THE DEAD LETTER

BY JOHN G. SAXE.

And can it be? Ah, yes, I see
  'Tis thirty years and better,
Since Mary Morgan sent to me
  This musty, musky letter.
A pretty hand (she couldn't spell),
  As any man must vote it;
And 'twas, as I remember well,
  A pretty hand that wrote it!

How calmly now I view it all,
  As memory backward ranges—
The talks, the walks, that I recall,
  And then,—the postal changes!
How well I loved her I can guess
  (Since cash is Cupid's hostage)—
Just one and sixpence—nothing less
  This letter cost in postage!

The love that wrote at such *a rate*
  (By Jove! it was a steep one!)
Five hundred notes (I calculate),
  Was certainly a deep one;
And yet it died—of slow decline—
  Perhaps suspicion chilled it;
I've quite forgotten if 'twas mine
  Or Mary's flirting killed it.

At last the fatal message came:
  "My letters—please return them;
And yours—of course you wish the same—
  I'll send them back to burn them."
Two precious fools, I must allow,
  Whichever was the greater;
I wonder if I'm wiser now,
  Some seven lustres later?

And *this* alone remained! Ah, well!
  These words of warm affection,
The faded ink, the pungent smell,
  Are food for deep reflection.
They tell of how the heart contrives
  To change with fancy's fashion,
And how a drop of musk survives
  The strongest human passion!

THE MUSICIAN'S MARRIAGE.

(Concluded from our last.)

One day he was working out an idea at his piano, when by a sudden impulse he rose, and going to where Marthe sat working, kissed her, saying, dreamily, "My dear little wife!" then quickly he returned to his place. He had scarcely seemed conscious of his act, the far-way artist look was in his eyes, his voice was veiled—in a word, the inspiration and the thought of his wife had somehow become mixed. Marthe ceased working; a deep flush spread slowly over face and neck; eagerly she listened to the sounds from the piano. Camille sat working for an hour or more, now dotting down the notes and words—for there were words, though Marthe could not well catch their sense—now trying the development of a new idea on the piano. Finally, after a pause, during which he seemed lost in thought, he rose; his aspect was changed, taking the music-paper he crumpled it in his hand and threw it away with the gesture of a man who is indignant with himself. He turned round, his eyes full of reproach; "Oh, Marthe!" he exclaimed, then he quickly left the room, and the young wife heard the front door slam behind him. Marthe picked up the crumpled paper, spent all the afternoon in copying off the smeared characters as best she could; then putting her copy under lock and key, she threw back the original where she had found it. The words ran as follows:—

L'eau dans les grands lacs bleus
  Endormie
Est le miroir des cieux:
Mais j'aime mieux les yeux
  De ma mie.

Pour que l'ombre parfois
  Nous sourie,
Un oiseau chante au bois;
Mais j'aime mieux la voix
  De ma mie.

Le temps vient tout briser;
  On oublie:
Moi, pour le mépriser
Je ne veux qu'un baiser
  De ma mie.

On change tour à tour
  De folie:
Moi, jusqu'au dernier jour,
Je m'en tiens à l'amour
  De ma mie.

Madame du Ruel did not forget her promise to call on Marthe; more than this, she showed herself affable, kind, familiar. Marthe was grateful, and little by little the woman of the world won the confidence of the poor, little, lonely bride.

Since that one moment of expansion, Camille had become more reserved than ever, and Marthe suffered from this coldness far more than she had done in the very beginning of their marriage. She could not tell all that was in her heart, for she did not understand it herself; but her broken confidences were indications more than sufficient for a woman of Madame du Ruel's experience.

"Of course; of course! I understand it all!" exclaimed the good lady, interrupting Marthe's disjointed confession. "Have I not seen it a hundred times? A nice little girl, carefully brought up, modest, with very proper ideas of duty, and all sort of thing, has been told that until her marriage-day she is not to think of love—that it would not be proper for her to do so; but on that marriage-day she is suddenly to change from white to red—a sort of legerdemain trick, which is by no means easy; she, who does not even know the meaning of the word, finds that she is bound to love her husband, and what is stranger than any of M. Robert Houdin's performances, she does begin by loving him usually; she asks nothing better, poor little soul, than to worship this man, whom she did not know two months before; to invest him with all the virtues and qualities which her ideal ought to possess. My dear, the great wonder of my life is that there should be so many good marriages in our world; it only proves that human nature is better than it is reputed to be. Sometimes, however, the experiment fails, and in those cases you will find on examination that it is nearly always through the man's fault."

"But, dear madame, I do not accuse my husband."

"Of course, you do not."

"On Sunday, for instance, when from my corner in the church I listen to his playing, tears come to my eyes; his music tells me that it is my fault if he does not care for me much; I feel that a man who plays like Camille is capable of loving very deeply, and that if I were less insignificant——"

"That's right! put it all on to your own shoulders. In plain words, this is the truth: Camille is the best organist in Paris, and you are peculiarly impressionable to music—when it is not too scientific and learned; that I saw at Madame Vernier's. As to his capacities for loving, I do not really doubt them. I have known him since his boyhood, and I am not the woman to put up with all sorts of negligences, if I did not really esteem the qualities of the neglectful one; only he has theories, and theories are the worst stumbling-blocks in the way of matrimonial happiness. In the first place, he is quite willing to surrender his outer man to gentle care, to have his comforts attended to; but he guards with savage determination his inner man from your influence, because as I have often heard him say, an artist requires interior liberty and solitude; besides, a woman takes up so much precious time. In our Paris life the differences of education of the two sexes are so great—women being taught to see all white and men to see all black, so to speak—that they have but very few points of intellectual contact or of common interest. Society is getting more and more like a funeral service, where the solemn beadle places the men on one side, the women on the other!"

Marthe listened to her new friend almost in silence. She had no theories of her own on education; she had been brought up like all the other girls about her, and it had never struck her that the system was a bad one, or, indeed, that any other was possible. Madame du Ruel, on the contrary, was a woman who had travelled and thought more than her countrywomen usually do. She had become very sincerely interested in Marthe, and meant to make something out of her. She continued her harangue until she had completely won her new friend's confidence, and obtained a promise that she would submit to be guided. "Only, my child, never let your husband guess that it is my advice that you are following; there is no one who has the power of exciting a man's jealousy as much as his wife's female friend and adviser."

Some little time after his conversion M. Saintis was rather astonished when he discovered that his wife wished to go to a certain Madame Dupré's evening entertainment to which they were invited. Madame Dupré was the wife of a deputy—a deputy of the Left. She had pretensions to make her house a rallying-point—to be a sort of humble Madame Roland. She liked men, was a bit of a blue-stocking, and, at the same time, was gay, talkative, and as fond of dancing as of politics. It was a house which M. Saintis usually avoided with great care; the music at Madame Dupré's—for music sometimes came in as an interlude to dancing—was of a kind to make the severe musician grind his teeth.

"Why, if you wish it, Marthe, of course."

"It is a long time since I have had a dance."

"You like to dance?"

The tone in which he said those words meant much. He was rather pleased, on the whole, to discover such a weakness in his wife; it gave him a delightful sense of superiority; so with the greatest good-nature he promised to accompany her on the following Tuesday.

Music is an absorbing occupation as we all know—so absorbing to a man of Camille's disposition, that most occurrences of life passed unobserved by him; but when on the evening of the party Marthe come before him ready dressed, his abstraction gave way suddenly; he looked at his wife, as though he then saw her for the first time.

"Why, my love, how pretty you are!"

Marthe blushed and laughed softly; she knew that he would never again look upon her as a mere provincial schoolgirl whom fate has cast upon the Paris world. Perhaps for an instant a feeling of bitterness came across her as she thought that her dreamy husband had needed the aid of a fashionably-made ball-dress to discover that she was really good-looking as well as young; but hers was a sweet and gentle nature, so the bitterness passed at once. Marthe really did like dancing; and when she found herself in Madame Dupré's well-lighted, gay-looking rooms, her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed, so that more than one grave politician moved round to ask who that pretty, fresh-looking young woman might be. The first to come forward and claim her hand was her old acquaintance, M. Durand the painter. Camille watched his wife for a few minutes whirling around, and then turned away, to wander rather disconsolately from room to room. He was out of his element; the dance-music grated on his ears, and he felt a great contempt for the frivolous crowd in which he found himself. At last he discovered, in a lost corner, a friend, musician like himself; the two cronies fell into a learned and lengthy discussion. Suddenly the dance-music ceased; there was a hush in the heated rooms; around him every one was listening to a young thrilling voice, which rose, at first trembling, then sweet and clear, above the subsiding noises.

"What a fine voice!" exclaimed Camille's companion. "How clear! Wants training, however. Who is it?"

His friend did not answer. At first he had but a confused sense of familiarity with the music, then suddenly he recognized his own melody, thrown aside as unworthy of his artistic theories. After the first few minutes he clearly distinguished the words:—

Le temps vient tout briser;
  On oublie:
Moi, pour le mépriser
Je ne veux qu'un baiser
  De ma mie.

On change tour à tour
  De folie:
Moi, jusqu'au dernier jour,
Je m'en tiens à l'amour
  De ma mie.

The burst of applause, when Marthe had finished her song, was enthusiastic; her triumph was complete. The young painter hovered around her, one of a crowd. She could scarcely answer the numberless compliments which assailed her on every side. She stood blushing—half-frightened, half-proud. Now and again she glanced quickly around, as though in search of some one, and then again the glance fell.

"Why did you not tell me before that your wife had such a splendid voice?" asked the busy mistress of the house, who, however, had no time to wait for an answer.

"Your wife!" exclaimed the musical friend, who, being short and thick, had not been able to force his way into the principal drawing-room where the singing had taken place. "I congratulate you, my dear fellow; but by whom is the music? It is modern, of course; probably by some young man still full of freshness and illusions; he has talent, very great talent indeed, but he is on the wrong track."

"Undoubtedly," answered Saintis.

"My good friend," exclaimed Durand, coming up with the heroine of the evening on his arm, "I appeal to you! Madame Saintis will not tell us who is the author of that adorable song. Between ourselves, I suspect that it is one of her own composition; if so, look out for your laurels; it is better than anything you ever wrote!"

"Camille, I am tired; I want to go home," whispered Marthe, whose bright colour had quite left her cheeks.

The dazed musician mechanically took his wife from her attentive partner, and they left the crowded, heated rooms. As they were passing out, Madame du Ruel took Marthe's hand, and pressed it encouragingly.

When husband and wife were shut up in the rattling hack, Camille at last broke the long silence, and said in a constrained voice,

"Why did you not tell me, Marthe, that you were so good a musician?"

"You gave me to understand that young ladies' music was distasteful to you; you even begged me only to practice in your absence."

"I could not guess that you had so remarkable a voice; I could still less imagine that you had been tolerably well taught."

"My teacher was a good one; then, I think, I have recently learned a good deal from hearing Madame Vernier sing."

"And—and—how did you manage to learn that song?"

"When you threw it aside, I took it up and copied it—I liked it so much, so very much!" Her voice trembled a little as she said this, but Camille did not seem to notice it. There was a struggle going on in his mind, and as yet the victory was doubtful. At last they arrived before the solemn old house by the narrow rapid river. The cabman, delighted at an exorbitant *pour boire* which Camille had absently bestowed upon him, rattled away at a furious rate, and then everything returned to its usual dead quietness.

"Marthe," said Camille—"my wife—forgive me!"

He was deeply moved; he was conquered.

Eighteen months later there was great excitement in the musical world. An opera by Saintis was brought out at the Opéra Comique, and it proved to be a genuine success. The musicians praised it—the public applauded heartily the charm and grace of the melodies.

"And our musician's theories?"

"His theories!" exclaimed Durand, addressing the circle of friends assembled to talk over the affair between the acts of the first representation—"his theories! he has shown himself wise in keeping them in the background this time; they led him to nothing but failure with his first opera. He owes this evening's success, I can tell you, to an influence which is quite independent of thorough-bass."

"Oh, we know!" exclaimed several young men laughing. "You ought to remind the director to have printed on on the play-bills—'Music by M. Saintis and wife?'"

"You have been her champion since the first, Durand."

"And I do not mean to resign the post. Laugh if you will, but to me the week has no pleasanter evening than Wednesday, when all the old friends and cronies of Saintis are made welcome by his wife; to hear her sing her husband's music is a perfect delight. She is charming. But there goes the signal; it would be a pity to miss the chance of watching her face as the curtain goes up. *Au revoir!*" and he went off, humming—

On change tour à tour
  De folie;
Moi, jusqu'au dernier jour,
Je me'en tiens à l'amour
  De ma mie.

MARY HEALY.

DRESS AND FASHION IN PARIS.

Tight-fitting costumes are more than ever in vogue; skirts are tightly strained in front over the hips; bodices are worn tight and long, with the very evident aim of making the figure look slim, in spite of all obstacles to the contrary. The costumes of the middle ages are rifled for closely-fitting dresses, stiff bodices, lined with whalebone, and metal waistbands, while our long trains, our historical sleeves, and our headgear are all imitations of bygone fashions. A very pretty novelty for young ladies is the polonaise corselet. It is made very low at the front and at the back, and is not buttoned, but fastened over the shoulders. Sometimes it is laced at the back rather low on the bust, like a cuirasse. Some cleverly arranged drapings of the skirt are joined to the end of the laced part. This model is worn with scarcely any tournures. Flat figures are likely to become as exaggerated as tournures were. The elegantes fasten their skirts to the edge of their corsets. Fur is being worn everywhere at present—on men's coats and women's dresses, and even on boots and shoes. It is also used for trimming chapeaux, and is not unsuitable to the shapes now made. Round, soft velvet and plush hats find their most natural trimming in fur; but the taste for fur this winter does not stop here; it has brought us back to the round capes so dear to our grandmothers, and other vêtements entirely covered with fur outside. Sable and ermine are now taking rank in ladies' toilettes. Fur has been used as a lining for some time past, but "nous avons changé tout cela"—our elegantes now wear sable pelisses, lined with quilted satin, and tight-fitting jackets and mantles, also made entirely of fur. These vêtements are trimmed with bows of ribbon, passementerie, and metal ornaments. Ermine, that has so long been in the shade as a fashionable fur, is now used for making the most charming jackets for young ladies. They are ornamented with large filagree buttons; but the *ne plus ultra* of elegance is to wear precious stones, surrounded with brilliants, as buttons, on these vêtements. A mantle has lately been made for a princess, ornamented with turquoise buttons set in diamonds. Another elegante fastens her fur cape with two splendid sapphires. There is, in fact, no limit to the luxury and love of all that is brilliant and expensive. There is a perfect rage for the new braid and braid-brocaded materials, interwoven with gold, silver or steel.

HUMOROUS.

JIMMY says he doesn't understand all this fuss about worked slippers. He doesn't like to receive slippers worked by his mother.

"I'LL be down again in a few days and bring you father's full name and address," was the thoughtful remark of a New Hampshire youth the other day, when he dropped in at a marble worker's to select a grave stone for his paternal relative.

"I WOULDN'T be such a christian as you are, John," said his wife, as she stood in the doorway dressed for church. "You could go with me very well if you wanted to."

"How can I?" he half sobbed. "There's the wood to be split, and the coal to be shoveled over to the other side of the cellar, and no dishes washed for dinner yet."

"Ah, I didn't think of that," she murmured, thoughtfully, and giving her new cloak a fresh hitch aft, sailed out alone.

A LARGE number of the young men of Detroit have purchased diaries for 1876, and they will take up their pencils with a firm determination to keep track of every day in the year. Every young man should keep a diary. When he is old and gray his grandchildren will fish it out of the rag-bag and find it more valuable than gold or silver. There is no set style of jotting down thoughts and events, but perhaps it will be well to give the record of 1875 as taken from the diary of an average young man:

"January 1—Went to see my girl. Shall leave off swearing, drinking, euchre, smoking, chewing, being out of nights, going to the opera, and shall try to save $10,000 a year."

"January 7—Went to see my girl. Lost a box of cigars somowhere."

"February 1—Won $25 betting on a dog-fight. That's the way to scoop 'em. Am trying to get along on fifteen cigars per day. Went to see my girl. She says I shouldn't swear."

"April 20—Went to see my girl. Nothing new."

"July 4—This is the glorious Fourth."

"September 1—Went to see my girl."

"November 11—Glorious weather. Went to see my girl."

"December 1—This is the first of December."

"December 25—This is Christmas."

"December 31—This is the last day of the year. Must commence to-morrow to save money and break off my bad habits. Went to see my girl last night, and made her happy by telling her that I was going to save $10,000 next year."

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