A SPRIG OF THORN.

I smell thee, thorn, beneath my dull room;
And straight there spring up in my fancy
Bright leagues of hedgerow, foaming white with bloom,
Beneath an azure sky.

I smell thee; and, as by some magic power,
The straggling grass and—how, I cannot tell—
To me breed spaces gay with bent and flower,
Its smoke I know so well.

A river rolls along the hilly brow,
And through the sweet, encouraging air, swelt
An odorous stream of freshest country air,
And a sweet scent of bells.

High o'er my head a lark sings his love song,
Heard as one hears echoes in happiest dreams,
And all the dreamland lying about us
With sweetest music teems;

O blooming thorn, how much I owe to thee!
For that thine odour, in this dreary place,
Has thus a green oasis made for me,
For one brief, blessed space.
—Chambers'.

BLIGHTED.

BY GEORGE ALDRIDGE.

She was singing as he passed;
Twining willows dark and fair;
Twining willows, singing low,
Eyes of sun hues, cheeks aglow!
Then to them at her behind
Eyes of light and locks of gold
Matched to sunny Madonna old
In that room—an ideal fair,
Myriad on myriad and half!
Antiphonals for vesals
Hybrid scenes in sound and glass—
Fairest music from sets to sun—
Not room he found as he fair stood,
He stood and saw the little maid,
Twining willows, singing low,
And pale her cheek and her eyes wan who
Sick and sor smile send in all,
Joy, curtained when she sleepless grew,
And where the mountain violets blow,
She faints in a dream of love.
Laughing for its own blue skies,

READY-MONEY MORTIBOY

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Mortiboy's first impulse, on feeling the hand upon his shoulder, was to cry for help; his second, when a tremendous reflection had convinced him of the entire folly of the first, to shake off the hand and turn round. It must be confessed that a third impulse tempted him—to break from the stranger's hold and scamper, and fled, with what speed he might. His assailant relieved him, however, at once, by turning to other business.

"Who—who—are you?" he stammered. It was a figure he did not larger; that of a tall strong man, warmly wrapped in a thick pilot jacket, with a stout cudgel in his hand, and a round felt hat upon his head. As the moon came out by the time and starts between the flying clouds, Mr. Mortiboy made out, besides these details, a black black beard, which covered all the face from the eyes downwards, and hid a fock or so of throat and chest.

Old Mr. Mortiboy, I think you are!" said the stranger, in a rough harsh voice.

"Mr. Mortiboy certainly—and perhaps old. Pray, who are you, and what do you want?"

"I want to speak to you. Come on! in this mouldy old churchyard, and go home. I will walk with you."

"You can come home to-morrow to the bank. That is where I receive strangers."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I shall go home with you now. So as soon as you've done your business—whatever that may be—this convivial meeting-place, we'll go together to Dorington."

"Is it business you want to speak about?"

"I suppose you don't have many evening callers for pleasure—do you Mr. Mortiboy?"

"I do not. I am not one who wastes his time in gossiping with people."

"You had many parties since your son went away, I suppose?"

Mr. Mortiboy laid his hand upon the stranger's arm.

"My son! Did you know my son Dick? Can you tell me anything about him?"

"Go on home, and I will tell you, all I know.

"It's twelve years and two months owled Mr. Mortiboy to himself—" twelve years and two months, yesterday. I wonder if he'll tell me what became of the boy?"

He led the way home; not by the paddock, through the shrubbery, as any stranger seemed to know pretty well, at he swung along the street by the side of him, great-shouldered and burly, looking up and the names over the shops, as if he was trying to read them; nodding his head, too, with a certain air of recognition, as they passed the public houses.

But it does not take long to exhaust the streets at Market Rasing; shut the pair found themselves in a very few minutes on the steps of Mr. Mortiboy's house.

"Still live here, eh?" asked the stranger. Mr. Mortiboy, not without a certain feeling of uneasiness, opened the door, and admitted his guest. The hall was perfectly dark, and he bade him wait while he struck a light. To his terror and amazement, the stranger, who evidently knew his way thoroughly, deposited his hat on the hat-stand and his stick in the umbrella-stand. Now this familiarity was a piece in a perfect stranger, and in the dark, savored of the supernatural; and thought Mr. Mortiboy was not a superstitious or a nervous man, he trembled slightly, and looked over his shoulder as he walked on to lead the way to the parlour.

As he passed curiously at him, he could not help thinking of the devil.

It was the room which had been the scene of the will-reading. There was fire, and only the one bedroom candle which Mr. Mortiboy carried in his hand.

The stranger—he was visible now—was a man who seemed about thirty-two or three years of age. His black curling hair was crisp and short; his figure was tall and muscular; his forehead was broad and square; and his eyes had a sort of fierce light about them which might mean many things.

Mr. Mortiboy stood, nervously, modestly held it before his face while he scrutinized him. He put it down after his inspection, which the stranger bore without flinching.

"I don't know you. What do you want with me? And what have you got to tell me?"

"You do not know me?" asked the other.

"I do not, sir. And, to tell the truth, I hardly want to know you; for I mistrust the look of you."

His visitor reached out his hand, and seized a decanter and a glass of wine hot in it.

"It's a cold night, and with your leave—he smoke it, and put in down with a gulpful of disgust. "Sherry. No, thank you. Just haven't you got any whyes? I am there one in the kitchen?"

Mr. Mortiboy stared at him with amazement. What had this familiar stranger to do with his kitchen? It was a lonely house, he thought to think of violence and midnight marauders.

"If we have business, it will be short, I suppose, and you may return in this room, cold or not, just as well as in the kitchen. Sit down, and say what you have to say, and go."

"We have business; but if is as long that I shall probably stay here all night. Take the candle, Mr. Mortiboy, and we will go to the kitchen, where you generally sit when Hester goes to bed. Follow me, I know the way."

He took the candle; and, going into the hall, turned to the left.

The old man went after him as he strode out of the room, and closed it; and, in his boots along the passages—which he seemed to know well enough—in a great wonderment and not a little terror. But how was he to disobey a man so big and so masterful—a man who knew the house as well as he did himself!

There was a bright fire in the kitchen, and the strange visitor sat down, and warmed himself.

"It is twelve years," said the stranger, in a deep tone rather, "since your son Dick ran away;—since, rather, you turned him out of the house."

"Twelve years and two months. Twelve years and two months, yesterday."

"Hang your two months. You never heard from him since he left you?"

"Never."

"Would you like to hear from him again?"

"If you know he had been doing well. If it was to hear that he had turned his youth had been broken, I should like to hear of him."

"Would you like, then to hear that your son Dick, very early in his history, is leaving you, saw the many crying of his ways, and reformed; that he became steady, industrious and respectable; that in short, he got money, and is, consequently much revered and respected by all good men?"

"I should. Good news indeed! If this is what you have to tell me, be quick about it."

"First, Mr. Mortiboy"—he had spoken throughout in a rough, constrained voice—"I have had a longish journey, and have caught a cold. Give me a glass of brandy."

"Brandy—brandy! It's what the confounded undertakers asked for this morning! I am sorry that I have no brandy at hand, sir. Would you take some gin?"

The stranger nodded. Mr. Mortiboy went to a cupboard which he unlocked, and took out a bottle and a wine glass. Before handing it to his guest, he held it up to the light, and then measured the contents by the length of his finger. It was two joints overthe length of the middle finger. He shook his head; and muttering, "I'm half afraid she's found the way to the cupboard," poured out a glass cautiously, as if it had been the finest Chartreuse. His visitor tossed it off quickly; and, taking the bottle from his hands, filled a second glass, and tossed that off. Then he sat down, and meditated for a few moments: Mr. Mortiboy watching him with his hands on his knees. The old man's nature was stirred up by the mention of his son's name. Old hopes, old affections, old memories, rose again in his heart, where they had been silent and buried former than half a score of years.

"Tell me about Dick," he said impatiently, drumming his heels upon the floor.

The stranger stood up and half bent over him.

"I am Dick," he said softly and in his natural voice.

Mr. Mortiboy leapt up as if he had been shot. He seized the candle again, and held it to his face. He peered in his eyes. He looked again. Then he put down the candle, and answered in a quivering voice, addressed in the words of Scripture—

"The eyes are the eyes of my son Dick, and the voice is his voice. But I do not know him—I do not know him. Dick was not so tall; Dick was smooth-faced; Dick was afraid of me. You are not Dick, sir. You are some impudent imposter, trying to cheat me out of a few pounds because you know that I want my son Dick to come back home. That I want him."

"Dick was nineteen when you turned him out of your house, and he has changed your door so much. It is no great wonder if his face was smooth; and I think you will remember, if you reflect, that you had given ample cause to be afraid of you."

"From to me—prove to me—that you are my son; my own son."

"The old man's spare, thin form—almost as tall as his son's—shook with emotion and excitement, and he stretched out his arms in a sort of wild yearning.

"Shake hands, father, and sit down, and I will tell you everything."

He held out both hands frankly.

Mr. Mortiboy took one hand timidly, and kept it in his, patting it coaxingly.—as

"Tell me something," he said—" the smallest thing—to prove that you are really Dick."

The stranger put his hand into his breast pocket, and took out a little roll.

"When your son left your house did you tell any one the reason why you turned him out in disgrace?"

"No one to this day knows the reason but Dick and myself. Whisper it."

"Then—as no one listening?—I will tell you. He was fast extravagant, but he wanted money from time to time—as all young men will. His aunt Susan gave him a little. You gave him none. He forged a cheque. It was only for five pounds. But—he forged it! Have you got that cheque?"

"It has never left my pocket-book."

"Take it out, then. I am going to have it back again. You paid the money, and you told him that you would never forgive him—that you would never see his face again."

"I did—God forgive me I did."

"You did. You wrote him a letter to London, in answer to his. Here is the letter. I will read it. You remember that it was very short."

"Your father sends you the enclosed ten pound note. Go, and retrieve your character."

"I not this the letter?"

The old man took it with trembling hands.

"It is," he cried—"it is. And you are really Dick?"

"Stay. Let me finish. Ten pounds and the five pounds make fifteen. Suppose we say this sum had accumulated at compound interest for twelve years, it would by lucky interest have amounted to twenty-six pounds, eighteen shillings, and perhaps a penny or so over. Here are twenty-six pounds, eighteen shillings and sixpence, which I propose to give you in return for the cheque."

He took the money out of a small bag, into which it had been counted, and poured it on the table.

Mr. Mortiboy counted it over again carefully; but his face was blank. Then he took out from a pocket-book—one of those flat leather books, bursting with papers, which suggest all sorts of things to do with investments—an envelope."

It was labelled, grimly enough, "The last of Dick." It was an old cheque, stamped and initialled by the clerks of the bank. He handed it across and waited in silence.

His visitor read it, put it in the fire, and went on.

"So far we are quite. You have your money back. Let our quarrel be as if it had been made up. By the way, do you remember an old letter to the effect that I was a boy, and burning my arm? See here! He drew up his sleeve, and showed a small, deep scar. "Put that in the fire, too. It can't mean these things."

"For *my Dick*," cried the father. "I know you now. I knew you, really, direct by you spoke in your old voice. I knew by things the boy changed to the man. And you are so big."

"Will you shake hands?"

His father shook hands with him—but not, as yet, quite cordially. In his mind—the memory was fresh—he had set up a other who had come back to him—across a feeling which jarred upon and was discord with the actual joy. It was a feeling of suspicion that perhaps he had only come to inherit his uncle's money, and that he was him. Parental affection was nipped in the very bud by the prospect of fresh expense, and the sight Susanna's and servants.

"Go on Dick—tell me about yourself."

"No. Tell me about yourself, father."

"I am well—I am well. Not much better off it's true; but bodily, well."

"And my sister?"

"Dead, Dick—dead. She died last week, and was buried to-day. And oh, Dick, Dick—what a pity you did not come a week sooner?"

"Why, father?"

"Because, if you had, you would have come in for all her money. As it is—I have not—I have not. Not much, I mean. Not all sorts of vexatious bequests. A hundred here, and a hundred there, and the remainder to window to put up. Dear, dear; what a pity—what a waste!"

"A memorial window?—ho, ho! In the church!—ha, ha! But well have a chance to see it, when I come to church. I know this way to set about getting painted glass cost price."

"Is you?" asked his father, eagerly. "Tell me how."

"Matter of business, my dear sir," answered the son, with an air of importance. "We must see our way in other things first. And the poor old Sadpa dead! Well, Well, I am sorry."

"And what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Do you want me to give you the history of twelve years? It would take more than one evening's talk. As many evenings perhaps, as I shall be with you.

"Why, Dick—why? You are not going away directly you come home, are you?"

"Business may take me. I've got my affairs too look after."

Mr. Mortiboy brightened up; and his father's affection for the prodigal was cooled doubt, glowed and flamed his heart, till he was fain to rise from his chair, and hug his son's hand, which he shook for several moments with every sign of lively emotion. Then he poked the fire, and brought up the gin bottle.

"Dick, on such a night as this, you must drink our own health. Shall it be gin? or they did not drink it all—or shall it be Whisky?"

"Brandy, father, for me."

Mr. Mortiboy noticed with the one candle, a peculiar reverence, bearing in mind the brandy, which he opened with great care and ceremony.

His son had lit a short wooden pipe, and was smoking as quietly as if he had never left his native land.

"I always have one pipe, and a glass of something," and has fallen into a habit of disgust. "Sherry. No, thank you. But haven't you got any whyes? I am there one in the kitchen?"

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