoughts, wishes, or sentiments, that were not connected with the sacred office to which he aspired. Bitter was her distress, and heart-felt was her agony, as she beheld the bright structure which fond fancy had raised, and hope had sweetly smiled upon, at once and for ever crushed, and its fragments scattered by the winds of disappointment. Yet she felt that she was beloved, and she nourished the certainty, as a kind mother would her illegitimate offspring, when deserted by all the world.

Albert, too, indulged in somewhat similar feelings; but he was incapable of the high resolves, the determined conduct, which marked the affection of poor Margaret. She knew that Albert had high expectations in his church, and though she would have gladly shared an humble cottage with him as her husband, yet she resolutely resigned all desires of worldly enjoyment so that she might witness the elevation of the man she loved, and be enabled to look up to him as the guide of her future existence. She felt that his love for her was equal to her own for him; but there was the conviction that, though she could not be his wife, yet he was debarred from every other union; and, therefore, she resolved to devote her whole existence to prove the strength of her affection. Her first step was to abjure the creed of her fathers, and to embrace the Catholic faith; and, when Albert became a priest, she entered a nunnery where he often visited, and to which he at length became confessor.

At his death, which happened when he was under thirty years of age, the tie to the religion she had chosen was broken, and she wished once more to return within the pale of the Protestant church; but the superior, becoming acquainted with the fact, at first used gentle persuasions, and, finding them of no avail, resorted to coercion. Reader, this was not in England, for Albert had gone to Rome, and thither had Margaret followed him. It was during a confinement that her intellects became somewhat disordered, and she was supposed to have acquired that spirit of divination which was subsequently exercised in so remarkable a manner as to induce a belief of supernatural agency. At length she escaped; and, when her relatives had long considered her as the inmate of a grave, she once more appeared among them—but, oh how changed! Such was the being who, at the expiration of several years, became the companion and instructress of Ellen Courtney.

I must now carry the imagination of my readers to a beautiful summer evening, when the eastern horizon, with its gloomy twilight, offered a striking contrast to the glorious glowing tints of vermillion and gold that flushed the western sky. It was one of those realities in scenery in which the poet and the painter love to luxuriate; and never was there a spot, even in the bright and rosy clime of Italy, better adapted to the enjoyment of such an evening, than that on which Ellen Courtney resided, and more particularly the small alcove that formed the entrance to the garden at the back part of the cottage, clustering with flowers that wantonly flung their fragrance to the passing winds.

And there stood Ellen, her delicate and finely-proportioned hand resting on the shoulder of a manly looking youth of some twenty years of age, whose strong arm was twined round the slender waist of the fair girl, their eyes beaming more and more with the delight of ardent affection, as the deepening shades gradually grew darker and darker to screen them from each other's observation. Nor was the interview less dear in its interests from being a stolen one. Edmund Foster was a noble-looking fellow, one on whom Nature would have conferred an exalted title in her peerage, were she accustomed to make those honorary distinctions. His countenance bespoke the hardy seaman, and, though the expression was that of open candour and benevolence, yet there was at times a look of such fixed determination, and scorn of danger, as made him rather the object of reverence than love. His dress was scrupulously neat; the snow-white trousers and waistcoat, the blue surtout, and the black handkerchiefs knotted over a fine linen shirt; in short, all displayed marks of taste that assumed a careless ease; and his manners and knowledge manifested a superior education.

But, who was Edmund Foster? Of his connexions and situation in life Ellen was wholly ignorant; he had rendered her an important service by a timely rescue from the hands of a gang of smugglers, running their crop from the coast. Ellen had strayed far from home to an eminence that commanded a view of the distant sea: here she had lingered, watching the setting sun, as he cooled his fervid beams in the azure wave, gorgeously blending the intense blue with his golden rays. Evening hurried on—a rich autumnal evening—the white sails on the bosom of the ocean gradually disappeared in the thickening gloom. The Foreland was throwing its dazzling watch-light far over the waters, to guide the course of the adventurous mariner amidst those restless sands, the death-bed of thousands. Still Ellen lingered, for now imagination peopled the vacant space with objects of her mind's creation. She thought that the moon would soon rise, and that she should enjoy her walk back to the cottage, lighted by its pale lumina, which would shed a pleasing influence on her ardent spirit. She knew not the prognostics of the weather; she was not aware that the red glare of the heavens on which she had gazed with admiration, foretold the coming storm; she was unconscious that the rapid breeze, as it danced with fitful gusts over the rolling swell, gave warning to the seaman that ere long it would burst with fury on his head, and lash the billows into maddened rage.

The moon rose, and Ellen returned on her path to the peaceful cottage, but the howlings of the rushing tempest were in the air; the lightnings played with fearful splendour among the blackened clouds; the pale luminary of night was shrouded in funereal darkness; the rain began to fall in heavy drops; the way was dark and dreary; and Ellen was alone. Agitated and alarmed, the maiden approached a barn-like building, which she had often passed unheeded, but which now seemed to offer a kindly shelter from the storm. The door, however, defied her efforts to open it, and she was near sinking with affright, when the noise of horses' feet upon the road attracted her attention. Hope revived her courage, but it was to sink her into deeper terror and distress, when a band of armed men surrounded the spot where she was standing, and one, abruptly flinging himself from the back of his strong animal, clutched the lovely girl by the arm.

"How now!" said he, "who have we here? what, turning spy, my lass? 'Twere pity but you'd a better calling."

"'Tis some poor gipsy wanderer," exclaimed another, "and it would be misfortunate to harm her, Ned, seeing that them cattle can read the book of fate."

"The book of humbug," said a third, dismounting; "the