

Poetry.

HONEST FRIENDSHIP'S GRASP.

Written for the Ontario Workman.

Many a weary heart hath pined,
Without a friend to cheer;
Many a good and honest mind,
Hath shed a lonely tear;
But many a one, when all seemed night,
Hath felt the precious clasp,
Which fill the soul with beams of light,
With honest friendship's grasp.

Each day doth bring its troubles,
As we journey on life's road,
A good friend will make them bubbles,
For he'll help you with your load;
Then, when the angry storm is past,
We feel the precious clasp,
Two honest hearts are still held fast,
By honest friendship's grasp.

But trust not always in smooth words,
Which often lead astray;
They fly in winter like the birds,
And come back when 'tis May.
Honest friendship ne'er grows cold,
However cold the blast;
There's genial warmth and worth untold,
In honest friendship's grasp.

When after years of toil and pain,
Absent from home and friends,
The wanderer seeks his home again,
Each anxious moment tends
To bring him nearer friends again;
He feels the joyous clasp;
There's enmity to care and pain,
In honest friendship's grasp.

HAL.

Montreal, March, 1873.

ODDFELLOWSHIP.

Written for the Ontario Workman.

There is a name well known on earth,
And blessed by all who know its worth,
For good it's done e'er since its birth—
Oddfellowship.

What is it that from day to day,
Does all it can to drive away
The pangs of illness and decay?—
Oddfellowship.

What is it that throughout the land
Extends an ever-helping hand,
To all who join our noble band?—
Oddfellowship.

What is it helps the widow on,
When from her side her husband's torn,
And every other help is gone?—
Oddfellowship.

What takes the orphan by the hand,
And helps him on till he can stand,
As one amongst us in the band?—
Oddfellowship.

What is it that does most to save
The aged from a pauper's grave,
And gives him all that he can crave?—
Oddfellowship.

Now friendship, love and truth you'll see,
Also, faith, hope and charity,
Combined in this our Unity!—
Oddfellowship.

It never yet was known to pause,
From giving help where there was cause;
For charity pervades its laws,—
Oddfellowship.

O blessed Lord, be thou our friend,
And grant that we may to the end
Do that which will our cause extend,—
Oddfellowship.

G. PURROTT, I.O.O.F., M.U.F.S.
Hamilton, March, 1873.

Tales and Sketches.

HER TWO HANDS.

Old Caspar came home about sunset. His pick was on his shoulder; so was his old wool hat, for he thrust it far back from his wrinkled front. Caspar had a bend, as if he had been half-persuaded these many years to go on hands and knees again. So heavily time sat on his back, and so close to the earth did his daily labor draw him.

He was a good-natured trotting old fellow, working his mouth eagerly and straining his bleared eyes, as he approached the town's draggled skirts, for very thinking of his folks—his old woman and his little girl.

There were rows of dismal frame huts all around, built by railroad companies for the purpose of penning as many of their employees' families at a time as possible. The reposed, grimy and barn-like, squat on that sandy foundation which Scripture condemns, swarming with legions of tallow-headed children. Women, sharp at the elbows and sharper at the face, were raising clouds of pork-smoke from their respective kitchen altars. In fact, the whole neighborhood reeked with the smell of grease, and the evening was so warm a Laplander might have resented it. But Caspar's nose was not delicate. He trotted over the cinder sidewalk, nodding this way and that, glad there was such a fine air, and that his old bones were so near home.

"That's the little gal as usual," he chuckled, as he turned a corner and found Maggie on

her lookout at the gate. She was a comforting sight to see in that neighborhood, so tidy and fair in calico and brass, and the pink flesh-color of youth. You wondered why she hadn't been set farther up town, and draped in something costly; why her deft fingers had never learned there were ten keys to unlock a soul which slumbered in rosewood, and which rises at a touch, like some blessed genii, to comfort all ills, all thoughts; you wondered why some high-bred father was not coming home to her now. But then this old man would have found it so hard to do without her. Then, too, Madge might never in all her life have struck the royal heart which was now in her hands, which she held her bank against all the future, and the interest of which was the only income she wanted.

"There you are, grandpa!" cried Madge. "Yes, and there you are Madge! And here we both are, Madge!" entering the opened gate and casting down his pick.

He put his hands on each side of her head and gave her a sounding smack on the cheek. "Supper's ready."

"Yes, yes. Jist wait till I git a little of the smut off my hands and neck. It's ben a powerful hot, dusty day."

Caspar trotted through the little barn allotted to him, hailed his old wife, who sat ready to pour out his tea, and after blowing and plunging through a deal of water, returned to his family with shining countenance and a handful of onions.

"I jist pulled these up for a relish. They're cooling, ingens is. You tended that ingenbed, didn't you, Madgie?"

"Grandma and I." "And we wanted some of them ingens for market," said the old wife, eyeing the sacrifice severely. "We ain't got no ground to throw away raisin' luxuries for ourselves."

"Well, well, mother," pleaded Caspar, dipping his fragrant sphere in salt, "I don't calk'late to pull 'em all. I jist wanted somethin' refreshin' after a hard day. Taste 'em, Madgie," insinuating emerald tops toward her.

"Oh? no, grandpa, keep 'em yourself," shaking her head and smiling.

"I feel," rambled Caspar, filling his senses and jaws with perfumed roots until a blind man would have pronounced him a Mexican, if his nose had sat in judgment over Caspar, "I 'rally feel as if I needed somethin' refreshin', working hard day after day for nothin', you might say. Sort of seein' your work go to pieces under your eyes, and knowin' the danger to them on the road."

"What do you mean, grandpa?" cried Madge, turning white as her bread and butter.

"Why, honey, you see we've picked and picked in that cut, and the sile's as unsteady as water. The stones and earth jist roll on the track contineral. The company orto do somethin' to that cut. Stones big as you is jarred down every train. But, then, the road's new, the road's new yet."

"Men ain't got no senses," broke out the old wife. "Don't you see you're skeering that child to death for fear Charley 'll git smashed up? He runs on that road."

Two blades of keen remorse leaped from Caspar's bleared eyes.

"Now, don't be skeered, honey. Take an ingen, honey."

He reached over to pet her fingers.

"Charley didn't pass to-day when the dirt was rattlin' down so. He don't pass till half-after eight this evenin', and we left the track as clean as this table. Yes, sir, them rails is as free and bright as new tin-pans. So don't be skeered, honey."

"I'm not scared about anything, grandpa," said Madge, tremulously, but smiling like a rainbow.

"There now, mother," cried Caspar, triumphantly, returning to his onions, "you come down on me for nothin'. She ain't skeered a bit."

No, not a bit. She flew about the room like a bird, washed the earthenware, brought her grandfather his pipe, and dropped at his feet to tell him some funny story afloat. In his enjoyment, he wrapped himself in such a cloud that she could hardly see the clock.

Madge slipped out to the gate. She was often there looking up the road. The two old people sat inside thinking of the days when they were young.

She was restless, and fitted over the sidewalk, following a magnet which would have drawn her from the centre of the earth. To the road of course. How often had she watched the rails converging horizon-ward until they sharpened themselves to a needle-point! The railroad had a fascination for Madge. When a baby, she used to follow her grandfather to his work, and hide among the bushes to see the trains whirling into town like screaming land-demons. She had heard of the sea, and the spell it had upon sailors, but she saw the railroad and felt the spell, which nobody seemed to remark, that it cast over inland laborers. She saw her boy-playmates sucked up by "the road"; heard her grandfather tell of hair-breadth escapes from collisions, of cool courage in men who placed themselves between the people and most horrible death. She had learned the power and mission of the road. In short, she was as loyal a daughter of the rail as any Maine skipper's child is of the sea.

Madge had affinity for an engine. To this day her throat swelled, her eye kindled, when the great iron animal swept past her. Charley drove an engine, and his engine was, in her eyes, a fitting exponent of the strength and beauty of his manhood. Such was the romance

of her little dry life. Everbody must have his enthusiasm. She had been in the town's great depot at night, arrived from a holiday trip, and had laughed aloud to see some busy engine hurrying up and down, picking up freight like a hen gathering her chickens; now breathing loud enough to deafen a multitude, now concentrating its strength and panting slowly away at the head of its charge. She had waked from sleep to hear them calling to each other through the darkness, and translated to herself what they said.

It was a proper thing for Madge to be an engineer's wife. She thought it a right thing to be Charley's wife under any circumstances, I assure you. There was now only a little strip of time between Madge and Charley. She looked over that little strip and saw just how it would be. They were to have a cottage on a clean street; her grand-parents, if they became infirm, were to have a home with her; "And these two little hands," said Charley, "will make me the dearest nest; I'll be so glad to run into it at night?"

Madge's pink face took on rose as she thought on all these things, looking up and down the cut to see if the track were clear, as her grandfather had said. It was clear. She felt relieved and foolish about coming out there through the twilight to spy for Charley's welfare, and much inclined to hid from the smoke rising far off. But those unstable sandy walls towering over his way? Madge watched them jealously. Just as the thunder of the train could be heard, her heart stood still to see them dissolve, like pillars ground down by some malicious Samson, and piled upon the track till nothing could be seen for yards but one long hill of earth and stones!

Now, little Madge, if there is heroism in you, it must meet and lasso that iron beast whirling a hundred people upon death! A hundred! The whole world was in the engine house, driving down first upon that fate! He wouldn't try to save himself when he came upon the life-trap. She saw how he would set his lips, bead nerve and brain to the emergency; she saw how car would crash into car, the wreck lie over a burning engine, Charlie be ground and charred under them all!

Oh sublimely unselfish woman! She flew over the track like a thing of wings. It was life and Charley, or death with Charley! The head-light flashed up through the dusk. There were matches in her pocket; she scraped them on a rail and tore off her apron. Oh! they wouldn't ignite, and the cotton would but smolder. It is rolling down as swift as air. Bless the loom which wove the cloth which made that cotton apron! She tossed it blinking and blazing above her head, walking slowly backwards. The red-eyed fury roared down at her, but you can't terrify a woman when her mind is made up. It should run over her before it should reach the sand-heap.

She was seen. The engine rent evening with its yells; the brakes were on—her lasso had caught it—it could now be stopped in time. She darted aside, but the current was too strong for her. She was dizzy; fell, and clutched in the wrong direction. Poor, poor little fingers!

Now the people pour out: they run here and there. Women are crying—perhaps because they weren't hurt. The engineer darts along like a madman, looking under the train. There, a dozen feet before the engine, rises the sand-hill. Everybody wants to know how they were stopped before they rounded the curve.

"Here she is!" shouted Charley, striding up with a limp bundle, like a king who had sacrificed to the good of the state. "She showed the signal! And stood up to it until I saw her—until we almost run her down! There's half the fingers cut off her left hand. There, what do you think of that, now, for the woman that saved you all!" holding up the mutilated stump.

"God bless it!" prayed an old gentleman, taking off his hat.

"Amen!" roared the crowd. With one breath they raised three shouts, which shook the sand-hills until they came down handsomely a second time, Charley standing above their enthusiasm with the fainting child in his arms, like a regent holding some royal infant.

"Let me see her!" sobbed first one woman, then another. So Charley sat down and let them crowd round with ice-water, cologne, and linen for bandages. He even gave the men a glimpse of her waxy face, just unfolding to consciousness. Like all Western people, they wanted to pour out their hearts in "a purse." Madge hid her face on Charley's blouse, and "would none of it."

He carried her home at the head of a procession, which stopped before her grandfather's hut, and cheered her "last appearance." So do people froth up in gratitude.

An hour afterwards, when the neighbors were dispersed, and Caspar stood convinced that "an ingen" might not be the best brace for Madge's nerves, when her hand was dressed, and her grandmother was quavering a psalm in the corner, Madge turned such a look on Charley as even that stout-hearted fellow could not stand. He leaned close to her, and not having yet washed the smoke off his face, was as Vulcan-like a lover as you could desire. But Madge always saw the god, not the mechanic.

"O Charley! how can I make a little nest for you now! After the feeling of to-night is over, you will wish you had married anybody rather than a maimed girl!"

Unwise Madge! She drew her fate upon herself. I do aver, that to this day her nose is much flattened by the vice like punishment Charley made her suffer for that speech.

When he came in next evening, he laid a paper in her lap, and watched the pale face expand and blossom while it read a deed of gift to her of the prettiest cottage on the prettiest street in that city. The company which Charley served, and which could do handsome things as well as thoughtless ones, begged her in a flattering note to accept the gift as only a small acknowledgement of their obligations to her.

"How could she make a little nest for him?" asked Charley, looking at her through brimming eyes.

"Why, with her hands, after all," answered Madge, crying.

"And this will always be the prettier hand of the two," said that foolish fellow, touching the bandaged one.

TOPPING A SHAFT.

A THRILLING SKETCH.

As I was leaving the yard one evening, to trudge back to the bits of rooms we were obliged to put up with, since I came to London, in order to get better wages, I was called called into the office by the foreman. "What is your present job, Lindsay?" he asked; and I told him.

"Humph! That can stand over for a day or two, can't it? Stubbs has fallen ill again, and you must take his place."

I didn't care to be shifted before I'd finished what I was about; but a journeyman bricklayer, with a wife and children looking to him for bread, cannot afford to be particular, and so I held my tongue.

"You must go to Coot's brewery to-morrow morning, and finish that chimney," the foreman told me. He gave me a few more directions, and then went his way, and I went mine, not very well pleased at the prospect before me.

I suppose I never ought to have followed the trade, for though I had gained myself a good character as a steady workman, I have never been able to overcome a horror at being perched at any great height. In the country, where the buildings were low, I managed well enough; but in this great city, there were roofs on which I could not stand without this dread oppressing me, nor look down without feeling as though something below was tempting me to fling myself over and end at once the miserable sensation which no effort of mine could possibly shake off.

This huge chimney the foreman had ordered me to finish was reckoned one of the highest and best built shafts in London. We were all proud of the job, which had been carried on so far without a single mishap; but I had been earnestly hoping that I might not be sent to it, and it wasn't till the workmen had got almost to the top, that I began to breathe a bit more freely, and trust that it would be finished without any help of mine.

Once at home with the youngsters' merry prattle sounding in my ears, I forgot my uneasy feelings about to-morrow's job; but the moment I dozed off to sleep, it came back to me in a hideous dream. I thought I was falling down, down, down! and just as the crash of my body striking the earth seemed inevitable, I woke up with a start, to find myself in a cold perspiration, and trembling in every limb.

No more settled sleep visited my pillow that night, and it was a relief when the booming of the clocks dispelled my frightful visions, and warn me that it was now time to face the reality.

The morning was bitterly cold and boisterous; scarcely a soul was to be seen in the deserted streets, at that early hour, and the dull thud of my footsteps sounded mournfully in the stillness reigning around. At last the great chimney loomed in sight, and gazing up at its height, I shivered at the thought of being on the top of it, and forced to look down at the sickening depth below.

If it had not been for the shame of the thing, I should have gone back; but the thought of Bessie and the children spurred me on; so, buttoning my jacket tightly around me, I began to ascend the staging. In my journey upward, I passed many costly curtained windows, and remember thinking, rather enviously, how nice it must be to be rich, and sheltered, on such a morning, from the biting cold, in a warmly furnished bedroom.

Some fellows wouldn't mind the least bit if they were perched on the top of St. Paul's on the coldest of the mornings, provided you supplied them with beer; but I wasn't over strong limbed, and more than that, I couldn't pretend to be strong-minded; so what to them was nothing, to me was almost death itself.

The higher I went the more intense the cold appeared to be, and my fingers became quite numb by the hoar frost that was clinging to the sides and spokes of the ladders. After a while I stood on the few boards forming the stage on the summit of the shaft, and giving one glance downward, my blood turned colder than it was already, as I realized the immense depth to the yard below.

Giving myself a shake to get rid of the dizzy sensation that came over me, and unhooking from the pulley the tub of mortar which my mate, waiting below, had sent up, I at once began my solitary work.

"I had been hard at it for more than an hour, and was getting a bit more reconciled to my position, cheering myself as I whistled and worked, with the thought that each brick I laid was bringing me nearer to a finish, when all at once a fiercer and colder blast than before came shrieking and tearing round the chimney. I was nearly overthrown, and in the endeavor to recover myself I tilted the board of mortar off from the edge of the shaft on to the frail standing-place.

In a second, to my intense horror, I felt the boards and all that were on them gliding away with me from the chimney, and in a few moments I should have been lying a mangled corpse below if I had not succeeded in flinging my arm over and into the hollow of the shaft, where, as the scaffolding and its load of bricks crushed downward, I was left hanging with certain death awaiting me the moment I loosened my hold.

My first impulse was to throw my other hand over and draw my body up so that I could lie partially across the top of the shaft. In this I was successful, and continued to balance myself, half in the chimney and half out.

There for some time I could only cling with frenzied desperation, praying earnestly to be saved from the horrible death threatening me; but at last I summoned courage to peer cautiously over the outside of the shaft.

Not a bit of scaffolding remained within many yards of me—and that but the poles, with a few boards dangling to them—and there was nothing to break my fall should I quit my hold.

Shuddering, I drew my head over the shaft, for there the darkness hid my danger, while to gaze on the scene without brought the old feeling of being dragged down back to me in full force.

Then I began to think of the wife and little ones whom I had left snug in bed, and bitter tears came into my eyes as I wondered how they would live if I were taken away from them. The thought brought me back to more selfish ones, and I kept asking myself, "Must I die? How long can I hold on with this fierce wind besetting me? Is there no hope? Will no one, seeing how I am placed, strive to rescue me?"

Again I turned my eyes downward. In the court-yard of the brewery, and in the streets below, people were fast collecting; windows were being thrown open, and women and children, shrieking and sobbing, were gazing from them at me. The crowd below thickened, running hither and thither. A large kite littered nearer and nearer. How I tried to steady myself with one hand, that I might grasp the cord with the other as soon as it was within reach, comes vividly before me now. But it never did come within my reach, a gust of the breeze carrying it farther away or dashing it to the ground.

An hour passed, and though still clinging to the brickwork, it was almost unconsciously; for cold and fear had so worked upon me that I became quite dazed; and the chimneys, the people, and the confused noise from the streets, and my own perilous position, seemed to be jumbled together in a tangle which I could not put straight. While in this half-insensible state I heard a voice shout my name. But it had to be repeated twice before I could rouse myself sufficiently to hear what was said.

"Bill! Bill Lindsay! cheer up mate! help is coming!" were the words that rumbled up the shaft.

After this there was a pause for some minutes; and scarce able to control my excitement, I tried to think how this help would come. Then there was a warning shout to me to keep my head back, followed by a whizzing, hissing noise; and, looking within the shaft, I saw a bright shower of golden sparks lighting up the well-like hole, and knew that a rocket had been fired.

But it struck the brickwork in its ascent and failed to reach me, so that once more I was left to wait and hope until the voice again shouted for me to keep clear. A moment after a fiery trail of sparks shot upward far above me, and an earnest "Thank God!" came from my heart as I grasped a thin cord that fell by my side as the rocket descended.

By this communication a stouter and stronger rope was sent to me. But my danger was not over, for in my weakened and numbed state it was perilous to slide down it. At first I could scarcely brace my nerves up sufficiently to launch myself over the brickwork, and my head turned dizzy, for a moment I thought myself gone, but conquering the feeling by a great effort, I slowly descended until about half the distance was accomplished.

Then the horrid fear seized upon me, "What if the rope should break, or not be securely fastened!" and dreading each second that my fears would be fulfilled, in feverish haste I slid on.

When within a few yards from the bottom, overtaken nature would bear the strain no longer; and, losing my hold, I dropped into the arms of those who had been breathlessly watching the descent.

Other hands than mine finished the shaft in calmer weather, and on a more securely fastened scaffold; and I, well-cared for by the best of little wives, soon got over the shock of my accident; but, as I go to and from my work, and look up to the huge chimney, I often recall with a shudder, the hour when I clung to its summit, counting the moments, each one of which seemed to bring me nearer to a dreadful death.