

Slower and slower the movement became, until a minor chord, that was like a human sigh, brought the novelette to a close.

Then I became conscious of a sound that was not my own music.

It proceeded from the sofa in the dark corner of the room, and was something between a sob and a cry.

I started to my feet, and hastened across the room, tripping over Mrs. Douglas' footstool in my haste, and nearly coming to grief in consequence.

She must have been asleep, for she looked at me with a sudden fright in her eyes as I stooped over her and begged that she would ask Susan for some water.

A sure instinct told her that all was not well, but she had learnt from experience that I best could manage her girl, and mechanically she left the room to do my bidding.

I found Lily rolled up in a corner of the sofa weeping bitterly.

I tried to take her into my arms, but she gently resisted, and drew herself away with a shiver.

The more I tried to soothe her, the more miserable she became.

"What is it, my darling, my own?" I cried, in an agony of apprehension. "Are you ill? Are you tired? Did I play too long? Tell me, dearest!"

It was long before she would speak, but at last an answer came that went to my heart like the stab of a dagger.

"That awful music, Oscar! It will always be ringing in my ears. I shall never forget it—never! never! And it was composed for me, too—specially for me! You were the hero and I was the heroine!"

Yes; I understood it now! I myself had done the mischief, and had dealt a fatal blow to this delicately-organized, sensitive plant!

III.

We had no more happy evenings.

From that night Lily seemed to have undergone a mysterious change for the worse, and all the distressing symptoms returned with renewed virulence.

The hollow cough, the hectic spot on each pale cheek, and the brightness in the eyes so unlike the sparkle of health.

But her illness had taken a peculiar turn, which I noticed with great pain.

She could not endure the sound of music.

Her nerves were unstrung to such an extent that the slightest sound—but, above all, the notes of a piano—had the effect of torturing her.

She would twitch and quiver in every limb, this being followed by violent hysteria.

If a pupil had had a lesson in my rooms Lily would invariably be worse, and the doctor at length warned me that my piano must be closed, or he could not answer for the consequences.

I was, therefore, obliged to see my pupils at their own houses, and to resist myself from practising.

The day fixed for our wedding had come and gone.

Fortunately the winter was mild, and I still entertained hopes that my dear one might regain sufficient strength to enable us to go abroad, and once safely landed in some warm sunny clime all might be well.

Mrs. Douglas was not so sanguine; but I could see that she pitied me, and forbore from anticipating evil.

All this time I was as one in a dream.

I got through my work mechanically, and music, so fatal to her I loved, had now lost its charm for me.

True it is that it had not lost its ascendancy over my mind.

On the contrary, it had gained a power over me that at times was quite alarming.

I would start from my sleep with the notes of that last composition, the novelette, ringing in my ears.

Day and night it followed me about like a spectre.

I could not rid myself of it.

When I sat down at the piano to perform a piece for some pupil, I could scarcely resist the impulse to play the music that was haunting me, until at last I would spring up and hastily take my leave, in dread lest it would gain the mastery over me.

Alas! this dreadful feeling grew stronger every day.

Soon the sound of people's voices in the street and the grinding of the barrel organs in the distance, seemed to join in mocking refrain, and go where I would, I was sure to hear odd snatches of my own music.

My daily vocation was thus rendered peculiarly distressing, and I would count the long hours that dragged so heavily away, till the welcome time of freedom came—for the evenings were still my own, or, I should rather say, Lily's.

To hasten home with a new book or a set of prints in my hand, and then to sit by her side reading on in silence, and feeling happy if I had succeeded in bringing one smile to her lips,—this was all the pleasure that remained to me in this life.

But even then I was obliged to be on my guard.

Many a time I have caught myself, or fancied

that I caught myself, on the point of humming a bar of the novelette.

Whenever I found this danger at hand, I would start out of the room, and lock myself up alone, or leave the house for a solitary walk.

The constant dread in which I lived reacted unfavorably on my health.

I could not eat nor sleep, and I fell at length into a state of such melancholy despondency that even the knowledge that Lily could not last much longer, failed to rouse me from my lethargy, to a keener sense of sorrow.

And now I came to an evening that is vividly impressed upon my mind, and around which there hangs the mysterious horror of a nightmare and all the unreality of a dream.

Indeed, it is only of late that I came to distinguish between what had been only the wild fancies of a fevered brain, and what had really happened.

Except a glimpse early each morning, I had not seen Lily for several days.

That sweet consolation had been denied me, for in the evenings she was too exhausted to sit up, and the doctor had forbidden that she should be disturbed.

Upon this particular night, the 3rd of April, I had fallen asleep on the sofa in my sitting-room.

I had not lit my lamp, for I could not play, and I did not care to read, and so the flickering firelight made me drowsy.

I remember hearing the church clock close by chiming nine before I dropped off, and I must have slept close upon two hours, during which I had been dreaming strange things.

I thought Lily was dead, and that her disembodied spirit was in the room, and speaking to me.

She was telling me that my novelette was haunting her, and that she wished to hear me playing it again, for she had learnt to comprehend its full meaning in a manner that before was impossible.

This dream gradually melted into half unconsciousness, and presently I was awake.

I sat up, feeling cold all over, and looked round me.

The light of the fire fell upon my beloved piano that had been dumb for two long months.

The effects of that dream were still strongly on my mind, and an unaccountable longing took possession of me.

I did not resist it. Heaven forgive me!

No; I went straight to the piano, opened it, and commenced to play.

I played the novelette that Lily had asked me for, and which, I felt convinced, she wished to hear.

How delicious sounded the notes of that sweet rippling melody!

I lingered over them, I dwelt lovingly upon them; I was in the seventh heaven.

And now the time was slackening; a plaintive tone was stealing into it; a sobbing, wailing voice seemed to mingle through the accompaniment, until there came a sudden crash, a horrible discord, that was followed by a human cry.

I sprang to my feet and looked round.

Lily was standing behind me, her fair hair hanging loose on her shoulders; her slight figure clad in a long dressing-gown; her eyes looking large, and awfully bright; her cheeks deadly pale.

Was it her voice that I had fancied I heard a minute before beseeching me to stop, and crying out that the music was killing her?

I don't know.

My mind was all confusion, and in a wild chaos.

But I caught her in my arms, and I could then realize that it was no spirit, but a creature of flesh and blood that I had to do with.

I think this restored me to my senses, and I carried her to the sofa.

I could have sworn that someone took my place at the piano, and was playing a mad, tempestuous movement, but this must have been only in my imagination.

And now I hung over her, and called her by every loving name, and kissed her white face again and again, but in vain: I could get no reply.

Then I gently laid her down, and ran for assistance.

I met the nurse and my landlady on the kitchen stairs.

They had heard the music, and were hastening up to inquire what it meant.

How Lily had come to leave her sick-bed nobody could tell.

The nurse had left her a few minutes before apparently very well, and had gone below for her supper.

Mrs. Douglas, wearied out by watching and fretting, was asleep in her room.

Sad waking!

She came down, pale and alarmed, only to read the sad truth in our faces.

Lily never again spoke or opened her eyes; and when the doctor came in he pronounced her dead.

The music had distressed her, and she had come up-stairs to beg of me to cease playing.

This had caused her death, and I, therefore, had been her murderer!

I was ill—dangerously ill—for months afterwards; delirious from brain fever.

But who cared about that?

Mrs. Douglas, it is true, watched by my side with all the tenderness of a mother, yet that only added to my remorse; and my misery

reached its climax when I was told that I should recover.

My story is ended.

With Lily's death the one romance of my life was over, and there was nothing left worth living for.

Music had become hateful, as well as dangerous to me.

I flew from the sound of it, though I could not be deaf to the spectral tones that constantly rang in my ears.

Fortunately, as an artist I had no inconsiderable talent, and I turned my mind into an entirely new channel.

I went abroad, and Mrs. Douglas accompanied me.

She and I became all-in-all to each other, and we shall never separate.

To work for her is my one object in life, and the only happiness left for me on this side the grave.

BLACK, AND WHITEWASH.

Throughout the United States and the Colonial Empire the popularity of Black's novels is as great, if not greater, than in the United Kingdom, and as many of our readers will doubtless have read the biography of the great novelist which appears in last month's *Harper's*, we make no apology for reproducing the following from the *World*:—"The series of 'Celebrities at Home,' which for some years has been running through this journal, has received the sincerest flattery of imitation in many quarters. It is not for us to grumble at this, but, on the contrary, to endeavour to learn something from our disciples; and, though our researches have been in most cases barren of result, we have at last come upon something which, in the slang of the day, is 'very precious,' very precious indeed. This *trouville* is an article published in *Harper's Magazine*, and written by Mr. Joseph Hatton, a gentleman known as a most industrious journalist and novel writer, but who in his latest work has given evidence of the possession of many qualities, notably of a fund of humour, of which he had not hitherto been suspected. Mr. Hatton's subject is 'William Black at Home,' and in his first sentences we are struck with the fact that, however much inclined to deal tenderly with his friend, the writer means to take stern truth as the keynote of his article. 'Tightly built, lithe of limb, strong in the arm, capable of great physical endurance, the novelist is nevertheless below the medium height.' A damaging admission, this, and not to be explained away by the immediately succeeding statement that 'Black gives you the idea of a small parcel, well packed.' We further learn that 'Black might pass for an ordinary gentleman of the time, until you come to know him well enough to talk to him familiarly,' which is again a doubtful compliment; and it is curious to learn that, after talking to Mr. Black, one finds 'something extraordinary in his appearance.' What the extraordinary something is Mr. Hatton does not divulge; we are left in doubt, whether, under conversation, the various physical characteristics on which the writer expatiates are modified, whether the 'dark hazel eye' becomes green, the 'firm mouth' weak, the 'square forehead' round, or whatever happens.

"We are not merely favoured with a portrait of Mr. Black, spectacles and all, but we have a sketch of his lodgings—we beg pardon, 'chambers'—in a street off the Strand; a view from the window of those lodgings, which is simply a reproduction of the pictorial head-line on the cover of the *Illustrated London News*; a sketch of 'Black's Yacht,' uncommonly like any other yacht, with a reminiscence of Black's back, very like any other back, only smaller than most; a view of the 'hallway'—what does 'hallway' mean in Hattonese?—'Hallway in Black's Brighton House,' and another of 'Drawing Room in Black's House at Brighton.' These are most interesting pictures, and will carry comfort to the heart of many a dour Scotchman exiled under pecuniary pressure to inclement Minnesota or wearisome Winnipeg. The fire-irons of the fender in the 'hallway' are evidently portraits; and there is a touch of the home-affections in depicting the sewing machine between the windows of the 'Chambers' which is inexpressibly pathetic. Besides pictorial representation of these delightful interiors, we have lengthy descriptions from Mr. Hatton's graphic pen. 'The blinds are primrose-coloured silk, a deeper tone of which is repeated on the walls, which have a dado of Indian or Japanese matting, mounted in ebony. And ebouissed mantelpiece elaborately carved, and having cabinet-like niches and shelves for china'—ho, oh! Mr. Hatton, at last we have discovered the long-sought author of Maple's catalogue!—'is in artistic harmony with fireplace and fender of brass repoussé work.' 'On both sides of the fireplace are inviting lounges'—lounge is American-Hattonese for ottoman or sofa. 'Easy-chairs are frequent incidents on the velvety carpet, so also are cabinets and tables.' If Mr. Hatton and his hero think alike, this last sentence is full of meaning. To Mr. Hatton an easy-chair is an 'incident' in Mr. Black's novels there are not many incidents, but plenty of easy-chairs. Mr. Hatton, with an eye to business, is careful to point out that on Mr. Black's table there are the 'latest *Harpers* and an American newspaper; and he gives the most elaborate description of a house which, if we remember rightly, is up a back street, and opposite to a steam brewery and a livery stable.

"Black's taste for *bric-à-brac* runs rather in the direction of spirit and wine bottles than in the way of teapots. He hands me bottle after bottle from his sideboard." This candid confession explains a good deal of the conversation recorded between the two novelists, a conversation which by no means degenerates into a monologue, as is apt to be the case in such interviews. Mr. Hatton was not going to let Mr. Black have all the tall talk to himself, and the manner in which each tries to trump the ponderous platitudes of the other is inexpressibly comic. Thus, Black replies to a question whether he makes notes of scenery, &c.:—"Yes, often very elaborate and careful notes, and especially in regard to atmospheric surroundings. If one does not correctly and completely frame a character or an incident, with all the circumstances of the time and place, one gets only a blurred page. For example, one may say, 'It was a beautiful day.' But what kind of a beautiful day? It must be described, so that the picture shall be truthful and finished. Every human being in real life has a background, and must have in a novel if the story is to appear real to the reader." Some people, after listening to the delivery of a little essay of this kind, might feel doubtful as to what to say next; but Mr. Hatton is equal to the occasion:—"There is nothing more charming in fiction or in essay writing, I feel impelled to add, 'than the artistic use of natural effects in the illustration of character, and the development and exhibition of incidents, tragic or otherwise: the paths that may belong to a gray morning or an evening mist, when woven in with a sad thought or a tender episode, must have often touched you who are so great a student of Nature's moods?' Conversations such as these, free, untilted, and wholly natural, abound in the article. From them we learn that Black, 'in common with Tennyson,' is reproved as responsible for the words he put into the mouths of his characters; that, 'in common with the late George Eliot,' he does not read the press comments on his works; that he once wrote a letter in the *Daily News* signed 'J. Smith,' and that he 'cannot endure the least noise when he is writing' which must be awkward, considering the immediate proximity of the steam brewery and the livery stable. Mr. Hatton thinks that 'the city by the sea,' of which he gives an elaborate description, and pays an unwonted compliment to the 'famous hunting in the neighbourhood,' should be called henceforth 'Black's Study.' Poor dear old Brighton! after all you have recently gone through, *Lowest-attached*, Richardson-defended, a dull summer and a bad season, this is the kindest out of all! And yet you have brought it on yourself! Over-built, over-chimneyed, you are rivalling London in your climate as well as your size, and your once pure atmosphere is sullied and poisoned by the constant presence of Blacks."

LITERARY GOSSIP.

"THE Bridge to America" is the title of another Book by Mr. Philip Robinson.

ALFRED MINES, editor of "Select Works of Johnson," publishes through W. Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London, an excellent student's book on "Problems and Exercises in Political Economy."

THE first number of the second edition of "The Greenwich Landmark," an amateur paper, edited very ably by Mr. T. J. Burton, and run in the interests of the Greenwich Library Association, has come to hand. It contains eight pages of printed matter including a large number of good advertisements. The articles are very well written, and the paper is nicely gotten up.

AN exceptionally interesting book is "Living English Poets—1882." The aim of its unnamed editors is to give representative pieces from all the English verse-writers who may really be called in any high and lasting sense poets. The selections begin, with Sir Henry Taylor and close with A. Mary F. Robinson. Sir Henry was born in 1800 and Miss Robinson in 1856. Between these two the cream of the poetry of the last 50 years is largely given. Exquisite taste marks the getting up of the book. It is a sort of Valhalla for the poetic guild. The outer fashion of the book is as choice as its contents. It is bound in vellum, and is printed on handmade paper. C. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., are the English publishers. It is a work that ought to be widely appreciated in this country.

MR. JOHN SKELTON'S "Essays in History and Biography" include a defense of Mary Stuart, but is partly made up of short obituary essays on notable Englishmen and Scotchmen who have passed away during the last half century.

This author, who is best known to the readers of to-day under his *nom de plume* of "Shirley" in the lately defunct *Fraser*, as well as in the pages of *Blackwood*, in the present volume, which is not to be his last, enters upon a confidential chat with his readers in "some last words by way of preface." Herein appear letters from Lord Beaconsfield, Thomas Carlyle, J. A. Froude, D. E. Rossetti, and Dr. John Brown, which give a delightful glimpse of literary friendship. "Shirley" is a strong writer on historical subjects, and his "Defense of Mary Stuart," which occupies nearly a quarter of the present volume, will be likely to provoke considerable discussion. The book is published by the Blackwoods, of Edinburgh.