

A SOLDIER'S LAST LETTER.

(Imitated from the French.)

Dear Rose to this page full of prattle
Don't think of replying, I beg:
Our army has won a great battle.
Your lover has lost his left leg.
Our soldiers, of course, did their duty—
No foe could resist their attack:
We carried off baggage and booty—
I carry a ball in my back.

Although they can't manage to save me.
They're kind in this Hospital, Rose:
For my body the house-surgeon gave me
Ten francs, which I herewith enclose.
At times, dear, I've sorely lamented
That soon I must sleep in the earth—
But, at least, I shall sleep more contented,
Thus leaving you all I am worth!

My mother, there no'er was a better,
Was sick, when I bade her "good-bye;"
But, ere your receipt of this letter,
I hope she has breathed her last sigh:
For, if the dear soul be still living,
Her heart is so warm that I fear
She will suddenly die, while you're giving
The news that my end is so near.

Sweet Rose, to your love and attention
Poor Carlo, my dog, I commend.
But, pray, in his presence don't mention
The fate of his master and friend.
No doubt, he looked forward to greet me
As Captain, or Sergeant, at least:
If he knew he will never meet me,
He would grieve like a Christian, poor beast!

Farewell Rose! 'tis useless repining—
Farewell to the pledges we vowed—
In the regiment of ghosts I am joining
No furlough, you know, is allowed.
I am shipping away from existence—
It is dark—and I hear from above
A voice that cries, "March!" in the distance—
Rose darling, remember our love!

Montreal. GEO. MURRAY.

JESSIE'S MARRIED LIFE.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

BY NED P. MAH.

I.

THIRTY YEARS AGO ON THE QUEEN'S HIGHWAY.

Noontide on a blazing summer's day. A pitiless, shadowless glare over everything. Over the white, dusty roadways, over the stucco church and dazzling head-stones in the churchyard, over the white stone wall, over the flagged side-walks that scorch the feet of the unwary wearers of wafer-soled summer boots; over the houses and gardens, and drooping flowers and ripening fruits; over the time honored clock tower, over the clock, like one huge eye in the centre of its hoary forehead, whose golden hands and gilded figures glitter so, that it is barely possible to read the exact time—four minutes to mid-day: over the façade of the Red Lion, pierced by the long tunnel-like archway, beneath which a choice team of greys stands waiting the arrival of the Firefly.

The Firefly mail coach dashes round the corner anon, and comes to a standstill in front of the Red Lion. There is something extremely workmanlike about the pull up. No fuss about it, no attempt at show, no jerking the wheelers on to their haunches, yet the rapid pace of the coach has been checked, and the reins thrown artistically from the hands of the gentlemanly autocrat of the box, and the four reeking roadsters whipped out of the vehicle by the natty stable-boy in a second of time.

As gentleman Jim walks, whip in hand, to the bar for his glass of brandy hot, he casts a critical eye at his new team. "Arry," he cries, in a hissing whisper, than which thunder could not be more terrible in the ears of the trembling subordinate, "you blank, blanked fool, didn't I tell you to let Bess have her head easier! Give her half a dozen holes at least more in her cheek rein; her wind isn't what it was, and she likes to get her head down on Lord's Hill."

Beg parding, sir," says Dandy Jack, guard of the Firefly, to a presumptuous passenger, "box seat's bespoke, sir."

Presumptuous passenger accordingly subsides into the only vacant place he finds, and he has scarcely settled his back comfortably against the pile of luggage behind him, before the greys are harnessed, gentleman Jim has mounted, ribbons in hand to his throne, Dandy Jack has screamed "All right," the four natty, moleskin-clad grooms have let go the heads of the four greys, catching deftly the lower corners of the check dust cloths bound with red braid, that hid the speckless glory of their polished harness and silky coats, and the glittering, dazzling, gaudy Firefly has swept, meteor-like, upon its way, just as the hoarse old clock booms out the first stroke of noon. This is how they did things in the good old days of ten miles an hour, including stoppages, when coaches carried Her Majesty's mails on Her Majesty's highway.

Meteor-like flashes the Firefly up the white, broad, unpaved High street, attracting to the windows the inhabitants of the town, attracting the eyes of the passengers in the street, attracting not only the eyes, but the loudly-expressed ecstasies of the small boys at the churchyard corner; attracting with a strange magnetism not only the eyes, but appealing to the whole nature of the poor cripple of Snatch-up Alley, who has wheeled himself down painfully in his miserable little wooden box, as he has wheeled himself day

by day from his youth up, and will wheel himself day by day till death mercifully ends his existence, or until a new-fangled railroad ends the existence of the Firefly. Which will happen first, I wonder! To no one under the sun is there such a charm in the poetry of motion as to the poor cripple. And to the whole town, though it see it day by day, the brilliant, well-appointed, dashing Firefly is a sight that will never grow old.

Past the white stucco church flashes the Firefly at twelve good English miles the hour, with the off leader in his accustomed canter. "It's no use checking him," says gentleman Jim; "it only frets him and he'll sober down of himself at the first hill." Past the raised terrace known as "The Rampart," surrounded by its great, sturdy spreading oaks, united by a chain and rail fence on which the young vagrants of the town perform the wildest acrobatic feats; past the squalid entrance to Snatch-up Alley, winding, serpentine, round Bryant's Corner, between high hedges that hem the view on either side, till, landing at last upon the open, gentleman Jim's firm hand pulls up incontinently that the Firefly's box seat may receive the body of the traveller for whom it was "bespoke."

Already he is emerging from the great iron gates as the coach stops, and no sooner has the gardener hung up the leather portmanteau from the wheelbarrow at his side, and it has been deftly stowed, by a single kick and stamp of Dandy Jack's toe and heel, in the recesses of the boot, than the young man, climbing up rapidly hand over hand, with quick transference of his polished feet from wheelbox to roller belt, deposits himself snugly at Jim's side. The English are not a demonstrative people, and whatever of leave-taking he may have had has been got over within the grounds. Dandy Jack, whose normal place, whenever the coach stops, is on the ground, screams "All right!" once more, and making a little rush at the coach as it starts again, springs upon the top, and clambers to his queer little perch behind, to betake himself once more to the cheery music of his horn.

Gentleman Jim, sitting stern and silent in the regalia of a pair of hoarsely cut lavender trousers, strapped lightly over lacquered boots of very neat exterior—his toes have not begun to get the box gait yet—an indescribably magnificent vest, a bird's-eye toyle, and a dust-colored overcoat of the very lightest texture, the whole surmounted by his majestic visage, and the inevitable white hat, with a black band, and an inexpressibly knowing, yet almost imperceptible, veer towards the right ear—having now got his team well in hand, and being, therefore, on the best possible terms with them and himself, condescends to exchange the sprig of jasmine, ravished from pretty Jessie at the Red Lion, which he has hitherto held in the impenetrable calm of his heroic lips, for a choice cigar from the case extended to him on his left.

Then Gentleman Jim becomes loquacious and catalogues the points, describes the tempers, and relates anecdotes of the four greys. "Bought 'em myself, sir," says he; "picked 'em up at Tattersals dirt cheap. The Duke of B— used to drive that team down to the Derby in his drag. I buy all the Company's horses now, and I save 'em hundreds a year by it. When I first came on the road they had five horses to every four miles of road, and so many sick, sir, that there was scarce ever a perfectly sound team over any stage. Now that I horse the coach we have only three horses to every four miles, and very few, comparatively, sick. The Brighton road, sir, though I say it that shouldn't say it, never knew what they'd lost till after I had left them, which I did on account of a row I had with a very influential and very choleric old gent, that used to travel up and down constant. I was in the right of it, but as he was an old customer, why, of course, I had to go. But I'll make bold to say their dividends will be considerable per cent. less this year than they were last. You see, sir, there's a good deal in buying horses, and a good deal in knowing horses, and a good deal in the treatment of horses when they're in stable. Now, I've heard say, sir, that a good commanding officer will get to know the disposition and bias and peculiarity of every one of his soldiers, and as it is with men, sir, so it is with horses; there's every one of 'em has his own fancies, and a throat strap too tight, or a bit that cuts, or a collar that galls—Shall I pull up, sir?"

This question was elicited by a lovely vision which suddenly became apparent by the roadside. A beautiful vision of a young girl in white muslin and blue ribbons, and eyes so bright that there was a suspicion of tears in them. As the coach almost halted in obedience to the gesture of the box passenger, he leant down, and received from the little white hand, upstretched to him, a single white rose, which he raised to his lips.

"Good-bye," was faltered from the little red lips.

"Good-bye, darling, and God bless you!"

"Don't forget to write."

And the Firefly dashed on again.

A commonplace parting enough, but under that parting how deep a romance was hidden was known only to Heaven, to themselves, and to three other persons in the world.

There was a silence of some seconds after this incident on the box of the Firefly. Gentleman Jim was the first to break it.

"I've often enough had the pleasure to drive your father, sir," said he, "which is a real gentleman, if ever there was one, and no pride about him, always ready with his crown and his thanks at the end of the journey, and not too proud, though he doesn't smoke in a general way, to

take a weed out of my case for company's sake—though he might smoke worse, though I say it. But this is almost the first time, if I recollect right, that I've driven you, sir."

"I am going," said the young man, "to seek my fortune."

Gentleman Jim's reply suffered a delay of some seconds, for here they reached the brow of a steep descent, where Dirty Dick, a character well known in the hunting field in winter and on the road in summer, was at hand to perform his wonted feat of deftly flinging the skid beneath the wheel without a moment's slackening of the Firefly's speed. Then he said:

"Are you quite sure—and I say it as shouldn't say it, only meaning no disrespect, sir, that you are not leaving your fortune behind you? Sure there's no fortune in the world, sir, as can compare to the true and faithful love of a pretty woman?"

At the time, the words fell lightly enough upon the tympanum of the denizen of the box seat. How often did they occur to him in after years with a weightier meaning!

"Love and faith and beauty are all very well, Jim, but it's money makes the mare go."

"And pluck's the best whip-cord, sir, of which you have plenty, as I'll be bound."

Shall I chronicle all the conversation, horse or otherwise, that occurred upon this journey southwards? Shall I describe how they toiled up Lord's Hill, of which the indomitable spirit of the four greys, aided by the cheery voice of the kindly coachman, made light? Lord's Hill, the terror alike of drivers and of cattle, where in that day which knew not of a society for the prevention of cruelty, the guard of the London "Heavy" was accustomed to dismount and flog the leaders step by step with a heavy hunting crop, while a many thonged flagellator, technically termed "the cat," was produced from the boot for the punishment of the wheelers. Shall I tell how, after long hours and many changes of teams, the Firefly rattled down Highgate Hill and putting on town pace clattered into Holborn and pulled up in style at the Saracen's Head!

Shall we journey with our hero from London to Rome, and join him in his studies there, and listening to his painter's slang, you learned about the old masters and the mysteries of *chiaro oscuro*? Shall we dwell upon the mirth, and the loves and the follies with which his fellow students sweetened their labors and recreated their leisure hours? These can have but little bearing on our story. Let us rather hurry over the next twelve months, until Theodore Leigh learns that his father is ruined.

"I did not know," cried Theo., "that any one not in business could be ruined."

"Sometimes," returned his bosom friend, Adolphe D'Orsay, dryly, "when they entrust their money to those who are in business."

"What shall I do?" cried Theo. gloomily. "I have no money. In fact, I'm already in debt, and—"

"Come back to Liège with me," cried the genial student, "and pass the winter there."

II.

LIÈGE.

As Theodore had subsided from the indomitable ambition, the sublime aspirations, the castle-building and hopefulness of two years ago, into the cynical, devil-may-careism of the ordinary Bohemian; as he lies here, on the squalid sofa of his bare little room in the back street in Liège, warmed only by the piece of stove pipe which shoots up impudently in the middle of his floor and vanishes incontinently at right angles through the wall; with a dingy smoking cap on his Hyperion curls, a long pipe between his lips, and a cup of coffee, made with hot water purchased from the ancient and witch-like dame who sits with her feet on a *chauffe-pied* behind the early breakfast stall in the *porte cochère* below, and favored by a *petit verre*—not measured, unless it be by Theo's judgement, which is sometimes liberal—from the black bottle on the floor, whence a fragrant odor of rum exhales, at his elbow; while that which proved the more substantial portion of his repast is hinted by the huge loaf of currant bread which looms in the background; sometimes butter is to be seen on the board, but last night an unlucky shower inflicted on Theo. the necessity of disburysing sundry centimes for a *fiacre*, and the luxury is unattainable to-day. Reclining here, I say, he forms the very type and beau ideal of the Bohemian.

But mind, a Bohemian is not a cad. Affecting to laugh at all conventionalities, bearing with an equal mind the cruelties of fate and the smiles of fortune, dining to-day on *bouillon* or on two sous worth of *à la mode*; to-morrow for fifteen francs at the best restaurant in the place; given to a philosophy oftener cynical than epicurean; indulging sometimes in questionable practical jokes, yet without a suspicion of malicious intent, yet ready at a moment's notice to assume the garb and the demeanor of a gentleman; generous to a fault, chivalric to a degree, amorous to excess, yet incapable of a base design or a mean action, for there is ever a fund of good nature and charity—of that charity which is *non ignora mali*, in the big heart of the true Bohemian. He laughs at care, makes light of trouble, endures privations with equanimity, and has been known to give his last sou to aid a less fortunate brother.

Theodore was not the first man whose dreams of glory have ended in this kind of acquired philosophy.

To him enters Adolphe, his chum and bosom

friend, with joy on his face and *Hamburger Nachrichten* in his hand.

"Rejoice with me, *mon vieux*!" he cries, performing a *pas seul* upon the dingy planks and whirling the journal ecstatically around his head; "a ray of the sun has pierced the gloom of my existence, my bright star is in the ascendant. Fortune has forgotten to frown and has smiled at last, by mistake, probably—it is but the exception which proves the rule."

"You have no right to say that," rejoins Theo. "I might say such a thing with my cursed luck!"

"I dispute the privilege with you. I cannot believe my eyes, yet here it is in black and white. I have won 1,000 marks banco in the Hamburg lottery!"

"Believe! O Thomas Didymus! You always fall upon your feet; I always tumble on my hands and knees!"

"I will wager my existence and the 1,000 marks banco into the bargain, which is of far more consequence, that you are forsworn. Pray did you not fall on your feet last night?"

"You speak in riddles."

"The key to the riddle is—Annabel!"

"Metaphorically, then, as far as Annabel's amiability was concerned, I fell upon my feet. I danced with her three times. Literally I stepped upon her dress, tore it, and tumbled on my hands and knees. *Ecc signum*, a rent in your black dress pants!"

"Pshaw! It don't matter a straw. The bault fine dresses like an angel. The tear will never be noticed."

"You speak like a millionaire. I was dreading to meet you. What is a split in his trousers to the owner of a thousand marks?"

"A bagatelle indeed! For he could even afford a new pair."

The thought that such an extravagance was possible caused them both to laugh.

"But did you enjoy yourself? Give me a graphic description of last evening. What did she say to you?"

"She was brought back by a partner while I was talking to Madame Cerretti. She exclaimed against my playing wall flower, protested I only did it out of conceit, because I was too vain of my dancing to think anyone in the room worth dancing with. I declared it was my modesty, that I had not the courage to ask any one, that my dancing was excusable. 'Faint heart,' I added, 'never won fair lady.' 'No,' she replied, with that bewitching foreign accent of hers, and the sweetest smile. 'No fair lady may sometimes win faint heart.' It is not so tapping my arm with a coquettish gesture with her fan, 'Come, if you will not ask me to dance, I will ask you. You can't refuse, you know, and you are perfectly aware you dance divinely.' Well, we danced, and danced two or three times more during the evening, when that stupid accident occurred, another couple coming bump up against us. Then we had both to go home. And I'm to paint her portrait. I am sure I don't know where. I didn't like to tell her I had no studio, and I can never paint in that dark little room of Cerretti's, you know."

"Never mind. You are going to have a studio. We'll hire that room of Julien's with the big skylight. Now don't say a word—remember the thousand marks—and you will make your fortune, and pay me back. Do you know I have a romance ready built for you. You will fall in love with this girl, the natural sequence of her falling in love with you. She is rich—she will make you rich. You are going to marry her. What a thing it is to be a favorite with women!"

"I am not going to dispute the fact that women are well inclined towards my unworthy self, because to my own wonderment I know it to be a fact. To my own wonderment, I say, for I am not at all the sort of man I should admire if I were a woman."

"If you were a woman you would look at things as women do. Remember," pursued Adolphe, laughing, "woman is a thing without reason, she pokes the fire at the top."

"But I am not going to marry Annabel."

"You are an idiot if you do not."

"Then I shall remain one—in your estimation."

"My dear fellow, are you mad! She is young, beautiful, *spirituelle*, and rich, and since your elder brother and the panic together, have ruined your father, I suppose you are not indisposed to admit that, from however high a point you look at such matters, a little wealth is by no means a drawback. It's dying in the face of Providence; it's—it's shutting heaven in your own face."

"I wonder," said Theodore pensively, "whether I am a coward—because I see my advantages, and don't take advantage of them? Ruthlessly am I hiding my talents in the ground. Am I better, or am I less daring than others? I only know that it is just the actions that my sense of honor dictates that lose me advancement and the world's applause, and the love of those whose attachment I value. Is a man then right only when he does wrong?—a fool, rushing to self-destruction, and a coward to boot, when he does right? It is a thought to drive one mad!"

Adolphe looked at his friend in amazement. He could not understand with what he could reproach himself in accepting the love of Annabel Cerretti. Was it that he did not love her sufficiently? Was it that he was poor? His own way of looking at all love affairs was so different. When a pair of bright eyes challenged him he replied at once, and was not at all particular as to whom they belonged.