

A BIRD-BALLAD.

(From the Danish of Henrik Ibsen.)

BY NED P. MAH.

We walked, one lovely spring day,
In the avenue up and down:
More alluring far the shady way
Than a street in the gaudy town.

The West wind whispered softly—
The sky was very blue—
A bird sang low in the hidden tree
To her children, as mothers do.

I painted poet pictures,
Bright with many a sportive word;
Brown eyes made laughing strictures
And glistened as they heard.

Then, 'mid the foliage, high laughter
We heard and chattering plain.
But we kissed good-bye, and after
That parting, met never again.

And, as I wander lonely
Up and down in the avenue
Of the feathered small folk, only
For peace and for quiet I sue.

For Mistress Sparrow—the truthless!
Made a ballad of our love,
And set it to music, ruthless,
As she sat by her nest above.

With the tale the bird-world is ringing,
And under cottage eaves
Each unfledged songster is singing
Of that spring day 'mid the leaves.

ONLY A DREAM.

BY MRS. M. A. DENISON.

A richly furnished room in one of the principal streets of London, West End.

Its inmates were a beautiful woman, a handsome but somewhat haggard-looking man.

The latter stood opposite the mirror, and, though his face was turned towards it, he seemed to experience no great satisfaction at the countenance that met his gaze.

The two had evidently been arguing some point, for the woman's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were humid.

"Do you think I would forego my engagements for a foolish dream?" he asked.

"To please me, dear Ralph. You seldom do anything to please me, of late," she pleaded.

"Bah! Look at your wardrobe," was his response.

"Oh! dresses and money—yes; but I counted upon more than that when I left my father's home. Consider, I gave up everything."

"Yes; and when will you cease to taunt me about it?"

"Oh, Ralph, I never taunt you—at least, I never mean to. Forgive me—I am thoughtless at times. You know I love you; but don't you suppose I see"—and the charming face grew more eloquent as the dark eyes were brimmed with tears—"that you never cared for me as I care for you? There, don't look that way. Only listen to me this once—stay home only to-day! Lisetta is coming, and the poor girl will think it so strange if you are not here to welcome her. Tomorrow the danger will be passed—tomorrow I shall be happy again."

"A woman's whim," he responded, slowly drawing on his gloves. "The thing is simply impossible. I made the engagement. Besides, I'm out of funds, and you know what that means to me—I may say to us—while in these very expensive apartments."

"Ralph, you know I would willingly go into the meanest—"

"Oh, stop, stop! No more of that. I know that you don't know anything about it. You never lived in a mean place in your life. You never had a wish ungratified, ever since you have known me, I am proud to say, and you never shall. That is why I must go out to-night."

"Oh, Ralph, stop this way of living! I will be poor with you—live in lodgings, leave these splendid miseries, go anywhere—and love you to the end, if you will give it up."

"You talk to the winds, woman—I might say to the whirlwinds. If you continue in this strain much longer—"

"We might go back home," continued the woman, in a broken voice. "My father cannot have cherished anger all this time."

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, sonorously. "I think I see the old patrician standing on the rug with both hands extended; methinks I hear him say, 'I forgive you; bless you, my children.' Fancy! the son of an ordinary actor, whose family were mountebanks from the beginning—the man he cursed. But"—his voice grew low and hard—"I was not the only one he cursed. Don't you see it was working out?"

"Don't talk that way, Ralph, for heaven's sake, or I shall lose my reason," and with a half-smothered moan, the woman sank into a chair.

"Why not go back upon the stage? I am willing; anything for an honest living."

"You forget that I am prejudiced against hard work," he said, turning half-aside. "I need a fortune at my back, with my luxurious tastes and my beggarly experience. I thought I should have one," he added, bitterly, "but there I was mistaken."

"Yes, but who knows what may happen? My father loved me once—there is no one to take my place; let us try—"

Then, frightened at the forbidding expression of his face as he turned upon her, she shrank back, only adding, "If you would only stay home to-day—to-night!"

Oh, if you knew how fearfully real that dream was!"

"Why, did I shoot you, or myself?" he asked coolly. "Did I scatter my brains (quite an unnecessary commodity in my business) all over the floor? Bah! what weak things women are! I have had occasion to remark that before."

"Then you will go! You will not heed me!"

"I will go. I will not heed you."

"Then, Ralph, good-bye; I shall never see you alive."

He burst into a low, musical laugh.

"How well she would look in tragedy!" he said, posing his head one side, contemplating her with half-closed eyes. "My dear, you would have made your fortune on the stage. Why didn't we go at once into legitimate business?"

"Will you go now?" she asked, her face brightening. "I will do my best; come, try me! see what an apt scholar I shall make—anything—anything but this terrible uncertainty!"

"Ah, but, my dear, there's an easier way to fill my purse. When that is full of the hard, yellow rocks—"

She made a gesture of despair, and hid her face in her hands.

"If this is to be our last interview, hadn't we better play a little at the sentimental? Shall I kiss you at parting?"

She sprang up and flung her arms about his neck, bursting into a passion of tears.

"No nonsense!" he said, almost angrily, as he disengaged himself from her embrace.

"You will never speak to me that way again," she said, with an emphasis so mournful that it startled even him.

"What was the dream?" he asked almost in spite of himself. "I can at least hear it; but I shall not heed it, remember."

"It is not much to tell, only"—and she looked up with a shudder—"the horror of it—the horror that never leaves me! I dreamed you were in a room that seemed to me to be the apartments of a palace, it was so exquisitely furnished. It was an oblong room, and pictures and statuary, and hangings that glittered with gold, and panels painted in the most exquisite colors, met my sight everywhere. I did not stop to look at these things, however. My attention was riveted on a long table richly draped in red. It did not seem a dinner, and yet there were men and women seated along both sides, and you were in the centre. Suddenly I saw at your back a tall, thin, evil-looking man, whose face held a terrible fascination. He seemed to be full of power, and his eyes gleamed and darted fire, like the eyes of a basilisk. The awful eyes were fixed on you, following your every movement. I tried to warn you, but my tongue seemed powerless to move, and my limbs were palsied. Oh, how those evil eyes followed you! And presently I saw what broke the spell of my silence—that in one hand he held a shining dagger, and was only waiting his opportunity to strike you to the heart!"

"At last"—she rose from the chair, white as death—"at last the blow fell, and at that moment the clock struck—it was striking when I waked up—but the hands seemed to stand at a quarter of three. I screamed, but you neither heard me nor saw me—and then I awoke."

"And whose was the face?" he asked, in a low voice.

If he felt any emotion as he listened to her description of a place he knew too well, he gave token of none.

"How can I tell, except to describe it! A narrow, high forehead; black, curling hair; eyes brighter than diamonds; a look of assured power; thin but handsome lips; tall, sinuous. Ah, I shall never forget that man—never!"

"No. He don't let people forget him, once they have seen him," her husband said; and then looked up with a keen, almost frightened glance, as he still stood smoothing his hat with his gloved hand.

"Oh! then you know him! My dream means something. Now you will stay—oh, Ralph, you will stay?" she added, with supplicating voice and eyes.

"Indeed, I will not stay," he made answer, impassively. "I'll go if only to show you of what tangible stuff dreams are made. So farewell, and forget—all you can," he added, in a lower voice, and somewhat impressively. "If you don't see me again, why, farewell, and meet your fate as bravely as you met me."

He went out, humming and laughing, leaving his wife sitting motionless, a nameless horror in her eyes, a faintness at her heart that she could not conquer.

How much she had dared, how much she had done for that handsome, wayward man! How dearly she had loved him, how fervently believed in him! And even yet it seemed to her that if only once she could compel that better self of his to come out into the light, she might yet save him from the curse that seemed hovering over him.

She believed in her dream, rather vision, she called it; and now he had gone to his doom, leaving her to suffer alone.

There was nothing to be done but to endure her loneliness. If she could but have followed him, as a strange yearning possessed her to do now! But how? He had taken a cab at the door, and she was not hardy enough to venture out, particularly as a thick fog had suddenly sprang up, obscuring the streets.

For some moments she walked the room, her hands clasped, her breast heaving with emotion.

"To be in this great city alone!" she murmured; "and he leaves me so often alone!"

She went to the grand piano and struck a few chords wildly; they seemed only to recoil in sound against her heart. She took up a dainty violin, but the tones held no melody for her. Suddenly the door was thrown open.

"A lady," said the pompous servant, with a doubtful glance at the veiled figure.

Mrs. Forester came forward with a cry of almost rapture.

Any one would have been welcome in that supreme hour—how welcome then his sister, whom she had never seen before!

"I thought Ralph would be at the depot," said the young girl, after her wraps had been taken off. "You don't know what a time I had finding you. I am afraid he is by no means a model husband," she added, laughing, little knowing what pain she gave. "He used to think we girls never needed him, but, indeed, I think he should have met me."

"He would, I think, but for an engagement that called him away," said Mrs. Forester, a sudden pang at her heart.

Now perhaps she could while away the hours of that dreadful evening!

"How pretty you are! and what lovely rooms!" said the young girl, looking about her. "Do you make tea yourself?"

"Oh, yes, always," was the reply, as the woman set a table daintily for the visitor; "Ralph likes the tea I make better than any other."

"I should think he would," said the young girl, admiringly; she was herself very pretty, a blonde, with soft, shining eyes and fluffly, golden hair. "Do you know I was so surprised when I got your letter, saying I must come here!"

"Pray, why?" asked her hostess, looking up with a smile.

"Well, because I am going to play in London, and came on with a troupe," was the candid answer. "Don't you see, we all thought you married beneath you."

"Oh, don't say that!" and Mrs. Forester drew her breath hard.

"Yes, of course we knew you did, for you were rich and of an old family—and besides, it was foretold."

"What was foretold?" queried the hostess, growing pale.

"Everything as it has happened, so far," was the reply. "One night there was a dreadful storm—I shall never forget it—thunder, hail, lightning, and rain and snow. Father came home in the midst of it, leading a half-blind old gypsy who had lost her way, and told us to kind to her. She seemed very grateful, and in return for food and shelter told all our fortunes. Ours—I mean we girls—were only commonplace, but Ralph's was wonderful. He was to marry a great beauty and an heiress—to be fortune's favorite in every way—but in a certain year to meet with an accident, unless very careful, which would change his whole career."

The woman listened with a smothered cry. "Do I frighten you?" asked the young girl.

"No, no—go on. I was thinking," was the response.

"Well, sure enough, he married a beauty and an heiress—so that part of it came true. The other—well, if he is very careful, he will avoid that, perhaps."

"And he would go out to-night," groaned her listener.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked the girl Lisette, glancing up in surprise. "Do you know you frighten me, you look so ill."

"I feel ill. I have had a dreadful dream that worries me; but come, let us talk of other things. Tell me about yourself."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell, scarcely. I came on with a troupe, and it gave me some importance to have a brother living in London," said Lisette, setting her cup down. "It's so nice to come here and be welcome. I know all the others are envying me because they have to go into common lodgings. And then I haven't seen Ralph for three long years, and he was always my favorite. I suppose he don't have to play now."

Her hostess smiled bitterly at the double significance of the word as she answered that he had given up the stage.

"And is he as handsome as ever?" the girl went on. "I used to think him as beautiful as an angel."

"I still think him handsome," was the answer. "You will find him very little changed."

"But you're not happy," thought the girl. "I'm afraid you're neither of your happy. Shall I sing for you?" she asked, aloud. "I do nearly all the singing parts. They say I have a very good voice," she added, naively.

"Above all things I should like to hear you sing, if you will not mind my walking about. I am restless to-night."

"Of course, walk all you please; and I will see if I am in good voice. It was such a dreadful voyage, and I am to make my appearance in public to-morrow night."

The evening passed wearily away to Mrs. Forester. Hour after hour she looked for her husband, who sometimes, if he had a run of luck, came home early. An indefinable anxiety weighed her down.

As for Lisette, the girl used all her efforts to amuse her. There were so many beautiful things to see and talk about, that she would not listen to any excuses for retiring.

"I don't usually go to bed till twelve," she said, "and sometimes a good deal later, when I go through a play. Do you think Ralph has gone to the theatre?"

"I am quite sure he has not."

There came a knock at the door. Lisette opened it, hoping to see her brother; then looked back with a white, scared face, as she said, in a hoarse whisper:

"He says—they've brought him home."

"Dead!" shrieked the wife, and mercifully fell senseless.

It was well she did. She did not see that ghastly burden, nor bear the decision of the surgeon who was called in, that the man was dead.

When she came to herself Lisette was weeping over her, and the landlady deploring that such a dreadful thing should have happened to her respectable mansion.

"Lisette, don't leave me!" cried the unhappy woman.

"Never, dear! I am so glad I was with you."

"And he—oh, my husband!"

"Hush, dear!"—and the girl fell sobbing on her bosom.

"I must go and see him," said her sister, lifting herself from the lounge where she had fallen.

"Not for worlds!" was she agonized reply.

"I tell you I will. I am his wife—you shall not keep me from his side."

"But dear, there are watchers there."

"It makes no difference! I must see my husband. Have they had a doctor?"

"Yes."

"And there is no hope?"

"No hope, dear."

"Dead! Is my Ralph dead! Oh, my darling! my idol! God has indeed punished me!"

She went slowly into the room beyond. How still and stark and white, that figure under the sheet!

Two men sat by the open bay-window, keeping each other's spirits up. They were smoking, and that pungent odor seemed to offend her.

"How little they care!" she sighed.

Lisette had followed her only to the door, then shrank back, leaving the woman alone.

"Oh, my darling! if you had only listened to me!" she moaned, as she turned down the covering. "Why wouldn't you?"

She leaned over, fixing her eyes upon the pallid face.

Long and steadily she gazed, holding her breath, both hands pressed over her breast as if to restrain the rapid pulsations of her heart.

The moments passed. Once she looked up at the clock. It wanted a quarter to three, and then, throwing herself on her knees, she took her position close to the body, and watched and watched with strained eyes.

What did she see? The men had flung their cigars out of the window and changed their places, looking in awe at the strange tableau. The man seemed marble on the bed, the woman seemed marble at his side.

"Hush!" she said, with uplifted finger.

Then one cry rang through the room that brought everybody in the house to the door.

"There is life here!—life! I tell you!" cried the wife hoarsely and rapidly. "Run one of you for help. He is not dead! Go quickly!—waste no time!—for who knows—who knows! Oh, fly, fly, for help!"

Both watchers left the room precipitately. Others came in, and with careless, pitying words mocked her hopes.

"I care not if he is cold, rigid, senseless—there is life there—I saw it! Bring me fire, a coal, anything that burns, and see if his flesh does not blister!"

And still they did not believe her. Two surgeons came—by that time they had applied the tests, and behold the dead man opened his eyes.

Terrible was the story he told, when at last they roused him from that death-like trance. He had been conscious every moment from the time they pronounced him dead.

When his wife came, he felt the deadly torpor stealing over his senses, but her voice, her lamentation, her close watch revived and heartened him, and he made almost superhuman efforts to show her that he was not dead.

That close watching saved him, and made him another man. To the wife he had alighted, wronged, insulted, he owed his life, and he had manliness enough to remember and confess it.

His wound healed rapidly, and when, a month later, they were recalled to America, on the death of Mrs. Forester's father, he was able to accompany her.

A late repentance had resulted in the alteration of the will in their favor, and Forester found himself in possession of the wealth he had so long coveted.

But more to him than all the riches that now poured in upon him was the love that had so guarded and restored him, and of which he found himself unworthy.

The gambler, who had been accused more than once of unfair dealing by Ralph Forester, and whose losses had kindled an animosity long-cherished against his victim, till it resulted in a blow from the dagger of an assassin was never heard from, though a reward was offered for his arrest.

Lisette was sent by her brother to Italy, where she is still pursuing her studies, and bids fair to astonish the world with her marvelous voice.

MR. HENRY IRVING will be tendered a public banquet in London on the eve of his departure for America, at which Lord Coleridge, who is also coming hither, will preside.