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Strange.

I.

Strange that the wind should be left so free,
To play with a flower or tear a tree;
To range or to ramble wher'er it will,
And as it lists to be fierce or still.
Above and around to breathe of life,
Or to mingle the earth and sky in strife;
Gentle to whisper with morning light,
Yet to growl like a fettered fiend at night,
To love and to cherish and bless to-day,
What to-morrow it ruthlessly rends away.

II.

Strange, that the sun should call into birth,
All the fairest flowers and fruits of earth.
Then bid them perish and see them die,
Whilst they cheer the soul and gladden the eye.
At morn its child is the pride of spring,
At night a shrivel'd and loathsome thing.
To-day there is hope and life in its breath;
To-morrow it sinks to a useless death,
Strange, does it seem, that the sun should joy
To give life alone that it may destroy.

III.

Strange, that the ocean should come and go,
With its daily and nightly ebb and flow;
To bear on its placid breast at morn,
The barque that ere night will be tempest torn.
To cherish it all the way it may roam,
Then leave it a wreck within sight of home.
To smile as the mariner toils are o'er,
Then wash the dead to his cottage door.
And gent y ripple o'er the strand,
To watch the widow behold him land.

IV.

But stranger than all that man must die;
When his plans are formed and his hopes are high,
He walks forth a lord of the earth to day
And to-morrow behold him a part of its clay.
He was born in sorrow and cradled in pain,
And from youth to old age it is labor in vain.
And all that seventy years can show,
Is that wealth is trouble and wisdom woe.
He walketh a path of care and strife,
Who drinks of the poisonous cup of life.

The Golden Rule at Misery Flat.

"Do, Lowizy, git down off that stool and quit rummaging in that bureau drawer."

Lowizy, from her perch on the stool, only turned her sloe-black eyes toward the cot whereon lay the invalid whose faintly querulous tones arrested her attention, and answered:

"'Pears like you're crosser'n usual, Mandy. I a'n't a-rummaging; I'm huntin' for a piece of that striped tickin to set a patch in Mike's overalls."

"Well, do git down an' shut that drawer," persisted the sick woman "there a'n't a speck of that there tickin left"

"There is too," interrupted the girl, holding up a large scrap, "and here it is, so, there. And what's more, here's a lot of new calico. Sakes! where did you raise so much?"

The woman's eyes brightened and her tones cheered perceptibly as she answered hurriedly:

"Well, shut the drawer and git away from there, and I'll give you one of them pieces for a new dress. You can take your choice, the laylock an' green or the speckled pink. Do git down. Right there by that window, too, and most time for Mike to be a-comin'."

At that moment Mike himself entered the door. His not ill-natured face clouded over as he observed Lowizy coolly replacing the prints in the drawer, and he stepped hastily forward as if to arrest her farther progress. A significant glance from his wife caused him to turn towards the cot instead of the bureau.

"Never mind it," whispered his wife soothingly, "she ha'n't spied out nothin'. She's only pokin' after a bit of stuff to patch your overalls. If you flare up likely as not she'll suspect something. I wish in my soul we'd never taken a hand in it."

And Mandy buried her face in her pillow and began to cry.

"You'd better take your quinine, Mandy," said Lowizy. "You've been a-gapin' and a-stretchin' all mornin', and now you're bawlin'. Your ager's comin' on, sure. There's your dinner, Mike, on the fire. Lift it yourself, can't you? I want to dose Mandy an' fix these yer overalls 'fore I eat."

Mike lifted his dinner and eat it in silence, while Mandy took her dose and Lowizy's nimble fingers plied the needle upon the torn overalls. When Mike had finished his repast she looked up from her work and said:

"I am going over to Bixlerville pretty soon to get Miss Naylor to cut out my new calico. You better not go over the slough. Mandy 'll need you round home. There's them late peas to brush. They're sprawlin' terrible. And there's that hanging-shelf in the kitchen—why don't you tinker that up? And be sure you don't forgit to bring the dugout over to the shore for me along about sundown. I'll be there, I reckon, long 'fore you will. Want me to call the doctor for Mandy?"

"Doctorin' does small good," answer- Mike gloomly. "Misery Flat 's no place for a man to live in. If a chap could ever get a hold of a claim over yonder on the hill—but there's no use a-trying; fever 'n' ager and hard luck for ever 'n' ever 'll take the go out of any man."

"Oh, you're blue to-day, Mike," laughed the girl. "I dunno what's got you and Mandy here lately. After the cotton 's baled and sold you'll chirk up. Misery Flat cotton beats the hill crop all to nothin,'"

"Yes," said Mike, a bit more heartily; "an' if we just could get a cabin and a few acres on the hill where we could live, I'd work the Flat plantation, and ask no odds of any man. But there's no use—"

"A-grumbling," interrupted the girl cheerily. "Bymeby you'll rastle out o' this, and get your home tother side of the slough. That is, if you don't fume yourself into the ager again. There, there's your overalls. Now I'm going."

Missouri Flat is one of the many islands that dot the Mississippi river between Cairo and New Orleans. River pilots know it by its proper number, its local name, Missouri Flat, being given to it by the small colony of humble folk from the State of Missouri who, in the hope of bettering their condition, had settled on the island which, like many others, was luxuriantly fertile, producing at small expenditure of labor abundant crops of the finest cotton, as well as grain and vegetables. As usual, where exuberance of vegetable life is found, there also is found malaria, and the unfortunate settlers on Missouri Flat came in time to deem the name flung at their island in the ironical speech of passing boatman no misnomer.

Mike Flynn, a bright young man of Irish parentage, with his young wife, a rosy, healthful Missouri girl, had come with the small colony to the island full of the hopeful enthusiasm of youth, and had set about the work of cultivating the soil and building up an honest home with commendable zeal. Before they had been a twelvemonth on the island they found out that wealth could only be gained on Misery Flat at the expense of health. Over on the rolling lands of the main shore it was healthful. If only they could secure a home there! To accomplish this Mike toiled early and late, carefully hoarding every dollar of his earnings. But sickness and death—three baby forms were laid away in the neighborhood graveyard on the hillside beyond the slough—had brought consequent expense and loss, and Mike's hoard increased but slowly. Mandy's health gave way at last, and then all things seemed to go wrong.

Mike, by nature, thrifty and saving, grew close, even covetous. It troubled Mandy to witness the growing change.

When theyhad first come to Misery Flat they had found but one plantation on the island. Its owner was eager to sell out his claim to Mike for a small sum of ready cash. With the plantation he turned over to the Flynns a child of about seven years of age, with but the excuse that she was "none o' their'n," and as she had come to them "'thout bein' sent fer, so she mout stay thar 'thout none o' his fotchin' away."

Of the child's history he knew nothing. Only he "allowed" she'd been lost off some steamboat. One had burned to the water's edge on the opposite shore only the night preceding the day on which the little creature had made her appearance at his cabin-door. In his own phrase, "he'd kep' her along till this present, but he didn't allow as he'd any call to tote her round the kentry."

Mike and Mandy, with true, warm-hearted hospitality, took the little waif into their home, and treated her, if not as their child, at least as their sister, teaching her to read and write and figure respectably, and to perform household duties quite creditably. She learned also to paddle a skiff and, what was far more difficult, to manage a dugout and to swim in the river. At fifteen Lowizy was, as Mike phrazed it, a girl worth somebody's while to look after. And truly, somebody of late had seemed to be looking after the unknown in a way that was causing Mike no little concern.

Upon the night-robe in which the little waif was clad at the time of her advent upon the island the planter's wife read the name which the child said was her own, Heloise Masson. It had been modified into Lowizy. Of the little one's simple recital they could make out only that she was on a big boat going to see papa, and that mamma rocked her to sleep in her lap, and when she woke up she was all stuck fast in some bushes, and wet and muddy and hungry; and that while she was looking all around to find mamma and sister she came upon the cabin and sought its friendly shelter.

After Lowizy's adoption into the Flynn family the little girl was always mentioned by Mike in his rare visits to Bixlerville by her real name, and Bixlerville good folk knew that Flynn's Lowizy, who came now and again with her bright face and merry, sloe-black eyes to fetch the doctor, or to do some errand for Misery Flat folks, was really and truly Heloise Masson, the lost child of some unknown persons.

One day, a few weeks previous to the opening of our story, Mike returned from a visit to Bixlerville with two letters, which, in Lowizy's absence, he read to his wife. One was addressed to the postmaster at Bixlerville, and entreated him to ascertain, if possible, the whereabouts of a young girl, Heloise Masson by name, who was lost off the steamer ——, in the year 18—, and supposed to have been drowned, but of whose existence, and in Bixlerville neighborhood, recent circumstances had excited strong hopes.

The postmaster, upon seeing Mike, turned the letter over to him, with also one enclosed, addressed to Miss Heloise Masson. As he did so he said:

"It's your Lowizy, Mike. I have no doubt of it. Maybe there's money in it, if you manage it sharp. Nothing like looking out for number one, you know. More'n likely these Massons 'll pay you for her keep and so on. Leastways you're her guardian, and as such you've a right to see what's in that letter before she does. May be you can make a good thing out of it. Who knows?"

In an evil moment Mike yielded to the temptation. The letter to Heloise convinced him that the girl was indeed the one sought for by parents who had mourned her as dead through all these years. Just how to make money out of his knowledge he did not quite clearly see.

"They'll take her away, that's sure, as soon as they find out she's here," he said to his wife. "And how are we to get on without Lowizy?"

"What would you do, Mike? Keep the letter from her? Sure, you've no right; and it would be far from doing as you'dbe done by."

"Right!" echoed Mike, crossly, ignoring the latter part of Mandy's argument. "Who's a better right than him that's fed and clothed her these seven years gone! Who'll pay me for her keep?

"Sure, she's paid as she's gone, Mike. Lowizy has been as much to us as we to her. You can't deny that. Don't do a mean thing, Mike dear. It isn't like you, and it'll bring no luck, though you may think so."

But Mike was blinded with lust of lucre. He hid the letters in the bureau drawer, and bade Mandy not mention them. He determined within himself to to go not soon again to Bixlerville. He grew moody and irritable, and Mandy, seeing the change, only became worse, and cried oftener on her weary pillow, and not even Lowizy's bright wits could account for the change that had happened to the pair.

"O Mike, Mike, I can't stand it any longer," sobbed the invalid upon the day that Lowizy, with her pink calico, had started to Bixlerville. "It's killing me, keeping the sinful secret. It's stealing, and lying, and cheating, all at once, and there'll never be a light heart in me till the sin is off my conscience. You're not the lad you were since the day you brought the letters, and it'll come to no good, no good. I was that 'fraid she'd blunder on to them letters this morning that I gave her the crossest and meanest word ever I spoke to her, in my hurry to get her away from the drawer—and she just the mainstay of the family. It cuts me to the heart. Give it up, Mike. Let us live and die on Misery Flat, if God will, but don't let us b'acken our souls with a sin that is sure to cry out against us when we least expect it. Could you be happy in your home on the bluff, if you had it, knowing all the while you was keeping Lowizy out of home and schooling and mother-love and all? Ah Mike, have you clear forgot the motto you said should be ours when first we came to the plantation? You know you said then to the neighbors that we'd all all live by the Golden Rule at Missouri Flat, and then there'd never come hard feelings. Dear Mike, go and pray to the good God to take away the evil spirit that troubles you and give you strength to square your life as it used to be by the best of all rules."

She pushed him gently from her as she turned away her head and ceased from pleading. Mike, without a word, went out.

"Lowizy, said Mike, about sundown, as the girl balanced herself in the waiting dugout, "I want to tell you something. I've been a-keeping it back for some time, but it is your right to know it. Likely as not you'll be mad that I haven't told you before; for it's good news for you, although it's bad enough for Mandy and me. There's a letter from your folks up to the cabin. You'll have to answer it, and then, of course, they'll come and get you and take you far enough from Misery Flat and make a lady of you. No doubt in a few years you'll be that fine you won't like to remember the rough times and the plain folks on the island. But Mandy and I'll never forget you or cease to wish you well. And I want you just to promise me one thing before we touch the shore, and that is that you won't hold spite against us for keeping back your letter. 'Twas wrong, and I'm sorry. I hated to think of parting with you, and—and—

Here Mike's voice grew husky and he blushed with shame, but he went on, though with a great effort.

"I couldn't see how we'd ever get a home over yonder if we let go of you, and I was tempted, Lowizy, to do a mean thing, and try to get money out of your folks. Mandy wasn't to blame. She frowned upon it all the time. Just say you'll forgive, Lowizy. Can't you?"

"Oh, hush up, you great big silly," laughed the girl, her eyes blazing with eager joy. "I've seen 'em all! Father, and mother, and big sister, and little brother that looks precisely like me. They're all over to Bixlerville tavern, pretty near crazy, every one of 'em, and all about me. A'n't it funny, though? My! but they're fine folks, too. Just think of me belonging to them and going to live with them. But don't you mind," she added hastily, as she noted the look on Mike's face. "I'll go with 'em; I'll have to. But I a'n't going to leave you and Mandy in no fix. You'll see. I told 'em all about you and Mandy, and how you couldn't manage without me, and they said what could they do for you, and I just up and told them. 'Buy him a bit of land over here on the healthy shore,' I says, 'and then I'll be willing to leave them. Once get Mandy and Mike where they can live, and I'll risk them for getting along without any girl like me.' You just ought to have heard my folks laugh! They praised me up to the skies for being so loyal—what's that I wonder? And my father—how funny it does sound—my father promised fair and flat that he'd buy you land, and he's gone this minute to see Lawyer Dixon about it. Now, what do you say?"

Mike could not take in the overwhelming intelligence.

"How did you find them out, Lowizy?" he asked dazedly.

"Oh, Miss Naylor, she just gave the merest look at my new pink calico and grabbed hold of my hand and said, 'Lowizy, if I don't miss my guess, you are in luck. There's folks, fine ones, too, over at the tavern hunting for a girl just your age and name. They say they've sent letters but never had any answer, and they're so sure the girl is somewhere in this region roundabout that they've just come themselves to search the whole country. They've got it all in the Bixlerville *Post and Herald*, and it's plain to my mind you are the girl.' Sure enough, there they were. Miss Naylor marched me straight up to the tavern and sent word to the folks. They knew me in a minute by those marks on my foot that Mandy said came from a scald sometime when I was a baby. So they did, my mother said. And then I look just like my father and little brother. You'll see to-morrow when they all get here. My! but they hated to have me leave 'em, but I told 'em I must. Mandy couldn't get supper and you'd be at the dugout, and go I would. So here I am. Hurry up, for there's lots to do, and they'll all be over here to see you to-morrow. We must get Mandy up and fix up the cabin a little slick. What in the name of sense are you crying about? Don't you understand? You're going to get your home on the hill right off! Good times are coming to Misery Flats. Why don't you hooray?"

The morrow came and with it the Massons, who clearly proved their right to Lowizy, and were able to explain the long-sealed mystery. Mike was made happy by the deed of gift of the choicest bit on the hill shore, and Mandy was supplied with the means of procuring many a desirable comfort. Lowizy, with her new-found friends, quitted the old life and old home at Misery Flat.

Mike and Mandy, too, soon found a new home in the neat cabin on the hill, and found there all that Misery Flat lacked, pure air free of miasmatic vapors. There they could hope to live and toil and add to the world's products, blessed with health and vigor. Misery Flat plantation was not given up, but worked successfully, and as the years went by and Mike came to be known as the man who oftenest sent the first and finest bale of cotton to the market, Mandy would make answer to the congratulations of friends in words whose full meaning were only understood by Mike himself.

"Yes, it is prospered we have been, although we've seen dark days. Sure, I never get a letter from Miss Masson, our Lowizy that was, and hear of her good life too, without thanking God with all my heart that we squared our lives by the Golden Rule at Misery Flat."

Thank goodness there is one place where prosperity is still to be found—in the dictionary.

The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

In the middle of the fifth century, the resident proprietor of an estate near Ephesus was in want of building stone to raise some cottages and granaries on his farm. His fields sloped up the side of a mountain, in which he directed his slaves to open a quarry. In obeying his order they found a spacious cavern, whose mouth was blocked up with masses of rocks artificially piled. On removing these, they were startled by a dog suddenly leaping up from the interior. Venturing farther in, to a spot on which the sunshine, no longer excluded, directly fell, they discovered, just turning as from sleep, and dazzled with the light, seven young men, of dress and aspect so strange that the slaves were terrified and fled. The slumberers, on rising, found themselves ready for a meal; and, the cave being open, one of them set out for the city to buy food. On his way through the familiar country, for he was a native of Ephesus, a thousand surprises struck him. The road over which yesterday's persecution had driven him was turned; the landmarks seemed shifted and gave a twisted pattern to the fields; on the green meadow of the Cayster had sprung up a circus and a mill. Two soldiers were seen approaching in the distance. Hiding himself till they were passed, lest they should be emissaries of imperial intolerance, he observed that the accoutrements were fantastic, the emblems of Decius were not there, the words that dropped from their talk were in a strange dialect, and in their friendly company was a Christian presbyter. From a rising ground he looked down the river to the base of Diana's hill; and lo! the great temple—the world-wide wonder—was nowhere to be seen. Arrived at the city, he found its grand gate surmounted by a cross. In the streets, rolling with new-shaped vehicles, filled with theatrical-looking people, the very noises seemed to make a foreign hum. He could suppose himself in a city of dreams, only that here and there appeared a house, all whose rooms within he certainly knew; with an aspect, however, among the rest, curiously dull and dwindled, as in a new window looks an old pane preserved for some line scratched by poet or by sage. Before his errand is quite forgot, he enters a bread shop to make his purchase, offers the silver coin of Decius in payment, when the baker, whose astonishment was already manifest enough, can retain his suspicions no longer, but arrests his customer as the owner of unlawful treasure, and hurries him before the city court.

There he tells his tale—that with his Christian companions he had taken refuge in the cave from the horrors of the Decian persecution; had been pursued thither, and built in for a cruel death; had fallen asleep till wakened by the returning sun, let in again by some friendly and unhoped-for hand; and crept back into the town to procure support for life in their retreat. And there, too, in reply, he hears a part of the history which he cannot tell — that Decius has been dethroned by death nearly two centuries ago, and paganism by the truthful one; that while heaven has wrapt him in mysterious sleep the earth's face, in its features, physical and moral, had been changed; that empire had shifted its seat from the Tiber to the Bosphorus; that the Temple had yielded to the Church; the demons of mythology to the saints and martyrs of Christendom; and that he, who had quitted the city in the third century, returned to it in the fifth, and stood under the Christian protection of the second Thydosius. It is added, that the Ephesian clergy and their people were conducted by the confessor to the cave, exchanging wonders as they conversed by the way; and that the seven sleepers, having attested in their persons the preserving hand of God, and retold the story of their life, and heard snatches of the news of nearly two hundred years, gave their parting blessing to the multitude, and sank in the silence of natural death.

A Prudent Person.

A friend of mine went a few days back to have a tooth stopped. The dentis advised him that he had better have the tooth taken out, and assured him that he would feel no pain if he took laughing gas.

"But what is the effect of the gas?" asked my friend.

"It simply makes you totally insensible," remarked the dentist; "you don't know anything that takes place."

My friend submitted; but just previous to the gas being administered he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his money. "Oh, don't trouble about that now," said the dentist, thinking he was going to be paid his fee.

"Not at all," remarked the patient; "I was simply going to see how much I had before the gas took effect."—*London Truth.*

Items of Interest.

A raining favorite—an umbrella.

Most disinterestedly good—Good fo nothing.

A thorn in the bush is worth a dozen in the hand.

Waiting to be whipped is the mos uninteresting period in boyhood.—*Jos. Billings.*

A Louisiana paper is called the *Suga Planter;* but it has no 'lasses on its edi torial staff.

The editor who was told that his las article was as clear as mud quite prompt ly replied, "Well, that covers th ground."

The following was sent us by a Mississ ippi correspondent as a matter of new but we have a faint suspicion that it is l—ittle exaggerated: "Talk abou your running vines! Why, there's grapevine down here that runs so fas people have to chase the grapes on fleet horse in order to be on hand wher they ripen."—*Cincinnati Breakfas Table.*

A farmer's daughter living nea Cleveland, Ohio, answered a personal i a newspaper, entered into correspond ence with the "unknown," finally me him, was married, went to the city t live, and returned to her father's hous in two months, dressed like a begga and looking twenty years older tha when she went way. Her husband wa a gambler and a loafer. This is a "per sonal" romance in a nutshell.

In a barber shop discussion the othe day one of the disputants said: "I'm getting tired of this eternal harping about the finer sensibilities and virtue of women—they're not a bit ahead of th men. Take a common instance—charity we'll say. When a man's generosity i touched in the right spot, he shoves hi hand right down into his breeche pocket and gives alms. Does a woma ever do that? No, sir, never!" and wit a triumphant, self-satisfied look, he pu on his hat and went out, leaving th other party crushed and dazed.

A woman does more hard work in put ting up a clothes-line than a man woul in building a telegraph line four mile long, and when we come to consider tha she has to toil without profanity, a new luster gathers about the name of woman that a three hours lecture at eleven p m. can never efface, and wreathes he brow with—with—[Here followed beautiful page of mingled pathos an blossoms of rhetoric, but it was lost b the compositor, and will never come t light until the sack of the rag-picke yields up its spoil.]—*Breakfast Table.*

Russian Babies.

Russian babies lead a mummy-lik existence until they are able to help themselves. They are always swaddled, and rolled up tight in bandages, so tha they may be conveniently put awa without risk of getting themselves int mischief or danger. On entering one o their houses an enthusiastic travele thinks he has come upon some paga tribe, having their idols and penates, with the heads well carved out and th rest of the body left in block. He look curiously at one laid upon a shelf, an other hung to the wall on a peg, a thir swung over one of the main beams o the roof, and rocked by the mother, wh has the cord looped over her foot. "Why, that is a child!" cries the astonished traveler, with a feeling simila to that experienced on treading upon toad which was supposed to be a stone. "Why, what else should it be?" answers the mother. Having learned s much in so short a time, the inquisitive traveler wishes to inform himself abou the habits of the creature; but hi curiosity being somewhat damped b the extreme dirt of the little figure, h inquires of the parent when it wa washed. "Washed!" shrieks the terrified mother, "washed!—what, wash child? You would kill it."

Petroleum.

Among the most remarkable natura products of the United States is min eral oil or petroleum. In 1877 ther were 6,283 wells in operation, chiefly i Pennsylvania, producing an aggregat of 420,000,000 gallons per annum o crude oil. The whole world may al most be said to be now lighted at nigh by means of American petroleum an American lamps, except of course tho towns and cities that are lighted by gas But even for gas lighting petroleum i now beginning to be used, for our in ventors are finding out ways to turn i into illuminating gas more cheaply tha that made from coal. The product o petroleum is so great and the natura supply so apparently unlimited that i vestors, in studying out new method and devices for using this substance have a broad, profitable and almos unexplored field of usefulness befor them.

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