

JANUARY.

SONNET BY HENRY PRINCE.

The first-born of the year, behold! I come
A frigid beauty, fresh from the embrace
Of Zero's arms, to take my queenly place
A vanguard leader of the months to run.
Not sculptor's marble is more cold than I—
My breath is keen, my gentlest humour rude;
Yet many a wooer have I, albeit my mood
Seems unpropitious for a lover's sigh.
And tho' my days and nights are short and long,
My skies are fair, my stars are brightest gold—
Nor swain nor maiden thinketh I am cold.
Thou cheeks may tingle as I pass along,
And when at last all ends and I have fled,
Perhaps some haply think of January dead.

Montreal, January 16th, 1877.

JOAN:

A TALE.

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON.

AUTHOR OF

"Cynthia up a Flower," "Red as a Rose is she," etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER V.

When one is twenty years old—when one's heart is as full of sadness and tiredness as it can well hold—when one has travelled many hours at a stretch in a noisy train—then one is pretty certain to sleep deeply and sweetly, even though one's mattress be copiously stuffed with cobble-stones, even though one's head be too low and one's feet too high, and one's bed altogether so surprisingly narrow as to require very judicious and quiet lying in, to hinder one from bodily falling out. Often, in her ocean of down in the green-lung room at Dering, has she slept less completely. Pulses quickly beating to the tune of some past excitement, or coming pleasure, have often made her toss and turn and look eagerly window-ward for the waving of morning's gray flag; but now there is neither excitement behind, nor pleasure ahead, and the slower morning comes the better; and so she sleeps.

God is good, and does not even send her a dream. If it came it would surely be a dream of better things and better days, and so it is well away. Not even the unnatural elevation of her feet by the capriciously-stuffed mattress, nor the depression of her head by the little, meagre, featherless pillow, succeeds in giving her a nightmare. She might have been still asleep now had not it been for the inefficiency of the curtain-rings, of which Diana overnight had warned her. The corking-pin had indeed drawn the skimmed curtains together somewhere about their middle; but up above there is a vacuum through which a wave of morning light rolls and washes under her eyelids. She turns sleepily over on the other side, but even then the wave reaches her, and so does the vigorous melody of a thrush-voice sweetly rebuking her sloth:

"Good-morrow! good-morrow! the sun was awake
Long ago in the blue summer skies;
Birds in the brake
Cared sweet for your sake!
O lady fair, arise!
That morn' fresh grace may borrow
From your dear eyes.

He says all this so loudly that the sleepy lady has to listen to him. She turns over once or twice again, nearly tumbling out of her strait couch as she does it. But it is useless; both glorious light and happy bird combine to forbid further rest. The bird, indeed, sings another verse:

"Good-morrow! good-morrow!
So, whistles the breeze,
O'er the lake as it flutters and sighs;
So murmur the bees from the scented lime-trees;
O lady fair arise,
Arise and give good-morrow!
The dearest of replies."

So in despair she sits up, rubs her blue eyes like a child with her knuckles, and looks round. It is a well-known fact that rude and outspoken daylight tells many hometruths about things that politer candle-light either slurs over or is civilly silent upon. If Joan's new room looked unhandsome overnight by the light of one composite candle, it certainly does not look more lovesome now that day's strong lamp is held up to its shortcomings. It would take a great effort of memory on the part of its owners, a great flight of imagination on the part of Joan, to reconstruct the pattern of the carpet; so utterly has it disappeared under the tread of the numberless feet that have evidently walked upon it. Of paint on door and wainscot there is so little as to be hardly worth naming; there is a zig-zag crack across the looking-glass interfering with one's view of one's nose; and the piece missing from the water-jug's spout is larger than it appeared overnight. It is now seen to amount to the loss of almost the whole spout. But eight hours of sleep have put new strength and courage into Joan. Not even the squalor of having a jug without a spout can make her cry; she feels as strong and as bright as the new day. She jumps out of bed, and runs to the window. She unfastens the curtain, carefully laying aside the friendly corking-pin with a thrifty instinct born of her new circumstances. Most likely there is not another in the household. There is no

blind, as you know, to draw up; so at once she stands face to face with the morning. It is not early dawn, as she sees at once; it is dawn's elder brother. The sun is already pretty high; she looks up at him fondly, though he rewards her by making the water pour down her cheeks. He and the moon are the only two old friends that are left her. Then she looks out curiously at the prospect. There is the gate at which her tired fingers fumbled last night; there is the little mean sweep up which the execrations of the dogs accompanied her. Three of them are standing at the present moment watchfully on the lookout for some passer-by to pounce out on and insult. A shabby grass plot, with a bed of ill-to-do shrubs, long-legged laurels, and cypress abortions in the middle; then the road. She puts her head farther out to extend her view. On the right the three little brother villas. People got up in them earlier, apparently, than they do here. A woman is standing at the door of our next-door neighbor shaking a hearth-rug; beyond, again, the great, unsightly hospital; larger, unsightlier than ever by daylight. She shudders. How could any one have built his dwelling so near that temple of pain and uncleanness! She looks away quickly, and turns her eyes toward the left.

What a contrast! On one hand, disease, anguish, ugly death. On the other, life that seems unending; beauty without peer; joy and mirth unrivalled. A great plain of most shining silver, laughing in white arabis haunted by the drowsy, booming bees. Joan smells all the flowers; mounts on the base of the sundial; traces with her finger the trite, sad sentence on its discolored face, "Tempus fugit." Tiny lichens, disapproving of the truism, are filling up the letters.

Then she returns to the laurel-tree, and looks carefully and hopefully for the spout of her jug, but it is not there. Still nothing happens; no one is either seen or heard. All the other houses are up and dressed. The scions of Campidoglio Villa are playing in the garden; the wife of Sardanapalus Villa is feeding her chickens; only Portland Villa still slumbers and sleeps. In despair she returns to the house; opens all the doors in succession as loudly as she can; makes her feet tread as noisily as they are able on the oil-cloth. It is no use; nobody wakes. She passes down the little sweep to the gate; says something polite and suitable to each of the dogs, who all receive her with an extravagant and overdone civility; passes out into the road with all six at her heels, and saunters toward the sea. Toward, but not to.

Her friend is further off than she thought. From the window it had seemed as if by stretching out her hands she might with her fingertips have touched the great, gleaming silver shield. But the nearer she approaches to it, the more its white glory seems to recede. She feels its cool and bracing breath upon her face, but itself she does not reach.

Whether it is the sea-air, or the skimmed supper overnight, or only the healthy working order in which her young organs are, but she suddenly becomes aware of being inexplicably hungry, and, after having walked half a mile or so, turns back in the hope of at length finding the household aroused.

As she reaches the gate again the hospital clock beats the light air with nine loud, deliberate strokes. They must be up by now. Yes, it is clear that in the interval of her absence some one has risen, though no one is visible, for the hall-door is unlocked; but on peeping into the dining-room she is disappointed at seeing no smallest sign of coming breakfast; only a depressingly dingy baize table-cloth, and a general impression of crumbs. She goes out again into the garden, and tries to recollect when, at what distant epoch of her life, she ever felt so hungry before. Oh, if the daffodils and the polyanthus were but eatable!

As she wanders disconsolately about she hears after a while a window thrown up. Diana looks sleepily out. Can it be called Diana?—Diana without any of her distinguishing features; Diana without her sausage frizzles, without her piled false hair, without the plumed and flowered abomination of her hat! Diana, as God made her; not as Helmsley fashions, as trolloping curls, as cheap clothes—as, in short, the desire to shine in the eyes of the 170th, have made her!

It would never have struck Joan as possible overnight that Diana could be a pretty girl. It comes upon her now with the force of a surprise that she is one. A little curly head; young dewy eyes full of color and light; pinky cheeks; red lips made for kisses and laughter. The beauty of a little dairy-maid indeed, but still beauty. It is difficult to look vulgar when one is very young, not inordinately fat, and when one has done nothing disfiguring to one's self.

"You out!" she cries, in a drowsy voice, wherein surprise struggles with departing slumber. "Why on earth did you get up so early? Is not the day long enough in all conscience?"

"I never can sleep after eight o'clock," answers Joan, half apologetically; "and there is no use in staying in bed when one is wide awake, is there?"

"I do not know" (indistinctly with a yawn). "I think it is better than being up, when there is nothing to do."

A pause. Diana leans her arms on the sill, and looks aimlessly out at the wakeful flowers and the preoccupied bees.

"Is your sis—is Arabella up?" asks Joan, with a small, vain hope that one of the household may be up and stirring.

Diana laughs, showing many neat little white teeth.

"Up! she is not awake!—Bell!" (turning toward the inside of the room, and raising her voice), "Joan wants to know are you up yet? Joan is up and dressed, and out; you must get up! It is your week for making tea! If you do not get up, I shall come and shake you!"

But not even this threat has any effect. Diana turns again to the window, replaces her arms on the sill, and shaking her head:—

"'Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard her complain. You have waked me too soon; let me slumber again!"

she says, with a laugh; "she will not be down for a couple of hours."

"Have you any idea what time it is?"

"It must be a quarter past nine."

"Is that all? I hoped that it was ten at least; I always think that there are just twice too many hours in the day, do not you?"

Joan is silent. "But to be sure your boxes will come to-day," continues Diana with a livelier air, rousing herself from the pensive strain of thought into which she has fallen: "that will give us something to do; it will take a long time, no doubt, to examine all your things."

Joan swallows a sigh, and strangles a shudder.

"I dare say it will!"

"Maybe they will be here quite early," resumes the girl, now thoroughly awakened; "then I will dress at once; I do not take long when once I set about it; Bell says twenty minutes—I say a quarter of an hour."

Joan shudders outright this time, and does not try to strangle it.

"You did not see any sign of breakfast, I suppose," says Diana, presently; happily unconscious of the effect her words have produced: "nothing laid?"

"Nothing!"

"I thought not; there never is; go into the dining room and ring for breakfast; go on ringing till she comes!"

CHAPTER VI.

The family is assembled at length, Di having successfully removed or concealed nearly all traces of the beauty that God has given her. She has, indeed, been unable to do away with her eyes, or make them look as underbred as the rest of her. They shine and laugh out of her disfigured face. She has, however, violet-powdered her fresh cheeks, piled her hair to more than its pristine height and bulk, and trailed her spurious curls to even greater length than on the previous evening. The dew has apparently taken every morsel of curl out of them; and, as she is pretty sure to see no one to-day, Diana has not thought it worth while to curl them.

They therefore wander in perfectly straight and lustreless disorder down her back. Nor has her sister had less prosperity in the task of self-disfigurement. Her hair has indeed been less, as she has had less original beauty to spoil.

Daylight is no kinder to Mrs. Moberley than it has already been to her furniture and her daughters. She looks, if possible, fatter than ever.

She has been holding Joan's most reluctant hand for full five minutes, and staring intently with pathos into her face, as she tries to dig out from among her features a resemblance to some member, alive or dead, of her own family. She is interrupted in her hopeless search by Diana. And she takes her seat in silence at the social board. Before she had entered the room, Joan had credited herself with an appetite to which any food short of tripe or haggis would be welcome. She had said to herself reassuringly that they are not likely to have tripe for breakfast. She had pictured herself as pasturing with relish on all manner of plain and homely food, thick bread-and-scraps, porridge, perhaps treacle. But the first glance that she casts on the table arrangements robs her at once of half her appetite—a rumpled table-cloth, rich in yesterday's stains; a dull teapot; dim spoons; cups all cracked more or less, mostly more; and not a flower! Not one of all the thousand primroses that are palely smiling from every hedge-row! Treacle! porridge! Who could eat treacle or porridge on such a table-cloth?

Her meditations are interrupted by the sound of the two girls' voices, raised in recriminatory dialogue. They are wrangling as to who shall make the tea, or rather who shall not make it, for it is clearly an unpopular office.

After a few moments of argument of "you-are-another" nature, during which no approach is apparently made to a decision, Joan's soft voice strikes in, or rather steals in, between the shrill sharpness of those of the two combatants:—

"If you like I will make tea; I am considered" (with a faint smile) "rather a good tea-maker; I always used to make it at—at—Dering."

As she speaks, the breakfast-room at Dering rises before her mind's eye; the breakfast-table in all the loveliness of spotless cleanliness, brilliantly-polished old silver, and airy china; the sideboard temptingly spread; the wealth of delicate flowers; the kind and courteous old man who always greeted her so lovingly; the pleasant, well-bred guests. Her offer is accepted with effusive gratitude, and she takes her place at the head of the board.

"Take care of the lid of the teapot," says Bell, as a parting injunction; "the hinge is broken, so it is loose, and if you are not careful to pour very slowly, it tumbles into the cups and upsets them."

"And is it never to be mended either?" asks Joan with a laugh that tries to be playful, but only succeeds in being sad. "Do the dogs like it too?"

Joan's motive for her proposal has been chiefly good-nature, but there has also been in it a grain of self-interest. Behind the urn she will be less observed—less compelled to eat. But here she is mistaken. Diana, whose sharp eyes are apparently as sharp as they are clear and shining, detects the emptiness of her plate, and the ill-nature of jaws.

"Why, Joan, you are eating nothing!" she cries in a high key of surprise, "positively nothing!—have some beef!" indicating a dish wherein appetizingly repose some thick slices of meat, lavishly daubed with all but mustard, and which, apparently, is the nearest approach to a grill that the Moberley chef can effect. "No! Some broiled ham, then? No! I see!"—a flood of color deepening the rose-tints in her fresh face, and a tone of mortification in her voice—"and I do not wonder."

"Indeed you are mistaken," cries Joan, now thoroughly distressed, reddening till the tears come into her blue eyes, with a vexed scarlet that outflames even her cousin's, and ready to volunteer to eat any abomination that can be offered to her. "If you will let me I will change my mind. Yes, I will have some—some—beef, please!" (looking anxiously from one dish to the other to see whose contents she will most likely be able to swallow). "Not very much—only a little."

It is on her plate now, and they are all looking at her. But the effort is vain. The too plentiful mustard makes her sneeze and cry.

"You cannot manage it!" asks Diana, in a disappointed key, after watching the ill-success of her guest's endeavors with an intent interest. "I was afraid that you would not, but" (looking at her with round childish eyes, full of concern and apprehension) "what will you do all the time you are living with us? It is" (glancing ruefully at the untempting dainties) "it is never any better than this—you will starve."

"There is not much fear of that," replies Joan, smiling faintly, though indeed the very same idea has just been presenting itself before her own mind's eye. "But to tell the truth, I do not think I am quite so hungry as I imagined; at least more bread-and-butter hungry than anything else."

"Give it to the dogs," said Mrs. Moberley placidly, not disquieting herself much as to any freaks of appetite displayed by her niece. "Here, Mr. Brown, you are the one who do not mind mustard! hi, along!"

Mr. Brown is on the other side of the table, standing on his hind-legs, with his fore-paws on the cloth, but, on hearing himself addressed, drops down on all-fours again, and rushes round the table in a stormy gallop. Too well he knows the manners of his brothers and sisters to give them any chance of interposing between him and his inheritance. Joan loves dogs, however noisy, rude, and greedy they may be; she loves them all, and at the present moment she is also deeply grateful to Mr. Brown for placing her of her beef. So she stoops down and pats his smooth head.

"He is very like a dog belonging to a friend of mine," she says; "by-the-by, I think he is an acquaintance of yours; I mean not the dog but the man. I think—I am almost sure that he said he knew you."

A light pink colors her cheeks as she says these last words, a tint called up by the recollection of the way in which Wolferstan had alluded to his knowledge of her aunt.

"What regiment was he in?" asks Bell. "When was he quartered here? The 7th were here last, and before them the 35th, and before them the 85th—"

"He never could have been quartered here," replied Joan, "because he is in the Guards, but I believe that he lives near here—at least his people do; his name is Wolferstan; do you know any such person?"

She is looking from one to the other of the three faces round her, and as she mentions the name of Wolferstan a ray of intelligence and recognition illumines them all.

"He said he knew us?" asks Diana in a tone of surprise and semi-awe; "he must have meant by sight."

"Nonsense, Di!" cries her mother, tartly; "he does know me quite well. He always takes off his hat to me whenever he meets me in Helmsley!"

"Is not he stylish-looking?" cries Bell, enthusiastically; "he looks so nice in church!"

"His father was a very *distinguished*-looking man, when first I came here," says Mrs. Moberley, pensively, "though no one would believe it now to look at him; he is quite silly, poor old gentleman, and has to go about in a wheeled-chair, with his valet to blow his nose for him!"

"His mother is a made-up old Jezebel!" cries Bell, acrimoniously. "Every year her hair is a different color; she drives past us sometimes in the road, and looks at us as if we were the dirt under her feet."

"And all because she is an Honorable, I suppose," says Mrs. Moberley, shaking her head; "and, after all, it is the lowest thing that you can be in the peerage, without being nothing at all."

"And so you know young Wolferstan?" says