

FATE.

BY LILLIAN ROZELL MESSENGER.

We sat together in the grand old park,
'Neath the olden Norway pine;
In the tender eyes of the twilight dark
Dreamt the evening's pale sunshine.

Its warm heart thrilled with the pulse of spring,
The soft day its shadow leaves
In the glorious stars, where the blue takes wing
As the golden crimson weaves.

For Hesperus' feet a glowing way;
While music of wind and bird,
In the soft green dome of the trees at play
Our soul's vague music stirred.

Not much to say; so much to feel
Such marvel of beauty to see!
And overhead the low notes steal
Of the birdling ecstasy.

And there in the olden Norway pine
Is the tiny nest, well built;
With perfume and song and warm sunshine
And the shadows about it spilt.

The murmur of joy's in the young old tree,
And echoes in two hearts below,
Who dream in love's felicity
Which only the loving e'er know.

But winter had dropped like a snowy bloom
Just between the golden and red
Of the rosy spring and summer noon,
And the year and the birds were dead.

Yet again spring twined her fairy wreaths
Of beauty o'er waning day;
But the tiny nest where the old pine weaves
Its sweet, solemn roundelay.

Was torn away and the branches torn,
And the voice of love was still,
Above and below: one bird was gone
And one love lost, that never will.

Return springtime to the soul which sees
O'er the evening crimson main
Of time where its white sail off lies,
Which will never come back again.

AN ACTOR'S ORPHANS.

BY A WANDERING MUSICIAN.

The father of the orphans—a strong, big jolly fellow of thirty-six, named Neville—was playing "Rob Roy" on a Saturday night in full strength and vigour, and was dead on the Tuesday morning after.

It was said that he got a chill in undressing after the exertion of this heavy part, and that little whiff of cold air at which a little man might have laughed, carried off this hale and hearty giant, and left his two children, Nelly and Johnny, without a relation in the world to look after them, and almost without a penny to support them. No stock actor, however steady or successful, can save money. A pound or two he may indeed accumulate during a good engagement, but it generally goes in some long journey, or week or two of enforced idleness; and so, when he passes over into an unknown country, his survivors are not generally troubled with the paying of legacy duty. Nelly and Johnny were just eleven and thirteen respectively, and had lost their mother when mere infants, but they were old enough to realize bitterly the loss they had sustained. The startled company held a consultation at once in the room where the massive form of Neville yet lay, with the orphans crying quietly all the while, fast locked in each other's arms.

"The orphans must be thought on first," said the "old man" of the company, who had only two children of his own. "I'll tak' the lass if she has no objection. She's full of acting, and may happen she'll turn out a star some day."

"And I shouldn't mind taking the lad and making something of him," said another promptly. "But perhaps it would be cruel to part 'em."

"Then I'll take the boy too," volunteered the "old man," after a nudge from his wife, but then the boy put in a word for himself.

"I don't want to be an actor, and I just hate the stage," he said, very decidedly; "but I mean to work for Nelly, and look after her, and always watch over her and see she wants nothing."

"Then what would you like to work at, Johnny, lay?" kindly asked one of the company.

"I'm to be a sailor, and nothing but a sailor," said Johnny, with great determination. "Father knew that all along, and always said he'd see about it. If you try to make me an actor I'll run away. I don't mind being a midshipman or a captain, if you wish it," he modestly added, "but I'm resolved to be a sailor."

"And how can you look after Nelly and protect her if you're away as a sailor?" demurringly observed Nelly's new guardian.

"Oh, you'll look after her while I'm away," said the boy, with a charming simplicity, "and I'll come home every now and then to see how she's getting on."

The company could not teach him to be a sailor, but they did the next best thing in their power. One of them had a brother in the shipping office at Glasgow, and through him Johnny Neville was apprenticed on board ship, all the company subscribing equally to provide him with an outfit. And so the orphans were provided for by these simple-minded mummies.

While ordinary people would have been pitying and condoling, and wondering what the children would do without their father and only friend, these promptly put out their hands and took burden and responsibility upon themselves, without a single thought that they were doing anything wonderful or uncommon.

So much for the prompt, practical Christianity of the despised "mountebanks." But as there is nothing so uncommon in that as to constitute a romance of real life—and ought not to be—I will go on to the after events in the history of the orphans, which I think do fairly come under that title.

If this were a story the boy would become at least a middy at once, and then rise by rapid strides to be a captain or an admiral; but it isn't; and the truth may as well be told that Johnny was only a common apprentice, and only rose to be a common sailor. The rough life at sea did not tend to refine him either in character or mind, but he never forgot his sister Nelly, and though he seldom saw her, did not fail to remind her of his love by an occasional present when he knew where to send one to, so that it should reach her. Those who looked closely into these things said that Jack Neville, as he was now called, was a roving blade, and that he had gone through some strange experiences of wild life abroad; but in all his ups and downs he had retained too much honesty to grow rich by questionable means. He had not been at sea all the years between the death of his father and the time when I met him. He had spent nearly two years in Peru, one in Australia, and one in California; but always gone back to the "life on the ocean wave," as that best suited to his nature.

Meantime, Nelly, under her new guardian, Mr. Seaham, had been trained with a steady persistence which would have made an actress of an idiot, but which, in a girl of her smartness and ability, slowly produced what Seaham had prophesied—a star. The Seahams drilled her in deportment, dancing, and all the subtle action of arms, fingers, and facial expression; and where their rigid rules ended her bright talent took up the task.

When Nelly was barely seventeen she was playing the lead in a good stock company; and in two years more was starring with a piece specially written for her by a London dramatist. During all these years the Seahams had guarded her as sedulously as if she had been their own daughter, and Nelly had neither time nor opportunity to think of sweethearts. But just as she was beginning to make a name, and the Seahams to get a tangible return for all their care and kindness, a poor actor, named Lagraffe, managed to secure her affections beyond remedy. By "poor" I mean poor in talent as well as in coin; Lagraffe, indeed, had never been intended by Nature for the stage, and could never have earned more than a decent super's salary single handed. He was tolerably good looking, however, and had a plausible, dashing style which carried all before it with the artless and simple-minded Nelly. Then the ruptures with her faithful guardians, the Seahams began. Nelly's ideas of the world were mostly of the romantic kind, and derived principally from the stage plays in which she had taken part, and she saw nothing but the most noble qualities in her lover, while the Seahams, with the practical acuteness of old pros., denounced him at once as a mercenary designer, who would never have looked at her had she been only an obscure super or ballet girl.

"It's thy bress he wants, not thee," said old Seaham, bluntly. "Tak' an old pro's advice, Nelly, lass, and ha' nowt to do wi' him."

Nelly looked upon Seaham as a kind father, but she only shed tears and shook her head when he spoke thus.

"I must marry him now, father," she whispered, with a wheedling cuddle and kiss, "for I've promised."

"Then unpromise it as soon as you can," cried Seaham, in great anger and excitement, "for thou's never have him wi' my will."

"Why, what has he done? What is his fault?" cried Nelly, in amazement.

"His fault is spending more bress than he can earn," said the old actor, snappishly. "He'd make thy winnings fly if thou wert fool enough to marry him."

"Must I never speak to any one—never marry at all?" said Nelly, a little petulantly, for your love-stricken ones are always unreasonable, and sometimes cruel.

"God forbid! my lass," fervently answered the old man; "but bide thy time, and thou'st get the pick of the land—a star like thyself, or may happen, a gentleman. Ye never know what fortune's in store for a pure, good lass like thee; an' thou's fit for the best on 'em—a real lady, as ever walked the stage."

Nelly had no doubt of the sincerity of the old man, but his words did not convince her. Her heart was lost on Lagraffe, and him she would have or no one. And her lover, when he was told of the objections in the way, loudly declared that it was selfish interest, and not affection or love, which prompted the refusal of her guardians. He only half convinced Nelly that such was the case; but at last the Seahams, weary of his insinuations, reluctantly gave their consent, that they might be cleared of such a charge.

"We're more than paid for aught we ever did for thee, Nelly," said the old man, with tears, "and would do the same over a hundred times for thy good. But when he is thy husband see that thou keep a tight hand on thy winnings, or it'll all run through his fingers like water through a sieve."

In the height of her joy Nelly promised implicit obedience to her guardian's wishes, and astonished both her intended husband and the Seahams by settling on these old friends a liberal pension, to be paid as a first charge out of her earnings. Moreover, the Seahams were still to travel with her and manage the company

organized to play her special pieces. To all this Lagraffe made no objection, and everything went off smoothly and agreeably. After the winter season was over Nelly and he were married, and a great part of her savings was used in furnishing a grand house in which she had resolved to take at least three months' rest every summer. Lagraffe never went on the stage after the marriage, or sought to do anything but smoke cigars and haunt billiard rooms. He was not a drunken man, nor was he cruel in the sense of lifting his hand to his wife, but he was thoroughly selfish, and in the end all but eaten up with one consuming passion.

During the first year or two of Nelly's married life few could understand how in the face of her great success she always spoke of being poor, and appeared so eager for the most exorbitant terms she could screw out of any manager. Managers, of course, called her a miser, and said she was piling up a fortune faster than any one who had ever gone on the stage, but managers saw only one side of her life. The constant drain on her resources was her husband. He thought himself clever in one particular way, and had grown to have a perfect passion for gambling. Sometimes he was lucky and won money by it, but on the whole it was a losing business, whether on the race-course, in the billiard room, or at the card table, and his constant cry to poor Nelly was "Money! give me more money."

Nelly knew the cause of her poverty, and had intelligence enough to see that the passion would grow stronger and more disastrous, and she pleaded with him, and extracted promise after promise that he would give up the practice; but she might as well have asked a drunkard to reform with a glass to his lips.

Nelly had now two children to provide for, and although at that time married women had not their earnings secured to them by law, she took her old guardian's advice, and invested such of her earnings as she could hide from the clutch of her husband without his knowledge, and kept the securities safe under lock and key when at home, and always took them with her when travelling.

That was the position of her affairs when I first saw her in the theatre at Liverpool, which I had just joined. Her house was in Liverpool, and she was filling up a holiday by playing in that place instead of resting as she had resolved to do when she married.

One night during this engagement, when she had just finished playing *Marguerite*, in "Love's Sacrifice," for which she had dressed exquisitely in a pale pink satin, a rough-looking sailor presented himself at the orchestra door, and passed resolutely in behind the scenes, saying as he went:—

"I want to see that beautiful lady in the pink dress! I must see the pretty lady in the pink dress! Bless me, but I think it's my sister Nelly!"

He reached the stage at last, and would have been promptly expelled had he not repeated his words, with the addition:—

"I'm Jack Neville, and I have not seen her since she was a little lass. Let's see my sister, and get a hug at her!"

Nelly came out of the dressing-room in sheer astonishment, and was instantly grabbed hard and tight in the strong arms of the hard-swearing, tobacco-chewing sailor. There was no money shown to the fine pink satin, or starch, or fine lace—it was a real bear's hug, which none but the hugger could be expected to enjoy.

Nelly nearly screamed, and when she at last recognized her brother Johnny she snorted angrily, and examined her dress and ruffles to estimate the damage done, and even rubbed her cheek dubiously at the spot his lips had pressed and smacked so heartily.

"What a swell! what a beautiful lady you've grown!" said Jack, in open-eyed admiration, as he held her out at arm's length. "Tell you, Nell, I could scarce believe it was you when I see'd you going into hysterics in that piece just now. And what a stunning actor! You lick everybody I've seen anywhere."

All this was hearty and brimming with affection and genuine love, yet Nelly did not like it, or her brother, or his words or manners.

"What a fright you are," she said, critically, "and how coarse your talk has grown. I thought you would have risen to something—a mate, at least."

"Everybody can't be mates," said Jack, very logically; "some must horder, and some obey, and I'm one of them as puts to their hand and does the work. Nothing very wicked in that, I should hope. Surely, Nell, you ain't ashamed on me?" he added, with eyes grown wondrously soft and glistening.

"No, not exactly ashamed of you," she hastily added, with an effort, and something like one of her old fond nestles into his arms; "but I'd like you to be different, Jack—better dressed and more refined."

And baser hearted under it all—eh, Nell?" added Jack. "That's about what it might come to—a fine gent, smoking a cigar, and swallowing nothing cheaper'n champagne, and at the same time robbing all around."

Nelly thought of her husband, and blushed, not sure but this was a hidden sneer at some of his failings.

"There, you're blushing. I know'd you was ashamed of me," said Jack, trying to disengage himself.

"No, no," said Nelly, seeing now the perfect innocence of his remark, and clinging closer to him. "I only wish I had you always by me to help me and advise. You're rough, Jack, but you're true."

"Soft, soft now!" hastily exclaimed her brother, "don't you begin to pipe your eye, or I'll think there's some'at wrong. You're married, they tell me. Let's look on the bloke you're tied to, so's I may guess if he's quite good to you."

"He's not here," said Nelly, with a shade of hesitation in her tones.

"Doesn't act? what does he do then?" pursued Jack, opening his eyes.

"Nothing particularly—he doesn't need, now that I'm so far up in the profession," said Nelly, a little proudly.

"Kind to you?" inquiringly continued Jack.

"Yes," answered Nelly, with a dubious hesitancy.

"Goes about drinking your money, and then come home and wallops you, I s'pose!" said Jack, sententially.

"No, no; he never lifts his hand to me—he's too much of a gentleman for that," cried Nelly, with great energy. "Indeed, Jack, he's very good—very—but he has one fault."

"And what's that?"

Nelly would not tell; every one had faults of some kind and she could not expect her husband to be perfect. So she lightly put the subject aside, and talked of Jack's adventures, and pressed him to come and see her and her children in her grand house, and stay there while his ship was in port.

But Jack declined most resolutely.

"I'd only disgrace you afore your grand friends, and mebbe make some on 'em faint by eatin' wi' my knife, when I should use a fork or something of that kind."

He promised, however, to see her again before he left Liverpool, and so with another hug and crush at her fine dress and laces, which she did not think nearly so damaging as the first, he left her.

It was about this time that Mr. Lagraffe, Nelly's husband, made the acquaintance of a mysterious character—a kind of sailor-like wanderer with plenty of money and time on his hands—at a foot-race in Pomona Gardens, in Manchester. The man looked anything but knowing, yet when he staked a pound on the three-card trick, which a man produced among the crowd during an interval of the races, and on which Lagraffe lost three half sovereigns in succession, he spotted the right card three times in succession, lifting a pound the first two times, and getting his hat knocked over his eyes by a confederate of the welsher the third—that is, when he had cleaned the swindlers out. Lagraffe conceived an instinctive liking for the stranger, and, in the height of his delight at seeing the swindlers done, invited the man to drink with him. In the same way, when Lagraffe had bet heavily on one of the pedestrians, the stranger standing close by, he was suddenly staggered by being ordered in a quick whisper to "hedge heavily."

"Why? why?" he asked.

"Because your taker, the man in the fur cap, signalled to the ped just now as he passed. It will pay him to lose. Hedge if you mean to save your money," and Lagraffe did hedge and saved his money accordingly. The two returned to Liverpool in the same carriage, and the stranger, who gave his name as Jack Robinson, rewarded Lagraffe for his confidence by telling him as they parted that he (Lagraffe) was only a sucking baby in gambling, who was bound to lose, and certain never to win.

A few nights later Lagraffe was busy at cards in a house which professed to be an innocent establishment for refreshments and billiards, but which was really a gambling hell of the worst description, when he again noticed the simple-looking sailor man, Jack Robinson, lounging near him and his opponent, and watching their game with evident interest. Lagraffe remembered the parting snarl of his queer acquaintance, and strove hard to demonstrate its injustice by winning, and for a time appeared to be successful, for his pile of money began to increase in size. By-and-by there came a change, and the winning was all the other way. Pound after pound went from Lagraffe to the other, till nearly fifty lay beside him, and then, to the evident surprise of the winner, the simple-looking Jack Robinson announced his intention of "having a hand" at it.

"I'm cleaned out," said Lagraffe, "but I'll go home and bring a fresh supply. I won't be half an hour."

"Then I'll clean out you while he's gone," said Jack Robinson to the winner, but that gentleman, probably scenting danger, politely declined.

"You must!" said the simple-looking stranger, feeling in his pocket with one hand, and pointing with the other to the sleeve of the winner's coat near the wrist. "You must, or I'll shoot you—right through the wrist—there."

The man scowled, but gave in, and the cards were dealt, each watching the other with all the eagerness and keenness of "Satan playing for a soul." Lagraffe found them playing when he returned, and by that time the pile of money had steadily changed hands—all the winning being on the sailor's side. Lagraffe had not been able to get more money, but he had broken open a little iron-bound trunk which his wife always took with her on her travels, and so got what was quite as good.

The professional gambler was soon cleaned out, when the simple-looking stranger rewarded him with the same sneer he had already bestowed on Lagraffe—that he was a sucking baby who knew nothing.

"I'll have a hand with you," said Lagraffe,