Poetry.

BACKBONE.

When you see a low-mortal
Who has no fixed and fearless views,
Running in the skirts of others,
Kicking in their cast off shoes,
Bowing low to wealth and favor,
With an abject, uncovered head,
Ready to retract or favor,
Willing to be drove or led;
Walk yourself with firmer bearing,
Throw your moral shoulders back,
Show your spine has nerve and marrow—
Just the thing which his must lack.
A stronger word
Was never heard
In sense and tone
Than this—Backbone.

When you see a theologian,
Hugging close some ugly creed,
Fearing to reject or question,
Dogmas which his priest may read,
Holding back all noble feeling,
Choking down each manly view,
Caring more for forms and symbols,
Than to know the good and true,
Walk yourself with firmer bearing,
Throw your moral shoulders back,
Show your spine has nerve and marrow—
Just the thing that he must lack.
A stronger word
Was never heard
In sense and tone
Than this—Backbone.

When you see a politician
Crawling through a contracted holes,
Begging for some fat position,
In the ring or at the polls;
With no sterling manhood in him,
Nothing stable, broad or sound,
Destitute of pluck or ballast,
Double-sided all around,
Walk yourself with firmer bearing,
Throw your moral shoulders back,
Show your spine has nerve and marrow—
Just the thing which his must lack.
A stronger word
Was never heard
In sense and tone
Than this—Backbone.

A modest song and plainly told—
The text is worth a mine of gold;
For many men must sadly lack
A noble stiffness in the back.

LAST WORDS.

And have they told you all? Ah yes, I see
At last you know it—know that I must die,
Don't tremble so; but come and sit by me,
And hold my hand and be as calm as I.
Bend nearer for my voice is faint and low
And I would tell you something ere I go.

I've known, a long time now, that in that heart,
Whose every beat was music to my ear,
I've held the second place. Nay, do not start;
I would but tell you—not reproach you, dear.
You loved her first; and thought with all your will
You strove to conquer it, you love her still.

'Twas hard to bear—to know that she whose whim
Had blighted all the sunshine of your life,
Could make your cheek flush and eyes grow dim
E'en with a word; I could not, though your wife
I struggled hard for your love; but no!
I could not win it, yet I love you so.

The hope that lighted up my path so long,
Has flickered and died out. I could not live
Without your love, but you did me no wrong—
I could not gain what you had not to give.
Nay, weep not; I am happy now I see
You'll love my memory better far than me.

The strife has been so long, the way so drear,
I feared my patience and my trust in God
Would fail; but now I see the end so near,
'Tis easier far to bow beneath the rod.
The night is nearly o'er; the morn is nigh;
Thank God for taking me! Dear love good-bye.

Tales and Sketches.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHAPTER I.

In one of the most retired of those quiet courts with which the City abounds, stood the counting-house and business premises of the wealthy Russia merchants, Messrs Harvey & Harrington, albeit the former name had ceased to be represented in the firm for many years, and the extensive affairs of the house were carried on under the sole guidance and management of the latter gentleman.

There was not a man in the City of any note or standing to whom Joseph Harrington was unknown, and scarcely one whom he did not know; regularly as the hour might be he was found on the Russia walk on Change; and few were the institutions or princes with which business connected him, abroad, he was wealthy, even for the City, and there at home a quiet unassuming one.

It was Christmas Eve, 1792; Harrington in his private room; the senior clerks had already left the office, and the younger ones only loitered about, wishing, yet fearing to go, until the head of the house had departed. Just as their patience was beginning to give way, a stranger entered, and desired to see Mr. Harvey.

"Harrington you mean, I suppose," said one.

"Well, well! no matter; either will do," said he.

A few moments afterwards the stranger stood before the merchant, and the clerks were dismissed for the evening.

"So you are come then!" said the merchant, who had evidently expected his visitor.

"Do I ever fail you?" replied the other. The words were uttered half sarcastically, half cringingly; as though the speaker were hesitating whether he could safely gratify his spleen or not.

"Tush! let us to business. What have you done, Charlton?" for that was the stranger's name.

"Little enough, Mr. Harvey—Harrington I mean," said he; eyeing Mr. Harrington with evident satisfaction, as he saw him writhe at the mention of his late partner's name. "I have not seen him."

"Who?" inquired Mr. Harrington.

"Who!" repeated his visitor, slowly; "Why, who can I mean? There is but one between you and me—one tie only, between the wealthy associate of nobles and the ——" He hesitated, and then added, in a lower tone, "We mean Louis Harvey."

"Hush, hush!" and Harrington started to his feet, and cautiously opened the door of his private room, to be sure that no one lingered in the clerk's office. All there was silence and darkness; and, apparently satisfied, he returned to his own room.

"Richard Charlton," he hissed forth, rather than uttered, "will nothing satisfy you? Name any sum; only free me from this state of torture and suspense."

"Joseph Harrington, I have told you twice before that I cannot be bought—once only did you tempt to buy me—but no more. Besides," he added, "with my habits, any sum would be soon gone; and I prefer having so safe a bank as the guilty conscience of a princely merchant gives me."

The calm sneering tone in which Charlton said this, stung the listener to the quick, and he cast on the speaker a look of the deepest hatred; but it was evident that he feared to give full vent to his feeling.

"Does he live?" he asked impatiently.

"I told you before that I have not seen him."

"Fool! answer me, or——"

"Nay, nay, be not too impatient, you know we need not hurry now—it is twenty years—ay, past twenty years, since we were obliged to do that. However, Louis Harvey does live, and may—mark you, Harrington—may come back again; and shall, unless my price, the only one which can buy me, is paid."

"Lives!—come back again!—and the merchant repeated the words slowly some half-dozen times; at length as though a gleam of light broke in, he exclaimed—"The proofs!—show me your evidence of this."

"Such evidence is too important to be carried about with one. Do you not feel it so?" and he glanced at the almost pallid man, whose head was sunk in his hands. "However, I have proof—the best possible proof. Listen!—

"When, some years ago, I became your tool——"

"Wretch! must I be tortured with your vile story again? Give me your proofs, and go."

This interruption was apparently unnoticed, and Charlton continued,—"Then I was only erring; what I am now, you well know. True, you saved me from a prison and disgrace, and I am still captain of my own ship—but at what a price? That which all men value, and I did once, is now as nothing to me! Twenty years ago old Harvey had been dead two years—he was your friend, was he not, as well as partner? You were the guardian of his boy, and his boy's fortune. That fortune was to be yours, if he died before attaining his majority; and you might have remained only a second-rate merchant. You were not rich then. The war has since done that for you; you were only ambitious. Well, then did I first know you. I was living far beyond my means; and, what boots it to quibble, I did forge an acceptance to a bill to meet a pressing demand. I hoped to raise the money by play, but fortune was against me. In two days the bill would become due. I applied to every one of my friends for the loan, but none could or would help me. At length you, who had remarked, as you said, my evident mental anxiety, gradually elicited (for I was still proud) that I was on the verge of ruin; but even then you did not know what I called ruin. You did not assist me. The day came on which the bill was due. I knew not in whose hands it was; but you had obtained it—how, I knew not—to my surprise and gratitude. I was grateful at the moment you brought it to me, for then I was meditating how to escape. Ere I could express myself you stopped me. 'This is a forged acceptance,' you said. My confusion condemned me. I was in your power—an abject—oh, how abject—for guilt makes us all abject, does it not? You took that now. Then you offered me a safety, the terms—(that I should rid you of a boy, your friend's son; (and he dwelt the laugh gloatingly, on the words) not injuring him, but only ridding you of him. Weeks passed ere you worked on my fears and won me to your purpose. Specious, plausible reasons did you give me, and threatenings too. At last I consented. The boy, Louis Harvey, was sent by my hand to Holland; the ship was wrecked and the boy (so the paper said) was drowned. Thus far I served you."

"Peace! I will not hear you farther," exclaimed Mr. Harrington.

"You will not? I have something new yet, and you shall listen. I returned to be married—to a fortune as you know; but you do not know how deeply I loved, nor how I will be revenged."

"What is this to me! Give me proofs of the boy," said the merchant.

"Give me my wife? She was mine in heart, at least; give me her again. Why, when I sought her, did she spurn me? why brand my ears with her scorn? Who taught her to hate me, and showed, nay, forced upon her the proof of my crime? Answer me that? 'Twas you!—you, Joseph Harrington!—you killed her, and I will have revenge!"

"Liar!" the indignant merchant exclaimed.

In an instant Charlton's arm was raised, but as suddenly it dropped again, and, by an immense effort he became calm. "I will not strike you yet," he said. "I will not strike you now. The boy lives!—give me my price, and he shall not trouble you again."

"Name it," said Mr. Harrington.

"You have a daughter—give me back a wife!"

The passion previously expressed in the countenance of the merchant was very calmness, compared with his feelings now. He did not speak; words would have been too feeble for his rage. He only looked at Charlton, but that look carried such conviction to the mind of the other, that he hastily attempted to soften, by words, the abruptness of his proposition. Harrington stopped him by a gesture of impatience, and then with a violent effort said—"Dare so much as even to hint at this again, and were I to be ruined tenfold, nothing should save you from my vengeance! Remember, you are in my power, not I in yours."

The laugh with which the captain greeted this outburst fell witheringly on the merchant's heart.

"The document of your safety and my doom," said Charlton, "is not in your possession; it is here! How I obtained it, matters not. Thus do I release myself!" and he held up to the astonished gaze of Harrington the forged bill. It was but a glance; a moment more, and the flames were rapidly destroying all evidence of Charlton's first crime.

Harrington was thunderstruck. It was too true; he had now no hold on his accomplice; his head swam, his brain seemed on fire. Two things only were present to him—disgrace, and the scorn and contempt of those over whom he had not unfrequently lorded it with a high hand; or else the sacrifice of his only child. Was it for this he had swerved from rectitude? was this the end of his ambition? He sat musing painfully; how long he knew not. The receding footsteps of Charlton only roused him; he saw him leave the room, heard the door slammed violently, and relapsed into a state of such deep abstraction, that when he awoke to the world again, the lights were burning low and flickering in their sockets, and the last sparks were just lingering in the darkened grate. Slowly he arose, and with heavy, hesitating steps, left the house.

CHAPTER II.

Bright and sparkling shone the stars in the quiet sky, and scarce less brightly did the frost-stars sparkle from pane to pane in the windows, of the busy shops. It was a glad night for the many. Every one seemed bent on being happy; and when people try to be so, it is a hard matter to prevent it. The cold clear air seemed to have given a glow of health even to the most care-worn; and light and frequent were the bursts of merriment that greeted the passers by. Perhaps there were few, who on that night were not disposed to meet the pleasure more than half-way; but such was not the case with the City merchant. The sounds of mirth jarred on his ears; every laugh was discordant to him; and he inwardly cursed the jocund crowds who impeded his footsteps. At length he hailed a coach (there were no cabs in those days), and directing the man to one of the most fashionable quarter of the town, was speedily set down before a spacious and noble-looking old mansion. The door was opened by his footman, and Joseph Harrington was at home. Snatching a light from a servant, he was hurrying towards the library, when a small fair hand rested on his arm, and a voice which always had been music to him, now said, half reproachfully, "What, will you not speak to me, father?" Instantly however, the tone was changed to one of deep and tender solicitude. "Dear father, you are ill? What has happened? How very pale you are; and, oh! how strangely you look on me!"

Almost rudely he seized his daughter's fair arm, and hurried the speaker into the library. There was a small study beyond it, and there he led her; then, locking the door, he flung himself into a chair. Alarmed, she, his only child, knelt down by him, and he repulsed her. His mind was made up, and he almost ceased to love the child he meant so wrongly. He had pondered on his homeward way, and felt he could not sacrifice himself. He dared not meet the scorn he would have heaped on others; and yet he knew that gentle being's heart and faith were plighted to one most worthy of her—one whom even he was proud to look upon as his future son-in-law. This was a man to be loved. Deeply, dotedly, did he love his child; and had he been asked, he would have unhesitatingly asserted his willingness to suffer all things for her, rather than be less than happy in her love. He had not tested. He despised temptations, for he had not known them. Now he was tried, and before the shrine of self. His natural feelings were rapidly withering, like the green grass which the lava of the awakened volcano scorches into ashes.

"Clara," he said, "you are my child, my only one; do you love your father?"

There was no reproach in the eyes which were fixed on his face. There was only love, trusting child-like love, saddened with anxiety.

"How very ill you are!" and the fair young face was weeping bitterly on his bosom. "Let me send for some one—indeed you must;" and she would have rung, but he stopped her.

"Not yet—not yet; I shall be better soon—and I must speak to you; but no, I cannot do so now—presently—presently—kiss, dearest—there, I am better now."

Some few moments passed, and the silence was only broken by the low sobs of the daughter, as she watched her father's features. Presently he said, "Has Arthur been with you to-day?"

"Oh! yes; we rode as usual, this morning, and to-night he promised to call again. How very late he is; and this is Christmas Eve, too. Come, let us go into the drawing-room; this room is quite chilling."

It was Christmas Eve! Well did he know that; and that the morrow would dawn on him, perhaps, a ruined man. He must not hesitate.

"Clara," he said, "do you indeed love Arthur so very dearly?"

"My father, can you ask me?"

How he shrank from that calm look, it was but for a moment. "You must not wed him," he observed; "you must——"

"Not wed him!—not wed Arthur! Have you not promised? am I not his?"

"No!" he thundered. "Listen to me; if you wed him, I, your father, am ruined." Then, lowering his voice, he added, "You would not see me beggared, nay, degraded, in the eyes of all?"

How very pale she looked; and then the rich blood crowded to her temple and her throat, and she seemed choking;—a moment more, and Harrington held his fainting daughter in his arms.

Clear and loud rang the hall-bell, reaching even to that study; and the father knew it was Arthur's step that trod so rapidly, the stone stairs. He heard him reach the drawing-room and enter; and then he carefully laid his daughter on a sofa, and rang the bell. A servant soon appeared, and desiring the attendance of his daughter's maid, he had her conveyed to her room, when, having ordered a physician to be sent for, he hastened to join Arthur, who was impatiently awaiting his betrothed.

Arthur Bellingham was the favorite and junior partner of an old banker. Many years had elapsed since the day he first entered the office as clerk; and now, by his unremitting attention to business, and the strict integrity of his life, he held the enviable position of partner in the wealthy firm of Livingston and Co. He was an orphan, said to be the only son of old Livingston's oldest friend; and this, in some measure, accounted to the clerks for his rapid rise. However, be that as it may, certain it is, that the old man looked upon him with more than common feelings of kindness.

When the door of the drawing-room opened, Arthur was hastening towards it, hoping and expecting to meet Clara; but the haggard countenance of the father was all that he encountered.

"Clara is not quite well this evening," said the latter, with forced composure.

"Not well?" said Arthur. "Why, what is the matter? she was quite well when I left her this morning. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, no; too much excitement. She is resting now, and will be quite herself to-morrow. It is a pity she cannot go with you to-night to Mr. Livingston's; but that need not keep you away."

"Oh, I shall not go; and yet," he added, "perhaps I must. It would be the first Christmas Eve I should have missed for many years; and I must not disappoint him."

"Oh, go by all means," urged Harrington, who was most anxious for his departure. "Clara is only a little fatigued, and will see you in the morning. You had better go. I will remain with her, so you can excuse us both." After some little persuasion Arthur did go.

Strange it was, but he did imagine that there was less cordiality in the shake of the hand, with which Mr. Harrington parted from him—less frankness in his manner—something cold and constrained; and yet he instinctively shrank from admitting it to himself. It seemed almost a wrong to Clara, to suppose that any one belonging to her could be unfriendly towards himself. However, he soon assured himself that it was only the natural anxiety of the father for the daughter which had thus changed him; and, consoled with this reflection, he arrived at the banker's door.

What a hum of voices burst on his ear, as he was ushered into the spacious rooms. There were young children laughing and struggling beneath the mistletoe, and Druidical mistletoe, which stretched out its crooked branches to embrace them; and there was the half-stifled little shriek of the older young ladies, who were, somehow or other, obliged to have the room; and generally surprised by the old bankers or his younger friends. But this was all fair enough. Was it not Christmas Eve? and did not old Livingston pride himself on being an Englishman, and keeping up the good old customs? Ay, and they all knew it, young and old, and were good-natured victims accordingly.

"What, Arthur," said the old man, "where's Clara? I'm reserving myself, you know, my boy. What have you done with her, eh?"

"She will not come to-night; she is not well" he replied; "that is, a little over-fatigued."

The old man was visibly disappointed. He doated on Arthur, and loved Clara, because she was to be his wife; and he tolerated Harrington for both their sakes. It was evident he did not like the merchant, and never himself spoke of him, unless obliged to do so.

"Caprice! caprice!" he muttered. "I'll wager she is kept at home, against her wish, Arthur."

"Perhaps so," he said, unconsciously.

"You think it?" sharply added Livingstone.

Arthur remembered her father's manner, and began almost to believe it.

"No, no; who would keep her at home?" he said, after a pause. "Ay, certainly, true, true. Come, let us join the party; somehow it seems a little dull without her;" and the old man walked towards a group of young children.

The hours passed away; it was near midnight; in another hour Christmas Eve would be over. The noise and fun were at their height, when a servent presented a card to Mr. Livingstone, at the same time saying that a gentleman wished to to confer with him on urgent business, and particularly pressed to see him.

(To be Continued.)

THE CARDINAL'S WATCH.

When Torrini, the magician, had been giving exhibitions in the principal Italian cities at the beginning of the present century, he decided to go to Rome in the hope that the patronage of his holiness the Pope would give *eclat* to his reputation. In this he was not disappointed. Pius VII., who was then the reigning pontiff, having heard of his performance, did him the honor to command his attendance at the Vatican. Being informed that his audience at this exhibition would comprise all the dignataries of the church, the magician devoted unusual care to the selection of his tricks; but, after bringing on his best ones, vainly racked his brain to invent something worthy of his illustrious spectators.

While he was thus perplexed, chance threw in his way the means of accomplishing his object. Happening to be in the shop of one of the best watchmakers in Rome the day before that fixed for the performance, he heard a lackey in rich scarlet livery, who had just come in, ask if his Eminence the Cardinal de——'s watch was repaired.

"It will not be ready till this evening," replied the watchmaker, "and I will do myself the honor of personally carrying it your master."

After the servant had gone, the tradesman said to Torrini:

"This is a superb watch. His Eminence the Cardinal, to whom it belongs, values it at more than 10,000 francs; for it was made to his order by the celebrated Breguet, he naturally supposes it to be unique of its kind. Curious enough, however, it is only two days ago that a young fellow belonging to this city offered me a precisely similar watch, made by the same artist, for 1,000 francs."

These words made an impression on Torrini, who having formed a plan of operation, said to the watchmaker:

"Do you think this person is still desirous to dispose of his watch?"

"I have no doubt of it," was the reply. "He is a young prodigal, who, having spent all his fortune, is now obliged to sell the family jewels, and will be very glad to obtain a thousand francs."

"But can he be found?"

"Easily enough—in a gaming house, where he passes all his time."

"Well," said the magician, "I wish to procure the watch, but cannot wait longer than to-day. Please buy it for me as soon as possible, and engrave on it his Eminence's arms, so that there shall be a precise resemblance between the two watches, and your profit shall be proportioned to the discretion with which you conduct the transaction."

The watchmaker, who knew Torrini, probably suspected his object in seeking possession of the watch; but being aware that the magician's discreet management would be assured by his necessity to his success, had no hesitation in complying with his request.

"It will only take a quarter of an hour to go to the gaming house, and I am confident of being able to procure it for you."

In less than the time named the dealer came back with the chronometer in his hand. "Here it is," he exclaimed, with an air of triumph. "My man welcome me as a providential visitor, and was so eager to dispose of