

Poetry.

HELP A FELLOW-MAN.

(Written for the Ontario Workman.)

As each successive day comes round,
It brings its joys and tears;
One hour our life with joys abound,
The next with cares and fears;
Our voyage on life's restless tide,
May calm and peaceful seem,
Yet many, without power to guide,
Drift swiftly down its stream.

They drift down past a struggling throng,
Some sailing fast for port,
Some easy glide the stream along,
Some labor hard for naught;
But few are they, that sailing fair,
Will lend a helping hand,
Another brother's task to bear,
And help him safe to land.

But yet there are a honored few,
Whose path perchance is calm,
Whose generous hearts beat warm and true,
Whose words are healing balm;
If drifting by they see a form,
They'll kindly stretch their hand,
And through the fiercely raging storm,
Will bring it safe to land.

We cannot all a strong arm give,
To raise a fallen man;
'Twill honor be, if while we live,
We all do what we can;
A cheerful word doth trilling seem,
But that some hearts hath cheered,
Who drifting on life's downward stream,
Hath turned and upwards steered.

Then while undaunted on we sail,
Let each with wary eye,
Keep sharp lookout when storms assail,
For vessels drifting by,
So that we, when we view the past,
Our life's course nearly ran,
Can say when fiercely howled the blast,
I helped a fellow man.

M.A.L.

Montreal, April 7th, 1873.

Tales and Sketches.

THE ENGINEER'S LITTLE WOMAN.

BY AUGUSTA LARNED.

"It's a risky business. A man has got to take big chances." John cleared his throat discreetly, as if he might be saying too much; "and then there is the little woman at home. If anything should happen to me, it would be all day with her. The road don't seem to me as it used to; and I mean to get away from it and turn farmer."

"Dunno," put in old Sam the signal man, shifting his quid of tobacco from side to side of his leathern cheeks. "It's easy talking. Words don't count more'n wind. But there's something another that holds folks to their places in this world—habit as much as anything; and, for my part, I'm going to live and die on the road."

"Die on the road!" There was something in the phrase ill-suited to John's state of mind. He was not prepared to die yet awhile. Life looked very warm and bright in his eyes, with the smiling face of his little woman filling the vista.

"Come over to the 'Vine' with us and take a nip, John," called out one of a group of hands off hours, like himself, who were washing away the grime and soot of a coal-train in a little back office of the freight house.

"Not to-night," replied John, hardly pausing in his long stride; "and you'd do better yourself to keep clear of the 'Vine.' Men of our trade haven't any business to muddle their brains."

"Get along with your preaching!" called out a rough fellow liberally smeared with coal-oil. "Everybody knows Merivale is a Methodist; and that his wife has tied him to her apron-string; Come, Dike, hand over the polisher," alluding to a not very immaculate crash towel. "I'll be gol-darned if I'd have a wife. I hate interfering women."

These remarks were quite lost on the subject of them. He had set himself towards home with a steady, square swing, such as he used in all undertakings. It was easy to see by John Merivale's motion that he need not be admonished to do what he did with his might. He had the grimy overalls on yet, which the little woman washed and patched every week of her life. Let the fellows without a home, he thought, scrub up in the freight-house. And something warm and un-speakable welled up in his bosom at the consciousness of his great good fortune. His hair and whiskers were full of cinders and grit; but Nannie had seen him in this guise more than once before.

On past the freight-house, along a network of tracks and long strings of empty cars, into the mean part of a large town, that did the dirty work for its more respectable neighbors, and took the bad odors and the garbage. Skirting this, John came to a more open space, where the small houses of mechanics stood, with a hand-breadth of garden about them.

There was one little brown dot of a house, under the wing of a great cherry tree, that looked as if it was trying to hide the tiny

thing behind its great trunk, to keep the world from any knowledge of the pretty nest concealed there. Just then a face appeared in the window of the little house, where a Virginia creeper would make a dainty frame work of flickering leaves by and by, though as yet the spring was chary of its green. Above it hung a canary-bird's cage of red and white wires, and there was a bit of muslin curtain, tied back with blue ribbons.

The face was round and dimpled, with a smooth, even tint, neither dark nor light. The lips were full and red, and the brown eye very shy of direct glances. Over the low, broad forehead, the soft, glossy hair was brushed smoothly, except where it broke into rings and impromptu curls about the temples. This was John's little woman.

At the moment John turned the street-corner, the canary-bird fluttered its golden wings and broke into a rapture of singing; and the face disappeared, and appeared again in the porch like a flash of sunshine. There was an embrace, and Nancy's smooth linen collar got rumpled when her face suffered a total eclipse in John's beard. But the next moment she was holding him by the arm, looking up with her eyes limpid and moist at the thought that she had her big fellow back again safe and sound.

They were in the kitchen and living-room now. John thought there was not another place like it for neatness in the world. The house had just two rooms on the ground floor, and one of them was a sleeping apartment. Beyond extended a tiny shed, and through the open door you caught a glimpse of well-scrubbed boards, a braided mat, and cleanly-washed pails and tubs. Everything about Nancy's little domicile bore some special mark of grace. Even the polished covers of the cook-stove, the shining tins and holders ranged upon their hooks were in a homely way, beautiful; and the carpeted space by the sunny windows, where the bird hung, with its work-table, and framed photographs, and bunch of life-ever-lasting, and dried grasses on the bracket, and a great pile of snowy stuff that Nancy was converting into shirts for John, with the patch-work of the foot-stool, and the little woman's sewing-chair, where the red light of the spring sunset stole in, was a dear, familiar picture of home-life.

The kettle was bubbling on the fire, the tea was steeping odorously, and the supper-table stood ready set, with covered dishes on the hearth, emitting fragrant smells. It was after John had washed and combed, and they were seated, with the veal cutlet and the mashed potatoes between them, flanked by one of Nancy's apple-pies and a glass dish of clear quince jelly, that John noticed the little woman had something on her mind. There was a perceptible flutter about Nancy, which made her lids droop and the breath come quick when John looked at her with his keen grey eyes. He was so comfortable, however, to have her there right before him, where he could touch her if he chose, that in the very excess of his contentment he kept still for awhile.

"Did you have a good run down?" Nancy inquired, as she poured a cup of tea, with a little tremor shaking her hand.

"Pretty fairish," replied John, putting in a large mouthful of potato; "only we came mighty near having a smash-up at Brighton."

"Oh, John, how did it happen?"

"There was a broken rail. We don't often stop at the station to coal; but we happened to yesterday, and it was all that saved us from kingdom come." This time he put in a mouthful of extra size.

"How can you be so cool, John? It makes me shiver to hear you talk."

"It's easy enough to be cool, Nannie, sitting here with you. Everybody on the line knows we are bound to have just so many accidents a year. It's a thing that can be ciphered on. Yesterday I saw a fellow lying stretched on the truck, with both legs cut clean off below the knees. It was his own carelessness. He tried to jump on after the train got underway. It turned me sick and giddy. Sometimes lately I've been thinking that I'm hardly fit for this business. The thought of you here, little woman, makes me squeamish. I never used to know that I had a nerve in my body; but now nights, when I drive the up-train through the dark, I get to feeling your arms around my neck, and a deuced queer feeling it is too. Men who have more than one life depending on theirs have no right to go into a dangerous service."

The little woman flushed; then paled suddenly, at John's last words. "You must get out of it, John. There's more reason now." And then she stopped and laid down her knife and fork, and the Canary-bird began to sing, as if he had just waked up, and was repeating his dream in music.

"That is just what has been bothering me a sight lately. You see I used to have the reputation of being a cool, steady hand. But I shall make a mess of it one of these days; I know I shall. It don't do to be forever thinking of home, and dreading danger, and setting a big price on your life. What's your notion about a farm out West, Nannie? Don't you think you would be as happy as a queen among the pigs and chickens?"

"I have always longed for it, John; for then I could have you with me all the time, and I should get rid of the old dread that I feel like a load right here," laying her hand upon her bosom.

"Courage, little woman! We'll fetch it before the year is out. Then I shall have

enough saved to start somewhere. I wouldn't mind if it was far away on the border; for big fellow as I am, I don't think I should be as much afraid of wild Indians, as I am getting to be of the road. So, if nothing happens before another spring comes around, we shall be living in our own little shanty."

"Something is going to happen, John." The little woman spoke quickly, as if it cost her an effort; and the unwonted color came in a gush to cheek and brow.

John had finished his supper and shoved away from the table, and was sitting now tilted back in his chair against the wall, with his pipe in his hand. He leaned forward and took a long look at her. Then he said, very low: "Come here, Nannie."

"Not now, John. Let us clear away the things and wash the dishes; and then we will have a long talk."

There was not much more said until the little woman had tidied the room. John sat in the same place, breathing out thin blue wreaths of smoke, that rose and curled about his head. The moonlight began to shine through the muslin curtains, and lay in still, bright squares upon the floor. At last John reached up to take down a lamp from the shelf.

"Don't," said Nancy, coming to him now. "Let us sit awhile in the moonlight." And then she toyed with the fingers of his big hand, and got her arm round his neck, and pressed her two palms softly over his eyes, and the secret was told.

John sat still, and held her close to him. Something profound, good and sweet welled up in his bosom, and would not let him speak. It seemed as though the angels must be looking at them there in the hush of the moonlight. He was glad the lamp had not been lit. For big, womanish tears rushed to his eyes; and a solemn, tender and religious feeling came over him, such as he had never experienced before.

"God is very good to us, Nannie," he said, when he could command his voice. "It will be a boy of course. The first always ought to be a boy—a little, healthy, rosy fellow, with a pair of eyes in his head just like his mother's."

"Don't say that, John," Nancy whispered; "for then you might grieve if it was a girl—a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired thing. They say girls are better than boys, John, and easier to rear up. She shouldn't tease you nights; for I should never tire of lushing her. Just think how like a picture it would be, with the cradle there in the corner, and playthings scattered on the floor, and the little shoes and stockings printed and creased with her tiny feet. You should always see her face first at the window, John."

They sat in the moonlight, with hands clasped, until the fire all went out of John's pipe; and he said, at last, breaking the delicious silence:

"The new prospect, little woman, puts me out with the road more than ever. A man hasn't any business to be rash when there are them depending on him dearer than his life."

Next morning John was up long before dawn; and the little woman was up, too, busying herself with his breakfast. There was a shadow on her face. And at last she came out of the cloud by the stove, where the steak was broiling, and the coffee steaming, and said: "John, I had mother's warning last night."

"What's that?" inquired John, rather sharply, turning round from where he was doing up his bundle.

"Past midnight I woke with a start, and something seemed to go by me in the dark. Mother used to say it was a sure sign of danger ahead."

"Fudge!" returned John, snappishly. "Your mother is an old gran—I mean old women are full of signs and wonders. Don't go to filling your head with such notions every time you happen to have a nightmare."

"Never mind," said Nancy, waiving the subject, in a tone which exasperated John more still; for he was certain she put faith in the warning, and would brood upon it after he got away.

"I want to go to the station with you," she added, quietly. "I can stay in the waiting-room by Mrs. Crockett until it is broad daylight; and you will have a few minutes for me after the train is made up."

John had no objections to offer, and the little woman put on her waterproof cloak, and drew the hood over her head. The stars were still shining as they locked the door behind them; and the moon, solitary and resplendent, hung low down in the sky.

"Let us go by the river, John. There is time enough, I always like that way best at this hour of the morning. John liked it, too. He was not possessed of a powerful imagination; but the mysterious blackness of the river, with its scattered lights quenched like falling stars, had for him a certain kind of fascination. They were not quite as comfortable as they had been the night before. John thought Nannie's foolish megrims had got into his head; but he wasn't going to show it—not he. So he whistled cheerily, and tucked the little woman under his arm.

The moon had gone down now. It was the darkest hour before dawn. Suddenly as they were nearing the railroad bridge, John stopped and clutched his wife by the shoulder. "Look ahead there, Nannie, My God, the draw is open, and no signal shown for the four-forty train, due here in five minutes." The words fairly hissed through his teeth.

"Oh, John," gasped the little woman, as

the awful danger flashed upon her, "it's the night express, isn't it, with all the sleeping people on board? Can we save them? Oh, we must! What is that lying up there on the track?"

"Old Sam, the flagman, dead drunk, I swear! Them scoundrels," using an adjective not common to his lips, "enticed him into 'The Vine.' I must drag the poor old wretch off the track. For God's sake, Nannie, look round and see if you can find his lantern and signal flags. He most likely dropped them herabouts."

Nancy scrambled up the embankment, hardly knowing how. "I've got the lantern, John," in a kind of quick pant.

"Are there matches?" John asked rolling the lumpy heap over by his great strength.

"No, no."

"Wait, here are some in Sam's vest pocket," he said, fumbling away in the dark, while the old fellow gave forth a sound between a grunt and a snore. "Steady, now, little woman, steady. Draw it across the rail. The lives of a hundred human beings hang on a spark." He spoke coolly; but Nancy knew how terrible the excitement was within.

"John, they won't go! they are damp."

"Take another."

She took three.

"This is the last," he said.

A sick, faint feeling came over her. The monster train could be heard thundering far off on the track. "God have pity on them!" she murmured, with ashen lips.

The fourth match struck fire. A fizzle, and faint blue smoke told the story. The lantern was lit. And John seized it and dashed wildly up the road, waving it aloft like a mad will-o-the-wisp. There was still time to save the great express train. It slackened speed; halted; then backed, with many snorts and screams from the engine, as if balked of its mad, wild plunge into the dark river, while the unconscious sleepers in the close cars little dreamed of the terrible danger they had escaped.

"You are coming round all right, ain't you, little woman?" said John, anxiously, dashing some water in Nancy's face, who did not know rightly what had happened.

"Oh, yes; and God be praised!" and she looked up with great tears in her eyes. "You'll never speak against mother's warning again; will you, John?"

In twenty minutes time John was driving his own train through the dim, pearl-colored dawn. He could not keep the thought of those sleeping people so near the brink out of his mind. Death and eternity brushed by him; and it made his hand shake, and the big beads of perspiration start out on his forehead. As he looked ahead, with his eye on the alert, the long lines of track appeared to wiggle and to writhe away like black serpents; and he grew almost afraid to touch the machinery with which he was so familiar.

Before reaching the great terminus of the road, John had made up his mind what to do. So he turned directly into the company's office, and in five minutes' time had been asked to walk up into the directors' room.

"Good morning, Mr. Merivale," said the gentlemanly official on duty, advancing with considerable show of warmth and emotion. "Sit down, Sir; sit down. The wires have just brought news of the inexpressible disaster from which your vigilance this morning saved us. The loss of life would have been too horrible to contemplate; but I can tell you in confidence, Merivale, that it would have been the death-blow of the company. That old wretch of a signal-man must be made an example of. We mean to weed drunkenness off the line."

"It will be a mighty hard job, sir; and I wouldn't be too severe on old Sam. The other fellows enticed him into the rum-shop, although they knew his weakness; and, as for my share of the work, it was no great matter. The little woman helped me, or it never would have been done."

"Who is the little woman?" inquired the director, with interest.

John told his story in strong, plain, homely words; and the high official said:

"Well, Merivale, you are just the man we want to tie to us—a man of principle, sober and vigilant. We are ready to advance your salary and advance you in every way."

"That's just what I'm here for, sir," said filigetting on his chair. "I'm come to tender my resignation. You have got a mistaken notion of me. I feel that I'm not fit for the work."

"Not fit for the work!" repeated the director, in astonishment.

"No sir. I don't drink; but there's other things beside liquor that unsteadies a man. He has no business to take great risks if others are depending on him."

"Have you a large family, Merivale?"

"No sir. There's only the little woman and me."

"No children, then?"

"Not yet, sir; but——"

"Oh, I understand. So you are determined to quit?"

"Quite determined, sir. You see I've got afraid of the road, and can't do my duty like a man."

"Well, I am sorry, very sorry to lose you. But wait a bit, Merivale. Here is a piece of paper for the little woman."

When John got into the street again, he unfolded the paper. It was a check on the Bank for two hundred dollars.

A YOUNG HERO.

"Ay, ay, sir; they're smart seamen enough, no doubt, them Dalmatians, and reason good, too, scowin' they man half the Austrian navy; but they ain't got the seasonin' of an Englishman, put it how yer will."

I am standing on the upper deck of the Austrian Lloyd steamer, looking my last upon pyramidal Jaffa, as it rises up in terrace after terrace of stern gray masonry against the lustrous evening sky, with the foam-tipped breakers at his feet. Beside me, with his elbow on the hand-rail, and his short pipe between his teeth, lounges the stalwart chief engineer, as thorough an Englishman as if he had not spent two-thirds of his life abroad, and delighted to get hold of a listener who (as he phrases it) "has been about a bit."

"No, they ain't got an Englishman's seasonin'," he continues, pursuing his criticism of the Dalmatian seamen; "and what's more, they ain't got an Englishman's pluck, neither, not when it comes to a real scrapo."

"Can no one but an Englishman have any pluck, then?" asked I laughing.

"Well, I won't just go for to say that; o' course a man as is a man 'ull have pluck in him, all the world over. I've seen a Frencher tackle a shark to save his messmate; and I've seed a Rooshap stand to his gun arter every man in the battery, barrin' himself, had been blowed all to smash. But, if yer come to that, the pluckiest feller as ever I seed warn't a man at all!"

"What was he then, a woman?"

"No, not that, neither; though mark ye, I don't go for to say as how women ain't got pluck enough, too—some on 'em, at least. My old 'ooman now, saved me once from a lubber of a Portugee as was just a goin' to stick a knife into me, when she cracked his nut with a handspike. (You can hear her spin the yarn yourself, if you likes to pay us a visit when we get to Constantinople.) But this un I'm a talkin' on was a little lad, not much bigger'n Tom Thum, only with a sperrit of his own as 'ud ha' blowed up a man-o'-war 'most. Would you like to hear about it?"

I eagerly assented, and the narrator, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, folds his brawny arms upon the top of the rail and commences as follows:

"'Bout three years ago, afore I got this berth as I'm now in, I was second engineer aboard a Liverpool steamer bound for New York. Ther'd been a lot of extra cargo sent down just at the last minute, and we'd had no end of a job stowin' it away, and that ran us late o' startin'; so that, altogether, as you may think, the cap'n warn't altogether in the sweetest temper in the world, nor the mate neither; as for the chief engineer, he was an easy goin' sort o' chap, as nothin' on earth could put out. But on the mornin' of the third day out from Liverpool, we cum down to me in a precious hurry, lookin' as if somethin' had put him out pretty considerably."

"'Tom,' says he, 'what d'ye think? Bless if we ain't found a stowaway.' (That's the name, you know, sir, as we gives to chaps as hides themselves aboard outward-bound vessels, and gets carried out unbeknown to everybody.)

"'The Dickens you have!' says I. 'Who is he, and where did yer find him?'

"'Well, we found him stowed away among the casks for'ard; and ten to one we'd never ha' twiggid him at all if the skipper's dog hadn't sniffed him out and begun barkin.' Such a little mite as he is, too! I could 'a' most put him in my baccy-pouch, poor little beggar! but he looks to be a good plucked un for all that."

"I didn't want to hear no more, but up on deck like a sky-rocket; and there I did see a sight, and no mistake. Every man-jack of the crew, and what few passengers we had aboard, was all in a ring on the fo'castle, and in the middle stood the fustimate, lookin' as black as thunder. Right in front of him, lookin' a reg'lar mite among 'em of them big fellows, was a little bit o' lad not ten years old—ragged as a scarecrow, but with bright, curly hair, and a bonnie little face of his own, if he hadn't been so woeful thin and pale. But, bless yer soul! to see the way that little chap held his head up and looked about him, you'd ha' thought the whole ship belonged to him. The mate was a great, hulkin', black-bearded feller, with a look that 'ud ha' frightened a horse, and a voice fit to make one jump through a key-hole; but the young 'un warn't a bit afeared; he stood straight up, and looked him full in the face with them bright, clear eyes o' his'n, for all the world as if he was Prince Alfred himself. Folk did say afterwards (lowering his voice to a whisper) as how he come o' better blood nor what he ought; and for my part, I'm rather o' that way o' thinkin' myself; for I never seed a common street-Harab, as ther calls 'em now, carry it off like him. You might ha' heard a pin drop, as the mate spoke."

"'Well, you young whelp,' says he, in his grimest voice. 'What brought you here?'

"'It was my step father as done it,' says the boy, in a weak little voice, but as steady as could be. 'Father's dead, and mother's married again, and my new father says as how he won't have no brats about, catin' up his wages; and he stowed me away when nobody warn't lookin', and giv me some grub to keep me goin' for a day or two till I get to sea. He says I'm to go to Aunt Jane at Halifax, and here's her address."

"'And with that, he slips his hand into the breast of his shirt, and out with a scrap o'