

## BRIC-A-BRAC.

In a dusty dark chamber  
We store up in mind,  
What, when we remember,  
But worthless we find.

The joys of a season,  
The loves of a day,  
The tears and the treason  
Long since passed away.

Now mingled together,  
A medley they lie;  
Not one worth a feather,  
Not one worth a sigh.

Did Lillian prove fickle,  
Why Love, too, proved blind;  
And all 'neath Time's sickle  
Prove finite we find.

Of yore though the days were  
In youth's early prime,  
As sweet as the lays were  
When love gave the rhyme;

Yet hope in the morning  
Was a false light to lure  
Us on to the scorning  
Of all that is sure;

And past days of pleasure,  
And nights of much pain,  
Seem now but the measure  
Of time spent in vain.

Then hide them, forget them,  
Ner think them again;  
Though we may not regret them,  
There's death in the strain.

Let an ever-closed chamber  
Conceal in the mind  
What, when we remember,  
But worthless we find.

## TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

## A NEW NOVEL.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## A BITTER BLOW.

Edmund Standen had been nearly three weeks in Demerara, and had transacted the greater part of the business that was required to be done in the settlement of the late Mr. Sargent's affairs, when the English mail brought him Sylvia's letter—the letter of renunciation.

He sat for some minutes after he had finished reading it, stupefied, powerless even to wonder. It seemed like a bad dream. That she, Sylvia Carew, who had laid her head upon his breast in that fond farewell, and vowed eternal fidelity, that she could thus deliberately renounce him, seemed a thing impossible of belief.

He read the letter slowly, thoughtfully, his senses coming back to him by degrees. No, it was not a jest, not a sportive girl's playful trifling with her lover. It had been written in sober earnest. It was a thoughtful, deliberate letter—logical even,—and demonstrating the reasons for the writer's decision.

"She has grown very wise," he said to himself, bitterly, and then read the letter for a third time.

Love had such potent dominion over him that he could not long feel bitterly towards the writer of that miserable letter. The third perusal let in a new light upon the lines. This foolish epistle, which had given him so keen a pang, was but a proof of his darling's unselfishness,—it showed him the noble mind of her he loved. For his own sake, out of concern for his welfare, she renounced him.

She preferred to remain in her obscure position, to endure her joyless life, rather than to accept the chances of his future; simply because she would not have him forfeit fortune for her sake. The letter breathed regretful love; her heart overflowed with tenderness for the man whose affection she renounced.

"Foolish child," murmured Edmund, with a fond smile, "more than foolish to think I would sacrifice her love for anything fortune can bestow. How could she have wavered so soon, after our mutual vows of fidelity, when she knew that there was nothing but hopefulness in my mind. Can my mother have influenced her to write this letter? It looks rather like it. But, no, that's not possible. My mother could not be guilty of a dishonourable action. She promised to be kind to my darling while I was away. She would never take advantage of my absence to persuade Sylvia to renounce me."

Whatever influence might have caused the writing of that letter, Mr. Standen had but one thought after receiving it, and that was an eager desire to get back to England as soon as it was practicable for him to return there. He hurriedly completed the remainder of the business in hand, doing it well, though hastily. He persuaded Mrs. Sargent that for her own health and her children's an immediate departure was advisable, and prevailed upon the stricken widow to make herself and belongings ready to start by the next inter-colonial steamer to St. Thomas. Poor Mrs. Sargent obeyed her brother willingly enough. Had he not come to her as a protecting angel in the hour of her bitter need? She was glad to leave the scenes where all her happiness was associated with the dead. The little black-frocked children were rejoiced to go to England in the big steamer, and talked rapturously of seeing grandmamma, whom the eldest could just remember. Edmund dilated on the delights of the Dean House gardens, and the English fruits and flowers, which were so different from the guava, tamarinds, plantains, and pine apples familiar to these small colonists.

The duty of consoling his sister and amusing her children kept Edmund Standen too constantly engaged for much in-

dulgence in morbid thoughts. The widowed voyager was ill and broken spirited, and her brother had hard work to cheer her were it ever so little. The small nephew and nieces were exacting. Edmund had actually no time for gloomy forebodings, which are generally the growth of leisure. He grew to think of the letter quite lightly. "Dear foolish Sylvia, how could she suppose I would give her up?" he said to himself.

Although duty kept him closely employed it could not altogether stifle impatience, and the voyage seemed longer than it would have appeared to a contented mind. He so longed to see his darling again, to gaze once more into the darkly luminous eyes and read there the tender denial of that foolish letter. When at last the steam wheels turned gaily in English waters, and the pretty Wight, glorious in autumnal verdure, stole up out of the blue, his heart beat loud with joy. Southampton, common place enough to the common traveller, to the lover seemed a fairy city, whose pavements were golden.

Mr. Standen allowed the widow and orphans but one night's rest at the Dolphin, ere he whisked them off to Monkhampton by the South-Western Railway. It was a long day's journey, with some changing of trains, and much delay at the junctions where they changed, and again uncle Edmund was fully employed by the claims of the widow and the small children. He was tired when they arrived at Monkhampton, where his mother's roomy landau and a cart for the luggage were in attendance. Edmund felt somewhat surprised that neither Mrs. Standen nor Esther had come to meet the travellers.

It was late in October, and even in this genial climate, autumn's decaying touch had made havoc. The woods were lovely with that glowing splendour which is the forerunner of death. The bare fields and busy plough spoke of seed time and winter. The carriage wheels went silently over fallen leaves that lay deep in the unfrequented roads. How welcome was that simple beauty of English landscape to Edmund after the more lavish nature of South America.

He uttered that favourite exclamation of Englishmen.

"After all, there is no place like dear old England." And England held Sylvia, that one loadstar of his soul.

Mrs. Sargent sighed plaintively.

"How happy I should be to return if I were coming back with George," she murmured.

The children were gay enough, craning their young necks in all directions, struggling out of their nurse's arms, pointing to every dwelling they beheld, near or distant, and asking if that was grandmamma's house. Finding by degrees that a great many houses did not belong to grandmamma, they began to have a diminished idea of that lady's possessions.

But they came to Dean House at last: the staid, sober, old mansion, fronting the high road so boldly, and not pretending to be anything better than it was. There was the familiar iron gate, there the green tubs of scarlet geranium, still flourishing with luxuriant bloom. Edmund gave a little impatient sigh as he thought how much greeting he would have to go through, and how many maternal questions, fond and anxious, he would have to answer, before he could hurry off to Hedingham and clasp Sylvia to his breast. It would be night ere he crossed the old churchyard and opened the little gate into the school house garden, and saw the lighted windows of Sylvia's parlour. He could fancy the glad look of surprise when she opened the door in answer to his summons and saw him standing before her in the moonlight. Come back from the other side of the world, as it were; come back to claim her in spite of her letter.

The neat parlour-maid opened the glass door. The gardener and his underling came out to assist with the luggage; and while Edmund was lifting the children out of the carriage his mother appeared on the threshold with Esther Rochdale at her side.

The first glance told Edmund that their faces were not cheerful. It was in honour of George Sargent, of course, that they put on those sombre looks.

"It's a pity they should look so doleful," thought Edmund. "I've had sadness enough from Ellen all the way from Demerara, and now they remind her of misfortunes instead of trying to make her forget them."

He kissed his mother, who received him with deepest tenderness. "My own brave son," she said. "Thank God for having brought you back to me."

"How is Sylvia," he asked eagerly. They were a little way apart from the widow, nurse, and children. The little ones were being kissed and welcomed by Esther Rochdale. She was delighted with these new claimants for her affection. The happy, loving nature overflowed in fond caresses, and pretty girlish talk.

"It does seem sweet to come to you," said poor Ellen, and then melted to tears at the thought that she came without that other half of her own being, the fondly loved husband.

Edmund repeated his impatient question. His mother was so slow to answer, but hung upon him with half-despairing fondness, as if he were going to be led off to execution in a minute or two.

"I don't know," faltered Mrs. Standen. "She is very well, I believe. I have not seen her lately. Come to your room, Edmund: you must be so tired. Change your dusty clothes, and come down to dinner. It has been ready for the last half-hour."

"You haven't seen her lately," repeated Edmund, ignoring Mrs. Standen's maternal solicitude. "You promised you would be kind to her, mother."

"Edmund," said Mrs. Standen, with that steady, resolute look which her son knew so well, "I will not say a word about Sylvia Carew till you have dined and rested a little."

"Then I shall go to Hedingham this moment," cried Edmund, snatching his hat from the slab where he had just now put it down.

"What, run away from your mother in the first hour of your return to her? I am sorry you have no better idea of a son's duty."

Edmund put his hat down again.

"You are too hard upon me, mother," he said, melted but yet reproachful. "You don't consider how my heart yearns for her. I have had but one letter from her during my absence, and that a letter calculated to make me uncomfortable. I am dying to see her. But if you wish it I'll dine first. Only you might gratify me by speaking of her. Tell me that she is well and happy. That will last till I have dined, and can get to the dear old school-house."

"I have every reason to believe that she is well and—prosperous."

"Meaning happy. That will do, mother. I see Sylvia will

be always a sore subject with you, and a bone of contention between us. But I must make the best of it. My affection for you shall not be diminished by your prejudice, nor my love for Sylvia lessened because you refuse to love her."

He went upstairs to his room, the fresh bright English room, with its English comforts. There was a fire burning in his dressing-room to welcome the voyager from a warmer climate. But this material luxury could not restore Edmund Standen's good temper. He flung himself into the arm-chair before the fire, and sat there in gloomy meditation instead of hastening to make his toilet for dinner.

"Domestic dissension!" he muttered, "how hard it is. Will my mother never reconcile herself to my choice? Will this sort of thing continue for the rest of our lives? It tempts me to think that my mother's influence was at the bottom of that wretched letter."

He went down stairs a quarter of an hour later, refreshed as to his external appearance, but by no means comfortable in his mind. The three ladies were already assembled in the dining-room, and Mrs. Sargent was looking almost bright, now that she was once more under the mother's wing. But Mrs. Standen and Esther both had a cloudy look. Except for their first greeting, Edmund and Esther had hardly spoken to each other once since his return. Miss Rochdale looked very small and slight, and insignificant in her black dress, and seemed anxious to avoid Edmund's notice.

The dinner progressed in the usual stately manner—that respectable stateliness and slowness which makes even a moderate dinner such a lengthy business. It would have been pleasant enough if there had been plenty of talk to fill the pauses in the service, but this was rather a silent party. Ellen and her mother talked a little, in confidential tones, chiefly about the lamented deceased, and the details of his fatal illness. Edmund, whom inclination would have kept silent, felt that for civility's sake he must talk to Esther.

"Anything stirring at Hedingham while I was away?" he asked. "Have you any news to tell me, Esther? You ought to have quite a budget after three months."

Miss Rochdale blushed, and looked down at her plate.

"I don't think there's much to tell," she said, "Hedingham is always quiet, you know, Edmund."

"Yes, it's a dreadfully dead and alive place, no doubt, still in three months there must have been some remarkable events—cricket matches, football—"

"I really don't know anything about cricket or football."

"Dinner parties, births, deaths, marriages?"

At this last word Esther's blush deepened to such crimson that Edmund could but remark it.

"Come, there has been a wedding," he exclaimed, "and one that you are rather interested in, I should think, by the way you blush. What does it mean, Esther? Have you been getting married yourself, and kept the news to surprise me on my return?"

"No, Edmund. I am never going to marry. I've been making a solemn vow to that effect to the little ones upstairs. I'm going to be Aunt Esther all my life, and a nice old maiden aunt by-and-bye."

"Nice you must always be; but we shan't allow you to be always a spinster. My mother must have some of the propensities of her sex, superior-minded as she is. Now, you know, all women are matchmakers. When they're done with matrimonial schemes on their own account they begin to plot for some one else. I've no doubt my mother has her views about you."

Esther was silent, and looked even a little embarrassed by this mild badinage.

"Then there is positively no news in Hedingham?" said Edmund.

"None that you would care to hear."

Dinner was over at last, and the produce of the Dean House graperies duly praised—the large bunches sent upstairs to the children by the fond grandmother. Edmund left the room with his mother, put his arm through hers, and led her towards the study, a snug little room where there were always candles ready to be lighted when anyone wanted to write a letter or find a book.

"Come in here, mother," said the young man, "I want to have a long talk. I suppose it's too late for me to go to the schoolhouse to-night, though I had set my heart upon seeing Sylvia before I went to bed. Our dinner is always such a long business."

He struck a match, lighted the tall candles in the massive old silver candlesticks, wheeled a comfortable chair forward for his mother, and then seated himself opposite her.

"Now mother," he said, "I've dined and rested, in obedience to your behest, and now tell me all about Sylvia."

"Edmund," faltered Mrs. Standen, looking at him with unspeakable tenderness, "I have something to tell you which will, I fear, make you very unhappy, yet it ought not to do so, if you can only be wise, and see the matter as I see it. You have had a most happy escape."

"What do you mean?" cried Edmund, with quickened breathing. "I don't understand a word you say."

"Sylvia Carew is married."

"Married?" he cried, looking at her in sheer amazement, and then he broke out into a laugh, singularly harsh of sound as compared with that genial laughter which was natural to him. "Come, mother, this is a joke, of course. Or you're trying me—you want to find out how I should take the loss of her, were it possible for me to lose her. But it isn't possible, except by death." Then, with an awful look he cried out, "She's not dead, is she? You said just now that she was well, but you may have been paltering with me in a double sense. The dead are well. For God's sake, speak," he cried violently, "is Sylvia dead?"

"No, she is well enough, as I told you when you asked about her; and she is what the world calls wonderfully fortunate. She is married to Sir Aubrey Perriam."

"Mother, do you want to drive me mad? Whose invention, whose lie, is this? Married to Sir Aubrey? Why she had never seen the man's face. I heard her say so the day before the school feast."

"True, but he saw her at the school feast, saw her and fell in love with her. They were married about five weeks after you left. A very quiet marriage. No one, except the Vicar and the people concerned, knew anything about it till it was over. It was a nine days' wonder. They came back to the place a fortnight ago. I have seen Lady Perriam driving about in her carriage."

"Lady Perriam," cried Edmund, with a still harsher laugh, "How well it sounds, doesn't it? I suppose it was for that she married a man who must be nearly old enough to be her