

WEARINESS.

BY CHARLES RITCHIE.

My days of light are mingled with sad tears,
For grief, unbidden, steals into my soul,
And the fierce warmth and laughter of old years
And many passions, vexed by many fears,
Cry aloud for peace and for control,
And the small part of life would equal the great whole.

The small, frail seed-time and the eager flush
Of youth, untutored by experience sage,
Would forward to maturer freshness rush,
And my deep, long ambition softly crush
My studied calm, quenched by an eyeless rage.
Ere I haste, let me write upon dear memory's page.

Yes, wherefore are our spirits hushed by woe,
Clasped round and fondled in a conscious fond,
For all our merit towards our love must go,
Our health and hope to feed and make it grow
A thing of beauty, worshipping and warm,
Why run we thus, nor shun the ever-thickening storm?

Time pauseth not, and we with hurried feet,
Half-hearted, half-ignoring all our art,
Are seekers after strange rewards and sweet,
And moved as by the touch of fleshly heat,
Captives in chains, and yearn not to depart
Till through the liver strikes a barbed dart.

Children of sorrow, aspirants of lust,
Ye are sent forth, commanded to be strong,
Ay, and with purpose more than covers of dust,
In higher life to place sublimer trust,
To cling to Fate, though intervals be long.
In the grand newer season Right shall slay old Wrong.

I falter, I who hold the harp and sing,
E'er that I wander from thy secret ways,
O teach me, teach me, dread and stainless king,
Like eagle shall I mount on skyward wing,
Excelling in the knowledge of thy praise,
O, lift me to the loveliness on high from craze.

There can from out the sadness come a joy
Which shall not turn from gazing at the sun;
There cometh hope despair cannot destroy,
And perfectness will not our senses cloy;
All labour shall be by just freedom won,
God shall our refuge be, when life is dead and done.
Montreal.

MARGIE.

Edward Stavedale was a painter—an artist in the fullest, completest sense of the word, for he lived, as it were, in the centre of a circle of art, and it was through this medium that the perception of outward things came to him. It was under the influence of this atmosphere that all thoughts were presented to him. He lived, therefore, in a world of his own; realities were to him the things most unreal. He mixed as little as possible in the society of other men because he found their presence and conversation disturbed the beautiful phantoms that, when he was alone, held him such sweet and genial company.

In summer-time, with a knapsack, a staff and a sketch-book, he would wander forth wherever the fancy led him, now over the mountains, now by the seashore, now through woods and valleys, collecting everywhere fresh ideas, fresh experiences of that nature without which true art cannot exist.

To Edward Stavedale sensation was a word that conveyed no meaning. He had passed through the stages of youth and early manhood untempted by any of the desires or ambitions, natural or artificial, that seem almost inseparable from man's career in society. He worshipped beauty in whatever form it came to him, but only through the soul, and in its purest sense.

Now that his life was midway spent, there were moments when a vague want was felt, hints that came he knew not whence, of a yearning for some more warm and real sympathy than the shadows of great men and women could afford him, wearing a void in his heart which grew wider and deeper each day.

One lovely evening in the fall Ed. was pursuing his desultory rambles, and had struck the wood which skirts the road between the Mountain House on the Palisades and Fort Lee, when his attention was suddenly attracted by the voice of a woman, harsh and shrill. Advancing further, he found he was approaching a bivouac of strollers, half-actors, half-conjurors, of the lower order, that wandered about the States, stopping to display their performances at out-of-the-way villages and remote farm-houses. All the strollers were absent with the exception of the woman—the speaker—whose hardened features and unsympathetic aspect kept the promise given by the voice, and a little girl of about thirteen or fourteen, small, dark, sharp-featured, but with limbs fine and faultless in their slight proportions, and wondrous, wild, dark eyes, almost excessive in size, flushing from beneath the waves of black hair that overhung her face. To her the woman was addressing herself in harsh and bitter reproaches, to which the child listened in the silence that becomes almost apathy in children who, from their infancy, are little used to any other tone.

The woman, finding how slight had been the effect of her words, raised a great heavy stick which was about to descend on the girl's naked shoulders, when Stavedale sprang forward, and, clutching the upraised arm, prevented the cruel blow from being delivered, while he admonished the woman in terms so severe that she actually quailed beneath his flashing eye.

Ed. Stavedale having discharged what he considered his duty, threw a glance of pity and a word of sympathy to the sobbing child, whose slight form still quivered with excitement, and turned away. He strode down the road to a small inn overlooking the Hudson, and, having dined, lighted his pipe and repaired to the stoop to enjoy his accustomed reveries. But the

shapes he was wont to evolve came not; one face—a wild elfin face, with heavy black hair and great lustrous eyes; one form—a slight, agile, nervous one—always stood before him. He took a pencil and sketched them in various positions and attitudes, and formed plans of pictures in which this little figure was to form the conspicuous object.

"I must get the child to sit to me," he said, to himself; and he resolved to start back to the strollers' bivouac in the wood, and to offer the virago a dollar to achieve this purpose.

As he was about to set forth, the girl, accompanied by a raw youth, the virago bringing up the rear, passed beneath the stoop on which he sat, the woman entering the hotel.

The child suddenly looked up. What a change came over that listless face; every feature became instinct with earnest life; the eyes gleamed, the lips broke into a radiant smile over dazzling little teeth, and a warm glow spread itself beneath the dark, sallow, but transparent skin.

It was very pleasant, Stavedale thought, to see any face light up so in his presence.

"You are glad to see me?" he said.

"Glad—yes."

"What is your name?"

"Margie, sir."

"Should you like me to make a portrait of you?"

"(Of me, sir?) with a blush and a smile.

"Yes; if you will sit I will give you half a dollar."

A pained expression stole around the child's face.

"Yes; only—"

"Only what? You won't? Why not?"

"Because mother—"

"If I ask her leave, and give her something?"

"Ah, then, perhaps."

A bargain was soon made with the old hag, and she readily consented to Margie's giving as many sittings to the artist as might be required, during her sojourn in the neighbourhood.

The girl was to Ed. Stavedale a curious study in her moral as well as in her physical nature. Vicious example, uncontrolled passions of every bad sort, brutal usage, fraud, force, the absence of all manliness, of all womanliness in those she lived with—such was the moral atmosphere in which she had grown to girlhood, such was the soil in which was sown a heart, an intense sensibility, a bright intelligence, and keen sense of all grace and beauty. Not a taint of vulgarity was in the child's nature; not a word passed her lips that had not a meaning, not a movement of her limbs but was replete with a strange, peculiar grace.

Ed. was fascinated by the elfin child, who, as she sat or stood before him, seemed not only to guess all his slightest intentions, but constantly suggested new ideas of form and symmetry, beautiful beyond description. He sketched her in every attitude: he sometimes feared to weary her, but when he expressed the fear, she shook her head with one of her bright smiles and an emphatic "Never"; so he went on painting, sometimes talking to her, sometimes in a silence which lasted for hours, and which she never attempted to break. At length—it was the second day—the strollers struck their camp, and Stavedale started on the road to New York. His way lay through Pleasant Valley and Sunnyside, and as he strode along he thought of the pictures he would paint, in all of which some hint, some movement, some expression taken from her, could be introduced with precious effect. He opened his sketch-book, and as he walked slowly on he contemplated the innumerable studies of her with which it was filled. He looked up at last—before him stood the original—trembling, her great eyes riveted on his face, with a look at once fearful, so earnest, so beseeching.

"You, Margie!"

The breath came thick and fast, and her voice was scarcely intelligible; but as she went on it strengthened.

"Yes, it is me. Let me go with you—anywhere. I will be your servant; I'll do anything on earth for you. Don't be angry. I couldn't stay with them any longer; they treat me worse than ever, because they know I was happy with you and you were kind to me. Do let me go with you. Let me go with you!"

"But, child, your mother? I have no right to take you from her."

"She's not my mother, she's only my step-mother; and my father is dead. I belong to nobody—nobody cares for me. Even what I do for them they only curse me for, and beat me when I can't do the work they put me to. Do let me go with you—let me go with you!"

Stavedale's hesitation was gone, and, taking her little trembling hand in his, he led her on.

Arrived at his atelier—he lived in a little top flat on Twenty-third street—he gave Margie money to go out and buy herself some clothes, and in half an hour she re-appeared, all traces of poverty, fatigue and emotion vanished. Her neat dress fitted her so gracefully, her wild hair parted in shiny, wavy bands, her little Arab feet and fine slender ankles, so symmetrical in high shoes and well-drawn striped stockings, and, above all, her oval face so radiant with beautiful joy and gratitude.

Stavedale felt very proud and happy.

"How smart you look!" he said.

She stood before him smiling, holding out her skirts as children do when their dress is admired. She broke into a short gleeful laugh of joy and triumph.

"So you are happy now, Margie?"

"Oh, sir!" and she seized his hand and covered it with kisses.

The tears sprang to Stavedale's eyes. He drew her towards him, and, resting his chin on her head, he began in a voice of deep and quiet emotion:

"Margie, I do not know if I have done right in taking you. At all events it is done. Never, child, give me cause to think I have acted wrongly—even foolishly, and, with God's help, I will be a father and a protector to you as long as I live. Kiss me, my child!"

She flung her arms round his neck and clung to him long and in silence, and he felt it was very sweet to hold such communion—to claim such love and trust and gratitude from a human creature; sweeter than to hold imaginary, unloving converse with the shadows of dead heroes and heroines.

Ed. Stavedale was once more installed in his painting-room. As of old, he dreamed and painted—dreamed and dreamed. But when the shadowy company was not sufficient to fill his heart and brain, he would wake up from his reverie, would go to the little sitting-room at the back, where he re-lighted his pipe, and, half-dreaming, half-listening, heard the prattle, childish, yet strangely wise, of Margie, who, as she fluttered about or sat on a stool at his feet, thought aloud in her own wild, suggestive, conjectural way, hitting on singular glimpses of great truths that could only come to her intuitively.

By degrees Ed. began to dream less and think more. Maggie was now fifteen. He felt that she had become more than a child and a plaything, and that a certain responsibility weighed on him in the care of her, in the provision for her future. She had learned to read and write, and one day when he entered the little sitting-room he found Margie with a book on her knees.

"What are you reading there, child?" he inquired, carelessly.

She held up the book. It was a trashy French novel. He snatched it from her and flung it beneath the stove.

"Mind this; when you want to read anything, you must show it to me first. Do you hear, little one?"

She arranged his chair, lighted his pipe and sat down at his feet in silence. Stavedale's eyes were wide open and full of earnest reflection. Once or twice she looked up timidly, but meeting no reply to her glance, she dropped her eyes again.

She said at last: "You are not angry with me?"

"With you? Never!"

"You see I am afraid of nothing on earth but vexing you. I care for nothing on earth but pleasing you. Between these two thoughts lie all the cares of my life."

Strange, the pain and pleasure Stavedale felt. He stroked her shining hair, kissed her forehead, and fell to thinking harder than ever.

Next day instead of putting on his dressing-gown, cap and slippers, and retiring to his atelier, he, for the first time for many a long year, at such an hour, donned coat, boots and hat, sallied forth and returned with a small library—books of history, biography, religion and some poetry: all works the most perfectly suited to the purpose they were intended for.

For months, between her light household duties, so quickly and happily performed, and the frequent sittings she still continued to give him, the books were studied with earnest attention. Some of them Ed. already knew; the rest he now read, and constantly of an evening questioned his pupil, drawing out and correcting her impressions with a pride and interest strangely new and pleasant to him.

As he had anticipated, Margie grew before his eyes with striking and remarkable beauty. He noticed the progress with a mingling of pleasure and uneasiness, and watched over her with a jealous care. Few visitors came to his painting-room, but at the sound of a strange footstep a look warned Margie to retreat; and she fled through a back-door like a mouse into its hole.

Another year and another passed by and Margie was sweet seventeen.

"It is certain," said Stavedale to himself, "that this cannot go on for ever. I am not immortal, and if some day I suddenly go off, what becomes of Margie? We must endeavour to get a husband for her. And yet who would marry her? An artist would for her face and form. But what artist?"

He knew nobody who in the least degree suited his notions of the sort of husband to whom he would confide the happiness of his adopted child. He had a vague consciousness that, in matrimonial affairs, there were troublesome details of money matters to be gone through, and on this part of the question he felt dreadfully incompetent to enter. He was quite willing to give Margie anything and everything he possessed; but how much that might be, or how he was to find it out and put it in train, and what was likely to be the pretensions or arrangements on the other side, it put him into a state of hopeless desperation to think of. All this he admitted to himself; but he did not admit—for the thing was too vague and indistinct for admission or actual contemplation—that a little aching jealousy, a numb pain, lay at the bottom of his heart, when he thought of giving to another the treasure that for four years had lightened his life and given him new and human feelings, and a hitherto unknown love and sympathy with his race.

Margie is eighteen, and still Stavedale had found no husband for her. Hitherto he had worked alone; now, the thought and the care of her, the time he devoted to her education

and her amusement—for he took her to the theatre and to Coney Island and up the glorious Hudson—rendered it impossible for him to do all he had been wont to do in his painting-room. He resolved, therefore, to look out for a student a good student, who might never in word or deed break on the cloistered strictness and purity with which Stavedale's jealous care had surrounded his pet.

After a search the wonderful student was discovered and installed in the painting-room Obadiah Sugden, the son of a New England oyster-farmer; was tall and thin and dyspeptic looking. He was bashful and silent, and worked all day long without so much as even opening his lips. But his great brown eyes were open and they saw Margie, and, with the usual result, he fell madly in love with her; but it was that hobbledehoy love that never displays itself save in some awkwardness. One day Stavedale caught his pupil gazing with all his might and main at Margie—gazing his whole soul out.

"What if—"

A thought for the first time struck Stavedale—flashed across him with a thrill of such strange, mingled contradictory sensations that he passed his hand across his head and felt as though some one had given him a blow.

But the thought that had struck into his brain stayed there, and he took it and handled and examined it and familiarized himself with it. Strange! It had never presented itself to him before! There was the husband he had been looking for Margie, two, three years—there, under his hand. Yes, it was the thing of all others to suit. If the oysterman would but approve he saw no obstacle.

The oyster farmer, upon receipt of a letter from Stavedale, came to New York, saw Margie, and regretted that his son was first in the field, for he himself was a widower and of an amorous temperament.

"Square it between 'em, friend Stavedale," said Sugden, senior, "and I'll not go back on you."

Stavedale was alone in the studio with Obadiah when he opened the matter lying heavily at his heart.

"You have never thought of marrying, Obadiah?"

His pupil shifted his position a little, colored very violently, and replied that he never had seriously.

"You ought to think of it, however, my good boy; why not now?"

Obadiah replied; "That's true."

There was a pause. Stavedale cleared his throat.

"If I found you a wife—a good, nice, charming little wife, that your father thinks well of, would that suit you?"

"Down to the ground, sir."

"Do you know any one you would like?"

Obadiah looked very sheepish, as, pointing at a crayon portrait of Margie, he exclaimed:

"He! he! That's her!"

"And do you think she likes you?"

"That's what I'd give my bottom dollar to find out."

"We'll find out, my lad."

Stavedale that very evening broached the subject to Margie.

"My child, I have been thinking a great deal about you," he said.

She looked up hastily.

"Do you know that you are of an age to think about being married?"

Heedless of the start she gave, for Stavedale's speech was all made up, and he feared that if he stopped it might stick in his throat, and he would break down. So he went on.

He told her how long he had thought of this; how he felt the loneliness of the life she led; how little a man like him was fitted to be the sole instructor and protector of a young girl; but he dreaded that a day might come—must come—when, if she were not married, he would have to leave her alone and unprotected in the wide, wide world; how dreadfully the thought weighed on him; how, until she was thus provided for, he never could feel happy or assured concerning her. Then he spoke of Obadiah; of his affection for her, of all his good qualities, of what peace and joy he would feel in seeing her united to him; and then, feeling he could not wait for her answer, he took her to his heart, kissed her, bid her think of all he had said, and took refuge in his painting-room, where he smoked five pipes without stopping.

"The sooner it's over the better," murmured the painter, and he urged on the wedding with a sort of feverish impatience.

It was the night before the wedding and Stavedale had been out, occupied with the last arrangements, and returned home towards eleven o'clock.

As he mounted the stairs to his studio his heart was leaden, and as he opened the door of his flat and entered the quiet little art home, the silence struck him with a chill of disappointment, for he had secretly hoped that Margie would have been up to greet him, after the occupations of his busy day.

He listened, but there was no quick, light step, no sound to indicate her consciousness of his entrance. Stavedale sighed, took up the dim light that had been left burning against his arrival, and instead of going to his room turned into his studio.

How deadly still it was! How deserted! The wan quivering flare of the little lamp only made the gloom it could not pierce more heavy, and as its wavering light flashed and paled over the faces of the pictures, they seemed to shudder on him while he passed.