

THE LAST STEP.

We were three souls upon the dungeon stair.
A sickly bar of daylight in the gloom
Shone through the door above; there rawned beneath
The horror of the *unbitten* nameless death—
The black cells' living tomb.

Step after step we followed, treading slow:
The flickering candles shook their ghastly flame:
The guide's harsh voice, in that deep-vaunted night,
With groaning echoes came.

Step after step he trod in icy dark.
Feeling along these wet black walls of stone:
Down, step by step, in blind and shuddering doubt,
Towards his doom, alone.

At the last step this slab of stone was raised—
You see the iron ring—and, far below,
The swirling current of the river rolled
Seaward its sullen flow.

Step after step he trod—and trod the last!
A cry, perhaps—and there was nothing more:
The dungeon stair was empty—the wet walls
Shut in the icy darkness as before.

The guide held high his flaring light—then passed.
I stood alone upon that last black stair,
And dreamed of life and death, and all that made
That poor wild soul's despair.

And thought how steep the way behind me lay.
How close the walls of Fate shut in—how deep
Below me rolled the eternal stream, whose tides
Rock all at last to sleep.

How far along the dim and downward stair
Have I yet gone?—how far have I to go?
I grope as they, who trod here fearfully,
Towards the death below!

Stretching my hands and feeling, faltering—
I hear no voice, nor yet one glimmer see
Across the dark. If on the brink I stand,
Let me but find, O Christ, Thy clasp'ring hand,
As Thou dost wait on that last stair with me!

G. A. DAVIS.

TWELFTH NIGHT AT CLAVERING HALL.

The announcement in the various papers that "Clavering Hall would be the scene of great gaiety during the season of Christmas, and would boast a succession of distinguished visitors," contained in it more truth than such paragraphs can usually boast. True, indeed, it was that Lord and Lady Clavering had determined that their winter festivities should this year be worthy of the fame they had acquired among their Sussex neighbors. As, however, the enjoyments of Christmas-day had been necessarily tempered by the more serious observances which its occurrence on a Sunday required, and as the same scruples had forbid them to dance beyond the verge of the New year, they reserved their greatest efforts, and their pleasantest neighbours, for their party on the Twelfth Night.

On the evening of that day the various guests had duly arrived, happy mothers and smiling daughters in well-filled carriages, and a few younger brothers in the solitary dignity of a four-wheeler from the nearest cabstand. The dressing-bell had rung, and already both old and young were profiting by its hint. Here perhaps was some more dandy, whose toilet boasted all the luxuries of a *petite maitresse*. Further on some budding flower of loveliness, *déjà femme par la beauté, encore enfant dans ses manières*, on whom to bestow additional adornment was but "to paint the lily," was wondering whom she should meet, and thinking whom she would like to meet. In the next chamber some dowager, once "passing fair," now, alas! *past*, who felt that, as the Frenchman says, "Cette beauté ne fut plus écrite sur son front qu'en traces hiéroglyphiques," was in vain running after her flying charms, which have already got many years start of her, or carefully occupied in planting "beauty's ensign on her cheeks." Here, too, the newly-arrived abigail, frozen with cold and with everything to unpack, was attempting to do that in twenty minutes which, on less important occasions, required a good hour—namely, to give as juvenile an appearance as possible to one whom ricketing, and *rucking*, and "many a vanished year," had combined to stamp "with all the characters of age."

While, then, the various guests were thus occupied with their toilettes, there was one in a small room at the top of the house who appeared busy with other cares than those of dress. A young and clever-looking man with handsome features was intently writing on small strips of paper. This was the tutor of the family, who had been requested by Lady Clavering to write the characters which were to be drawn, on the appearance of the twelfth-cake, after dinner. He had been the favorite companion at college of Lord Clavering's eldest son: but, alas! those talents which had ensured his popularity there, could not preserve him from the necessity of accepting a dependent situation, and he gladly yielded to the warmly-expressed wish of Mr. Clavering, that it should at least be in the family of his friend. Even here, however, the impossibility of his mixing on terms of perfect equality with the different guests became apparent, and it was only in consequence of his young pupils joining in the sports of the evening, and from a wish to add to their amusement, that he consented, at Lady Clavering's request, to undertake what was likely to bring him more into notice than he wished. He was, however, young and naturally of high spirits, and the composition of the characters, which had been begun as a task, he, when once in the vein, pursued with zest.

He had already completed the number, when he remembered that they were all, to a certain degree, uncomplimentary, and he determined to write one in a different style for the sake of Lucy,

the second daughter, who, perhaps from the fact of her not having yet left the school-room, treated him more as her elder brother's friend than as her younger brother's tutor. He finished his lines, and secretly hoping that fortune would be good enough to allow that particular character to her, he thrust the rest of them into his pocket, and descended to the drawing-room. If the thought occurred to him as he walked down stairs that the other characters were by no means flattering, it was only to smile at the recollection, as he soon dismissed all idea that any one could take offence where none was meant.

He found the whole party assembled in the drawing-room, and his handsome figure and clever countenance attracted attention, and produced inquiry among the young ladies who did not know him; when, however, they learnt that it was "only Mr. Arthur, the tutor," they were satisfied, and let him retreat into his quiet corner.

Dinner passed off, as such dinners in the country will do, but heavily to all except those who were able to establish an animated *l'été-à-l'été*. The Marquis of Dulwich, who, in consideration of his title, enjoyed the brevet rank of a man of talent, fired off, at sundry long intervals, some very ponderous puns, which were duly repeated to those who were not fortunate enough to hear them the first time, and also to some that were; and Mr. Rose Green, the fine gentleman of the party, enlightened the natives as to the last chit-chat of the clubs, and the merits of the Opera Buffa. The only portion of the party that seemed really merry was collected at a side-table, and included Lucy, the second daughter, of course, and (also of course) the tutor. Indeed, as the merry laugh of the former reached the ears of Lady Clavering she dispatched a look in that direction, which seemed to say very clearly, "Remember, my dear Lucy, you are not in the school-room."

At length, dinner over, and the whole party, including the gentlemen, assembled in the drawing-room, the twelfth-cake was produced, and Mr. Arthur was deputed by Lady Clavering to carry round the slips of paper on which were written the characters. He would gladly have avoided this, but as he did not like to refuse, he secretly determined to take advantage of this to give his friend Lucy the character he had written for her. It was settled that none should look at their characters till it was their turn to read it aloud to the party. Unluckily for poor Mr. Arthur he was dejected in the act of accomplishing his manoeuvre as to Lucy by that young lady herself, who exclaimed, with characteristic simplicity—

"Oh, but, Mr. Arthur, you did not do it fair; you shuffled this one into my hand; I saw you did."

When he was thus taxed with it his glowing cheeks would have rendered any denial useless, even if he had intended one. Unfortunately, all this attracted general attention to him and his characters, and the reading aloud of the one he had given to Lucy was looked for with curiosity.

"I dare say," cried one, "that Miss Lucy is not the only one to whom Mr. Arthur has taken care to give an appropriate character."

"Oh, no," said another, "we shall no doubt each of us get either a warning or a compliment."

The Marquis of Dulwich, who was rather deaf, inquired what it was they were saying, and Lady Clavering, who, though annoyed at the whole thing, thought it better not to show it, replied—

"Oh, my dear Lord, it is only that they have detected Mr. Arthur here in conjuring a particular character into the hands of my little girl, Lucy; and now they say they are sure he has done so to all of us, and that we shall each find something appropriate said of us."

"Eh? what! ah! capital!" said the Marquis; "well, then, as the reading is to begin with me, and as my eyes are not very good by candlelight, I will just get Mr. Arthur to read mine."

Mr. Arthur would gladly have excused himself, he was obliged however to take the strip of paper and read as follows:

ORATOR MUM.

Your silence a proof is how much you must know,
Since the deeper the waters the *deeper* they flow;
And all, who have once heard you speak, have agreed
That your usual silence is wisdom indeed.

The Marquis, who had listened with a smile of approval to the first lines, made a very ineffectual attempt to get up a laugh at the end, while the rest of the party, seeing this, made an ineffectual effort to suppress one. "Very much obliged to Mr. Arthur, I am sure," said the Marquis.

It was now, however, Mr. Rose Green's turn to read; opening his slip of paper he found it headed—

LORD NOODLE.

Though your legs are as thin as a dandy's cane-stick,
You lose nothing in weight since your head is so thick.

Mr. Rose Green made some sarcastic remarks about Mr. Arthur's having a very happy talent for delicate satire, and thrust his paper into his waistcoat pocket. The lady of the house, who was next to him, found herself the possessor of the following name and verse:—

LADY CANDOUR.

Your memory and candour all persons must own,
In confessing your virtues your candour is shown,
And your excellent memory is very well known
For remembering everyone's faults—but your own.

Lady Clavering having managed to take the thing more good humoredly than those who had

preceded her, others followed. It were, however, useless to describe each person to whom the following names and characters were allotted. Suffice it to say, that they read their verses with a look and a tone which too often seemed to imply "that was levelled at me," and with a want of spirit and ear for poetry which almost tempted Mr. Arthur to exclaim, with Orlando, "I pray you war no more of my verses with reading them ill-favourably." The following, by no means flattering descriptions, were distributed in some cases most unhappily happily.

MISS PENELOPE PRIMROSE.

You got yourself into a terrible mess
By answering No, when you should have said Yes.

MISS FURBELOW FLOUNCE.

Though you read not and think not, at least you can dress,
Thus showing you know where to look for success:
You estimate justly your person and brains,
Knowing which is most likely to merit your pains.

SIR LOUIS LOOKDOWNON'EM.

Your pride all attempt to explain it defies,
That with so little food it should reach such a size.

SIR DRINKAWAY EATAWAY.

You forget, though of excellent health you may boast,
If you're always a *gobbling* you'll soon be a ghost.

MISS SERAPHINE SONATA.

Fair Seraphine! who would not say
That hears you strumming all the day?
None work so hard as those who *play*.

SIR BRILLIANT FASHION.

You're more proud of the vice you assume, and have not,
Than of all the good feelings you really have got.

MISS GALLOPDE.

You've a beautiful foot, and you dance like a fairy,
But your face's expression is ne'er known to vary:
Our judgment about you, I fear, must be led
By whether we look to the heels or the head.

Mlle. VERY VANE.

Your love is so constant it little requires
To burn in your breast with unquenchable fires,
It needed not beauty, or talent, or pelf,
To make you and keep you in love with—yourself.

SIR EMPTY EGOTIST.

When you talk of "I said," and "I did," and "I thought,"
Of the "heat that I felt," and "the cold that I caught,"
You forget how the world it must greatly amuse,
That so many I's with such E's you can U's.

MISS GADABOUT.

If dancing were ever the business of life,
You'd make any man a most *hard-working* wife.

The above characters, with some more, including King and Queen, had brought it down to the turn of Miss Lucy, to whom all looked with interest as she read aloud the following:—

MISS PHOENIX PARAGON.

Even you have one fault, for it must be allowed
You're too bright and too good for the ev'ry-day crowd:
Then let not each magpie come chattering—none
But eagles should fly at, or gaze on, the sun.

Poor Mr. Arthur had retired to a corner of the room, unfortunately not too far to enable him to hear the comments of those who were disposed to be facetious at his expense, and far enough for his presence to impose no check on them.

"Very good advice to Miss Lucy, I am sure," began one.

"And so good of the tutor," said another, "to instruct the young ladies as well as the young gentlemen."

"I suppose," said Mr. Rose Green, "by the chattering magpies he must mean Lady Clavering's guests."

"And by the eagle, himself," said another.
"Rather a short-sighted one," said a third, glancing contemptuously at the tutor's spectacles.

"And one," said Mr. Rose Green, with the look of one who was saying a very good thing, "who seems not so much inclined to fly and to gaze at the sun as at the daughter."

These observations, and many more of the same kind had poor Mr. Arthur to endure till the party broke up. His only consolation was a short speech from Miss Lucy, as they all went up-stairs at night.

"Well, we have had a very pleasant evening, and Mr. Arthur's characters were very amusing, and I am sure he gave me a very good one."

And on this simple speech the worthy tutor feasted his recollection till he almost fancied it would not be necessary to be an eagle to gaze on that sun.

He took off his spectacles, put on his nightcap, and slept away the remainder of the Twelfth Night.

HEARTH AND HOME.

How abundant are the men and women who crave martyrdom in leadership! How few are willing to honor themselves in the loyalty of service!

The highest education is that which not only provides food for the pupil's memory, but training for his judgment, discipline for his affections, guidance for his conduct, and objects for his faith.

A person who has no resources of mind is more to be pitied than one who is in want of necessities for the body; and to be obliged to beg

our daily happiness from others bespeaks a more lamentable poverty than that of one who begs for daily bread.

Age takes its pleasure from memory; youth centres its joys in the hope of the future; philosophy, which belongs neither to the young nor the old exclusively, has regard to the present, and sobers its visions of what is to come by the experience of what has already gone before.

A MAN or woman in high health, with good spirits and full of energy, is an immediate source of happiness to those with whom he or she associates. They cannot resist the infection; they are cheered, animated, and encouraged, their energies are called forth, and a positive good is conferred upon them without either effort or self-denial upon the part of the giver.

To be really "at home" is to have every sentiment and faculty called into play, and find satisfaction, and the whole being at peace; it is the intellect quickened and pleased, affection excited and rewarded, and taste and fancy and friendship and all worthy aims made strong. To be truly and completely "at home" is the best thing any of us can have in this world.

The instruction given by amusement dissipates thought. Effort in all form is one of the great secrets of nature. The mind of the child should be disciplined by the effort of study, as our souls by suffering. The perfecting of the first age belongs to work, so that of the second to sorrow. Parents may teach their children a number of things with pictures and maps, but they will not teach them to learn.

A CELEBRATED writer, in advising respecting the choice of a wife, expresses himself thus— "This bear always in mind, that, if she is not frugal, if she is not what is called a good manager, if she does not prize herself on her knowledge of family affairs and laying out her money to the best advantage, let her be ever so sweetly tempered, gracefully made, or elegantly accomplished, she is no wife for a man in trade. All those otherwise amiable talents will but just open to many roads to ruin."

FAULTS OF CHILDHOOD.—If parents could be convinced that a large proportion of the troublesome faults of childhood actually proceed from errors in their physical treatment, much useless fault-finding would be abandoned. Fresh air and wholesome nourishment, regular hours and happy surroundings, would cure many irritable nerves, prevent many a fit of passion, and brighten up many a sluggish and torpid mind. If this dependence of good conduct on physical well-being were fully recognized, it would also dissolve much of the criticism which we use so freely upon our neighbors, and it would make us far more truly helpful to those who need our aid.

BURDENS.—Mental burdens will be far more easily borne if they are placed, as much as practicable, out of sight. When we gaze upon them, they increase in size. When in our thoughts we emphasise and dwell upon them, they sometimes grow almost unbearable. It is well enough to face trouble when it comes to us, to measure it and know its weight, that we may summon up courage and strength sufficient to endure it; but, this done, let us place it where it may no longer be in constant sight—let us carry it manfully and bravely, but not drag it to the light, to dwell upon its weight, and to claim sympathy for being obliged to bear it. When the emphasis of life is laid on the cheerful and attractive side, its real burdens will be borne lightly, happiness will abound and be diffused, and the value of life be multiplied tenfold.

HOW TO SUCCEED.—Most of our desires are best and most quickly accomplished, not by headlong chase after them, but by due regard to other things. He who would be a good mechanic must obtain general information, cultivate habits of observation, know something of other trades besides his own, and no more allow his mind to grow rusty than his tools. He who would be a first-rate lawyer must not limit his study to technical law. The artist cannot afford to ignore mathematics, nor the merchant to lose interest in reading. Every employment thrives best in the hands of those who unite a fair general knowledge of other things with a specially excellent knowledge of their own. So, when we set ourselves strenuously to accomplish any given task, we need not only perseverance to stick to it, but ability to leave it at proper seasons and to turn the mind into other channels, or the work itself will be less perfectly and less speedily performed.

THE Ghost-Seeking Society may find in this little item a contribution to their whim. There is a beautiful superstition connected with a certain country house in Guilford county, U. S. For many years this house has been in the possession of a family named Hotchkiss. Some years ago a young and amiable member of this family died. Her many graces and virtues had given her an almost sainted character in the community. After she died it became a fixed belief that cardinal-hued flowers would, when allowed to remain over-night in the room where this sainted young woman died, lose the dark richness of their hue, and be found in the morning pale and white. We were shown a letter by a lady of this city from a cousin in Guilford who made the experiment at her request. He declares positively that several red roses he left in the room were found next morning white to the roots of the leaves, and yet unwithered and retaining their fragrance and the richness of health.