

Yet, O Sea, that glittering breast is heaving,  
All unconscious of the life it rears,  
Shouting in the mirth of its bereaving,  
Laughing o'er a thousand widows' tears.

No! I ask not for a life high lifted  
O'er the changeful passions of mankind,  
Undistracted, self-contained, and gifted  
With a force to feeble issues blind.

Rather fill my soul to overflowing  
With the tide of this world's grief and wrong;  
Let me suffer; though it be in knowing,  
Suffering thus, I am not wholly strong.

Let what grandeur crown the life of others,  
Let what light on lone endurance shine;  
I will set myself beside my brothers,  
And their toils and troubles shall be mine!

—Spectator.

### THE ENGLISH LABOURER.

THE labourer whose decease had been reported to the Board upon their assembling, was born some seventy-eight or seventy-nine years ago. The exact date is uncertain; many of the old men can only fix their age by events that happened when they were growing from boys into manhood. That it must have been nearer eighty than seventy years since is known, however, to the elderly farmers who recollect him as a man with a family when they were young. The thatched cottage stood beside the road at one end of a long, narrow garden, enclosed from the highway by a hedge of elder. At the back there was a ditch and mound with elm-trees and green meadows beyond. A few poles used to lean against the thatch, their tops rising above the ridge, and close by was a stock of thorn faggots. In the garden three or four aged and moss-grown apple-trees stood among the little plots of potatoes, and as many plum-trees in the elder hedge. One tall pear-tree, with seared bark, grew near the end of the cottage; it bore a large crop of pears, which were often admired by the people who came along the road, but were really hard and woody. As a child he played in the ditch and hedge, or crept through into the meadow and searched in the spring for violets to offer to the passers-by, or he swung on the gate in the lane and held it open for the farmers in their gigs in hope of a half-penny.

As a lad he went forth with his father to work in the fields and came home to the cabbage boiled for the evening meal. It was not a very roomy or commodious house to return to after so many hours in the field, exposed to rain and wind, to snow or summer sun. The stones of the floor were uneven and did not fit at the edges. There was a beam across the low ceiling, to avoid which, as he grew older, he had to bow his head when crossing the apartment. A wooden ladder or steps, not a staircase proper, behind the white-washed partition, led to the bedroom. The steps were worm-eaten and worn. In the sitting-room the narrow panes of the small window were so overgrown with woodbine as to admit but little light. But in summer the door was wide open, and the light and the soft air came in. The thick walls and thatch kept it warm and cosy in winter when they gathered round the fire. Every day in his manhood he went out to the field; every item, as it were, of life centred in that little cottage. In time he came to occupy it with his own wife; and his children, in their turn, crept through the hedge or swung upon the gate. They grew up, and one by one went away, till at last he was left alone.

He had not taken much conscious notice of the changing aspect of the scene around him. The violets flowered year after year; still he went to plough. The May bloomed on and scented the hedges; still he went to his work. The green summer foliage became broader and the acorns fell from the oaks; still he laboured on, and saw the ice and snow, and heard the wind roar in the old familiar trees without much thought of it. But those old familiar trees, the particular hedges he had worked among so many years, the very turf of the meadows over which he had walked so many times, the view down the road from the garden gate, the distant sign-post and the red-brick farmhouse—all these things had become part of his life. There was no hope nor joy left to him, but he wanted to stay on among them to the end. He liked to ridge up his little plot of potatoes; he liked them to creep up his ladder and mend the thatch of his cottage; he liked to cut himself a cabbage, and to gather the one small basketful of apples. There was a kind of dull pleasure in cropping the elder hedge, and even in collecting the dead branches scattered under the trees. To be about the hedges, in the meadows and along the brooks was necessary to him, and he liked to be at work. Threescore and ten did not seem the limit of his working-days; he still could and would hoe—a bowed back is no impediment, but perhaps rather an advantage, at that occupation. He could use a prong in the hay-making; he could reap a little, and do good service tying up the corn. There were many little jobs on the farm that required experience combined with the plodding patience of age, and these he could do better than a stronger man. The years went round again, and yet he worked. Indeed, the farther back a man's birth dates in the beginning of the present century, the more he seems determined to labour. He worked on till every member of his family had gone, most to their last home, and still went out at times when the weather was not too severe. He worked on and potted about the garden, and watched the young green plums swelling on his trees, and did a bit of gleanings, and thought the wheat would weigh bad when it was threshed out.

Presently people began to bestir themselves and to ask whether there

was no one to take care of the old man, who might die from age and none near. Where were his own friends and relations? One strong son had enlisted and gone to India; and, though his time had expired long ago, nothing had ever been heard of him. Another son had emigrated to Australia, and once sent back a present of money and a message, written for him by a friend, that he was doing well. But of late he, too, had dropped out of sight. Of three daughters who grew up, two were known to be dead, and the third was believed to be in New Zealand. The old man was quite alone. He had no hope and no joy, yet he was almost happy in a slow, unfeeling way, wandering about the garden and the cottage. But in the winter his half-frozen blood refused to circulate, his sinews would not move his willing limbs, and he could not work.

His case came before the Board of Guardians. Those who knew all about him wished to give him substantial relief in his own cottage, and to appoint some aged woman as nurse—a thing that is occasionally done, and most humanely. But there were technical difficulties in the way; the cottage was either his own, or partly his own, and relief could not be given to any one possessed of property! Just then, too, there was a great movement against out-door relief. Official circulars came round, warning boards to curtail it, and much fuss was made. In the result, the old man was driven into the workhouse, muttering and grumbling; he had to be bodily carried to the trap, and thus by physical force was dragged from his home. In the workhouse there is of necessity a dead level of monotony; there are many persons, but no individuals. The dining-hall is crossed with forms and narrow tables, somewhat resembling those formerly used in schools. On these, at dinner-time, are placed a tin mug and a tin soup-plate for each person, every mug and every plate exactly alike. When the unfortunates have taken their places, the master pronounces grace from an elevated desk at the end of the hall.

Plain as is the fare, it was better than the old man had existed on for years; but though better it was not his dinner. He was not sitting in his old chair, at his own old table, round which his children had once gathered. He had not planted the cabbage, and tended it while it grew, and cut it himself. So it was, all through the workhouse life. The dormitories were clean, but the ward was not his old bedroom up the worm-eaten steps, with the slanting ceiling, where as he woke in the morning he could hear the sparrows chirping, the chaffinch calling, and the lark singing aloft. There was a garden attached to the workhouse, where he could do a little if he liked, but it was not his garden. He missed his plum-trees and apples, and the tall pear, and the lordly elder hedge. He looked round, raising his head with difficulty, and he could not see the sign-post, nor the familiar red-bricked farmhouse. He knew all the rain that had fallen must have come through the thatch of the old cottage in at least one place, and he would have liked to have gone and re-thatched it with trembling hand. At home he could lift the latch of the garden gate and go down the road when he wished. Here he could not go outside the boundary; it was against the regulations. Everything to appearance had been monotonous in the cottage; but there he did not find it monotonous.

At the workhouse the monotony weighed upon him. He used to think as he lay awake in bed that when the spring came nothing should keep him in this place. He would take his discharge and go out, and borrow a hoe from somebody and go and do a bit of work again, and be about in the fields. That was his one hope all through his first winter. Nothing else enlivened it, except an occasional little present of tobacco from the guardians who knew him. The spring came, but the rain was ceaseless. No work of the kind he could do was possible in such weather. Still there was the summer; but the summer was no improvement. In the autumn he felt weak and was not able to walk far. The chance for which he had waited had gone. Again the winter came, and he now rapidly grew more feeble.

When once an aged man gives up, it seems strange at first that he should be so utterly helpless. In the infirmary the real benefit of the workhouse reached him. The food, the little luxuries and attentions, were far superior to anything he could possibly have had at home. But still it was not home. The windows did not permit him, from his bed, to see the leafless trees or the dark woods and distant hills. Left to himself, it is certain that of choice he would have crawled under a rick, or into a hedge, if he could not have reached his cottage.

The end came very slowly; he ceased to exist by imperceptible degrees, like an oak tree. He remained for days in a semi-unconscious state, neither moving nor speaking. It happened at last. In the gray of the winter dawn, as the stars paled and the whitened grass was stiff with hoar-frost, and the rime coated every branch of the tall elms, as the milker came from the pen and the young plough-boy whistled down the road to his work, the spirit of the aged man departed.

What production did that old man's life of labour represent? What value must be put upon the service of the son that fought in India; of the son that worked in Australia; of the daughter in New Zealand, whose children will help to build up a new nation. These things surely have their value. Hodge died, and the very grave-digger grumbled as he delved through the earth, hard-bound in the iron frost, for it jarred his hand and might break his spade.

The low mound will soon be level, and the place of his burial shall not be known.—Hodge and his Masters.

ALL that is left of the house in which Shakespeare resided during the latter portion of his life and in which he died is the foundation. The last owner, a revengeful parson, pulled the house down because he thought he was being taxed higher than he considered due. He also cut down a mulberry tree which was planted by the poet, in order to rid himself of the annoyance of people coming from all parts of the world to look at it.