

## "THE SONG OF HARD TIMES."

A PARODY.

With footsteps weary and worn,  
With pockets minus a red,  
A merchant sat in unmercantly style,  
Resting his aching head.  
Loss—Loss—Loss.  
The dollars as well as the dimes,  
While still with a voice that told of the blues,  
He sang "The Song of Hard Times."

Break—Break—Break.  
While the wives are making calls;  
Break—Break—Break.  
While the daughters are going to balls.  
It's Oh! to be a slave,  
Along with the barbarous Turk,  
Where man has never a cent to save,  
If this be a merchant's work.

Break—Break—Break.  
While over the books I skim;  
Break—Break—Break.  
Till in comes poverty grim.  
Stocks and dollars and notes,  
Notes and dollars and stocks,  
Till over the books I fall asleep,  
And dream of the missing rocks.

Oh, women with husbands dear,  
Oh, women with brothers and sons,  
You ne'er would buy such monstrous bills,  
If you knew of the awful duns.  
Loss—Loss—Loss.  
In counting-house, office and bank;  
Deprived at once with lightning speed  
Of money as well as of rank.

But why do I talk of rank?  
'Tis a being of fancy's own;  
When yesterday he who stood so high  
To-day is standing alone.  
Yes! to-day is standing alone,  
As gold and silver have fled;  
Alas! that friends should be so few,  
When a man is wanting for bread.

Break—Break—Break.  
The creditors still keep hold;  
And what are they gaining? A few bank shares,  
Some railroad stocks—no gold;  
That battered sign and this empty store;  
A ledger, some old blank books,  
And the clerk's old hat, that even a rat  
Wouldn't wear on account of its books.

Break—Break—Break.  
From the millionaire down to the clerk;  
Break—Break—Break.  
No matter how hard we work,  
Notes and dollars and stocks,  
Stocks and dollars and notes—  
All all going: while over my brain  
A vision of madness floats.

Break—Break—Break.  
In Boston as well as New York;  
Break—Break—Break.  
In London as well as in Cork.  
While the West is blaming the East,  
And the East is blaming the West,  
And the merchants are drawing their money from bank,  
But can't tell how to invest.

Oh! I'm sick of breathing the air  
Of this crowded and dusty street.  
Where the men I once regarded with care  
Are treading me under their feet.  
Oh! for one short hour,  
To feel as I used to feel,  
When my purse was full and my suit was whole,  
And my friends were as true as steel.

With footsteps weary and worn,  
With pockets minus a red,  
A merchant sat in unmercantly style,  
Resting his aching head.  
Loss—Loss—Loss.  
The dollars as well as the dimes,  
While still with a voice that told of the blues,  
Would that the rich would pay their dues,  
He sang "The Song of Hard Times."

## PANSIE.

I.

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note—

"Chubby, if you say that out loud again, I'll—"

"Well I suppose I must learn my lessons—stupid!"

I know that Chubby is putting on a detestable and impudent face, and shooting out his lips abnormally. I know that Nell, with eyes ablaze, is glaring at him across the table, as she looks up from the delights of *Invanhoe*, and yet I will not raise my head from the paper whereupon my pen is hurriedly tracing words that someone's eyes will gloat over to-morrow morning.

It is more than a week since I have been able to find a moment to write to Dick, and he will be hungry for a letter; at least I think so, judging by my own sensations, when three or four days go by without bringing me a big envelope, directed in a clear hand, to "Miss Merivale, Morncliffe, near York." It is a good thing I am the eldest of the Merivale family, for my Christian name might provoke the postman into a disrespectful smile.

"Pansie"—a quaint name truly, but mother and I know what it means, and we love it; at least she does; and I love it because it sounds so sweetly from her lips when she tells me that I am her "Heart's-ease." Well, as I was saying, things have seemed to come in a crowd of late, and mother has been suffering more than usual, so that I have left Dick without a letter for more than a week.

Not a drum—

Crash!  
*Invanhoe* has taken flight through mid-air, and Chubby is "hard bit."

There is a horrible gasp from Maud, who is seated by the window hemming a pocket-handkerchief, and pricking her little pudgy finger at every third stitch, and then she flings her work upon the ground, and lifting the

corner of a not particularly clean pinafore, makes strenuous efforts to wipe poor Chubby's face, whereon combined tears and dirt are tracing sorry streaks of woe.

I look up at Nell, and see her standing before me a veritable figure of penitence; her head droops, her long black lashes lie upon her rose-flushed cheek. What a beautiful picture of shame and sorrow the little lassie makes!

But I am in no humour to appreciate the picturesque side of things, just now. One of my rebellious fits is on me; I feel all one protest against the atmosphere of discomfort that pervades Morncliffe. I have none of the heroine's pleasure in trials and annoyances; I am simply weary of petty strife and miserable anxieties; and this noisy rioting among the youngsters seems to be the last straw that is doomed to break the back of that sorely-tried camel—my patience. Instead, therefore, of reproving the combatants, as in duty bound, I leaned my head upon my hands, and splash goes a tear upon the paper before me, making a great blur on Dick's letter.

"Pansie—Pansie—oh, dear—I am so sorry," Thus Nell's voice, broken by sobs, pleads for pardon, the while two arms steal round my neck.

"I think it's me you ought to say that to," puts in Chubby, setting grammar at defiance, as he sits on the floor ruefully rubbing his injured crown.

"Well, and I am sorry—there!" says the offender, and then falls to hugging me again.

"Nelly ish solly," proclaims baby Maud triumphantly, smiling at poor Chubby, and standing a-tiptoe to investigate the nature of his injuries.

"I'm sure Nelly is sorry," I echo with an air of grave conviction, "and now she will help Chubby to finish learning his poetry."

Nell's bright eyes look somewhat pitiful as I stoop to pick up the prostrate *Invanhoe*, and deposit him on the bookshelf above my head; but she accepts my suggested expiation of her wrong-doing, sits down bravely by Chubby's side, and the two little dark heads bend over the same book, and attack the difficulties of Sir John Moore's famous obsequies.

"I wish they hadn't never buried him at all," mutters Chubby, as these difficulties prove hard to surmount.

"You mean you wish nobody hadn't never written about it," rejoins Nell, with all the superior wisdom of twelve over eight and a quarter.

But I refrain from rebuking the superabundant negatives contained in these remarks. I am writing at railway speed—writing to tell Dick that at last the obstacles in the way of my leaving Morncliffe for four whole delightful weeks, seem to be overcome.

Aunt Emily, mamma's only sister, is coming to take charge of the house and children—I wonder how she and my dear undisciplined Chubby will hit it off!—and so, for the first time since I can remember, I am to go away upon a visit.

A long way, too, down to the Cornish coast, where, in a grand old manor called Merlewood, dwells Mrs. Colquhoun, Dick's married sister. I have never seen any of Dick's relations yet, so this visit is rather a formidable affair to me; but for all that I look forward with great delight to the change. I suppose it is that when one is young, and in faultless health, the instinct that leads one to wish to enjoy life is strong. Looking back through the vista of my seventeen years, I cannot say that I have done much in that way hitherto. You see, what with the children, and mamma's bad health, and bills—and—well, and other things, too, that papa and I know of—there isn't much time to think about enjoying oneself.

Our old nurse, Janet, who has lived with us ever since I can remember—sometimes getting her wages at spasmodic intervals, sometimes going wages-less altogether—says, that the worst piece of ill-luck that ever befell the Merivale family, was Cousin Stephen leaving Morncliffe and five hundred a year to papa.

Until that happened he used to work in a desultory kind of way, but still profitably, at his profession; afterward, he just let his connection drop, and took to trying to live like an independent country gentleman; developed a taste for the turf, and—well, it is hard to tell the rest.

Mamma's health gave way under the ceaseless pressure of anxieties, and so it came about that I, Pansie Merivale, cannot remember ever feeling young. As soon as I had sense enough to think, it seemed as if mamma and I were all at once the same age, and weighed down by the same burdens. Then, as time went on, and she—dear patient martyr!—grew weaker, and suffered more and more bodily pain, I seemed to grow the older of the two, and it began to feel a sort of sin to let things come to her knowledge, if I could possibly bear them on my own shoulders alone. Of course, some things she was obliged to know. When papa came home late, and brought noisy companions with him, I used to creep up to her room, and, crouching down upon the floor by the side of her couch, lay my head against her shoulder, and hold her hand—how thin and worn a hand! in mine. As now and then a louder burst of merriment came from below, she would press my hand close, and whisper to me that my love was precious to her, and that I was her dear, dear "Heart's-ease."

When the guests went away, and we heard papa coming up to his room, she would put me gently from her, and say: "Go now, darling,"

and kiss me with lips that trembled yet spoke no words of dread. And so I had to leave her, to what words of jeering cruelty, what sneers at her helpless pain, who could say? I used to steal softly and stealthily to my own room, and kneeling by my bed, pray that the God of the fatherless and the widow would look down in pity upon those who were worse than fatherless, and upon that gentle, loving woman who was worse than widowed.

Strange experiences these for a girl! Well might all the buoyancy of youth die out under such cruel discipline. But when Dick came I seemed to grow young again all at once. It was as if I had been some swimmer fighting along a stream, bearing up against the dead weight of a burden that threatened every moment to drag me down; and all at once, just when my heart began to fail me, lo! a blessed sense of help and comfort came upon me, and the weight of the burden that had seemed well-nigh too heavy to be borne, was suddenly lightened. God's hand had led me across the path of one who was fated to be my aid and comfort. A new courage, a new strength was infused into my soul; nothing seemed too hard to bear, because there was Dick to share it with me. And now, as if all this light and gladness were not enough, Aunt Emily has come home from abroad, and so I am to go and see Dick's sister, and Dick is to be there too; and I am dazzled with so much happiness at once, like one that the sunlight blinds.

I have never allowed to myself before, how weary I have been sometimes; but now I do; and more than this, the excitement of this strange new life that is coming has upset my mental equilibrium, and I am irritable with the noisy young ones, and what baby Maud calls "coss."

Last night Janet was closeted a long while with mamma, and then went out on some mysterious errand. When she came back she was laden with parcels, and among their varied contents were yards and yards of black silk, enough to make me one of those trailing, rustling dresses that I have seen ladies wear at our grand old Minister, and that I have "coveted" with every fibre of my young heart, in spite of the decalogue plainly set forth upon the wall above my head. When Janet called me into mamma's room and I saw the rustling silk laid across the couch by the window, saw the happy smile—how rare, how rare a thing to see—upon her lips; saw the dear hands trembling with eagerness as they fingered the delicate laces and ribbons that were scattered all about—when I saw this sight, and knew that the great love of the mother-heart had thought of me so tenderly, I scarce could find words to utter, and in my troubled happiness it did not cross my mind how dearly the pretty things had been purchased. But later on, as we three—mamma, Janet and I—were holding solemn conclave on the matter of the form and fashion of my dresses, I missed the sparkle of a certain ring from mamma's finger.

Like a sudden revelation it came upon me then what she had done for me, and, catching her hand in mine, I kissed it once and again, weeping for very joy to think of how well she loved me, and yet of all "the pity of it."

All this only happened last night, and I am hating myself for looking forward so eagerly to this coming visit. I am hating myself for my impatience with Nell's passion and Chubby's resentment. I have hardly patience to thread baby Maud's needle, for the fourteenth time; and my hand shakes so, as I write to tell Dick that it is "all right" about the going to Mrs. Colquhoun's, that he will certainly fancy I am suffering from ague.

At length—at very great length—the Burial of Sir John Moore is disposed of, and I am thankful to see the children scampering about the ill-kept, neglected garden that surrounds Morncliffe on all sides, and of which I am so heartily ashamed. I have struggled to keep the flower-beds that are directly under the windows in something like order; but I can hardly wield a scythe, or remove the broken pedestal of an old sun-dial that uprears itself from amid a tangle of dock-leaves and nettles, and gives a dispiriting graveyard aspect to the whole. I don't think I ever realized how bad things at Morncliffe were until Dick had to see them. Then I'm sure my cheeks must have got tired of blushing. True, Dick never seemed to see what an out-at-elbows household we were; perhaps it was for my sake he made believe to be blind—or was it that he saw only me, and had eyes for nothing else?

What a grand gift is the power of intuition in a man! Dick has it to perfection. It never seems necessary to explain matters to him; he understands just at once, not only how things are, but exactly how they affect one, and the look or word that can help most is always ready. When you have struggled against things and fought against giving in for year after year, and suddenly find a helping hand, you abandon yourself utterly to the exquisite happiness of having some one to cling to. It is the happiest experience to feel like this; but I wonder is there a lurking danger under its sweetness—a danger of falling into the sin of idolatry?

"Oh, what a tired, white face to greet a fellow with," said Dick, one morning, as I went into the long, low school-room, whose broad bay window commands a delightful view of the monumental column. "Have things been going very badly, little one?" he went on, stroking my head, that lay against his breast.

"Yes, yes," I almost sobbed; "very, very badly. But I don't mind—I don't care—as long as there is you." Then the thought of my exceeding preciousness came over my heart like a

flood; I flung my arms about his neck, and held my head back, so that I could look into his dear true eyes. "Oh, Dick, Dick!" I cried, in the passionate gladness that his sympathy had called into being, "what should I do, my darling—if I lost you?"

Something in my words, or in my face, or in both combined, seemed to touch him strangely; and I saw, almost with fear, a mist gather in his eyes, as he turned away from me.

"He is afraid that I love him too much; that I am making an idol of him," I thought to myself, in reviewing the matter afterward.

But one day the time was to come—the bitter, cruel, weary time—when I was to know why Dick turned from me then.

The eve of my flight from Morncliffe has come at last. My modest luggage is corded, and stands in the back passage. Janet and I came to the conclusion that it was wiser to put it there than in the square front hall, for papa does not look with a favourable eye upon my departure, and the signs of that departure might call forth unpleasant comments.

Aunt Emily has come. She and mamma have not met for years, and each is shocked with the change in the other; for auntie has had much sorrow, and is now a childless widow. She looks old and worn, but there is something that wins one's trust about her face, and a certain dignity in her carriage that I think frightens papa—a fact I am wicked enough to rejoice in.

When the morning comes I go away; I hurry over saying good-bye to mamma. It is our first parting—our very first since seventeen years ago I lay upon her breast, her first-born, the flower that God sent to be her heart's-ease amid the troubles that even in those days of her married life were closing round her. The children gather at the window to see me start; I catch a glimpse of a hand that waves farewell to me from the upstairs room, and with a choking sensation in my throat, I lose sight of Morncliffe, as the cab that is my only chariot turns the corner of the road.

It is late in the dark autumn night when I reach my destination; yet the long day's journey has not seemed weary to me, for is there not Dick at the end of it?

Yes; he is there at the station to meet me, and oh, joy and gladness, he is there alone! Mrs. Colquhoun's carriage waits outside, and very soon we are bowling along through the dusky night; but it is not dark to me, for Dick is by my side.

"I hope you will like my sister, Pansie," says he, as we turn into a long avenue, densely dark with the shade of overhanging trees.

His arm is around me, and my hand nestles in his; so I am in a frame of mind to promise to like anybody and everybody. "She is much older than I am, and was a sort of mother to me when I was quite a little fellow. She is a woman of many sterling qualities and great common sense, but if her manner is a little cold at first you mustn't mind. It's Harriet's way to be reserved at first."

Thus says Dick as we traverse that funeral avenue.

But there is no time to wonder any more; the hall-door is open; Dick is handing me from the carriage; and there, at the top of the steps, stands a tall stately woman, while peeping over her shoulder is a little sandy-haired man, a head shorter than herself—Mrs. Colquhoun and her husband.

II.

I have been ten days at Merlewood. When I come to think of it, it is strange that I, a visitor in the house where Dick is also a guest, should spend so much time looking through that window, and watching the cloud-shadows play hide-and-seek with each other in the rocky dells. The fact is, the atmosphere doesn't suit me. To put it plainly, I find that I don't like people who possess "many sterling qualities," in other words, I don't like Dick's sister.

Every hour since I came to Merlewood, every day that Dick and I have been together in the society of Harriet—Mrs. Colquhoun—I have felt as if an awful, intangible something was drifting Dick from me; and as if I were some poor, helpless child, standing on the bank of a dark river, whose current bears away the sweetest blossom that my hands have ever gathered.

When we started for an after-dinner stroll, we were a *partie carrée*—Mrs. Colquhoun and her husband, Dick and I. We had fallen into the usual procession these expeditions resolve themselves into, Dick and his sister leading the way, with the diminutive owner of Merlewood and myself bringing up the rear, when all at once some one—upon whose pathway in life may all blessings rest!—required the presence of our hostess, and with an unwillingness that not all her tact could conceal, she left us. Hardly had the stately figure of his wife vanished from our sight, when Mr. Colquhoun's little green-grey eyes gave me a meaning and sympathetic look, and, presto! he, too, moved quickly off among the golden-brown beech-trees that surrounded us on all sides. Having mentally hugged the little man for his considerate departure, I caught fast hold of Dick's arm with both my hands, and tried to put into words the content I felt.

"Oh, Dick—darling—I am so glad!"

He gave a comprehensive look round, and seeing no indication of our solitude being disturbed, drew me to his side, and I stood on tiptoe to meet the kiss that dropped upon my happy mouth. I dare say it was very undignified to show my gladness and my love in such open