THE RIVER TIME.

BY GEO. MERREDITH.

Oh, wonderful river is the River Time,
And it flows through the realm of Tears
With a current so resistless it knows not ebb,
And a strong flow sometimes and a surge sublime,
As it blends with the ocean of years.

How the winters are foul by the River of Winter,
And the summers like bubbles on it
And the seers and the shapers hoar they come and go
On the River's breast with the ever-flowing
As they glide to the shadow and shoot.

There's a magic in up the River Time,
Where the spectral sail sets gleaming.
There's a charm in the sky and a witchery in time,
And a voice as sweet as a vesper chime,
And the dreams and the voices are strange.

And the name of that isle is the "Long Ago,"
And we have our treasures there,
There are flowers of beauty and heaves of snow
(Fury and rage of days, but we have the sun),
There are lookers and tramp of feet.

There are treasures of music that nobody sings,
And a part of an infant's prayer,
There's a bare unwept and a bier without strings,
There are broken vows and pieces of rings,
And the garments that she used to wear.

There are hands which are paved when that fairy shore
By the mirage is lifted in air,
And sometimes we hear, through the turbulent wave,
Sweet voices we've heard in the days gone before,
When the wind down the river is fair.

Oh, remembered for age be that blessed isle,
All the one of life till night,
And when evening comes with its beautiful smile,
And our eyes are closed to another while,
May that presswood of such be light.

—*The Mirror, London.*

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A SIMPLETON;

A Story of the Day.

BY CHARLES READE.

CHAPTER XXVI.—CONTINUED.

Rosa had down her work, and said, quietly, "Uncle, almost the last words that passed between me and my Christopher, he promised each other solemnly never to marry again till death should us part. You know how deep my sorrow has been that I can find no few wishes of my lost Christopher to obey. Well, to-day I have had an opportunity at last. I have obeyed my own lost one; it has cost me a tear or two; but, for all that, it has given me one little gleam of happiness. Ah, foolish woman, that obeys too late!"

And, with this, the tears began to run.

All this seemed a little too high-down to Mr. Lesignan. "There," said he, "see on what a straw her mind turns. So, but for that, you would have done the right thing, and married the earl?"

"I dare say I should—at the time—to stop his crying."

And, with this listless remark, she quietly took up her sewing again.

The sagacious Philip looked at her sadly. He thought to himself how pitiful it was to see so young and lovely a creature, that had given up all hope of happiness for herself. These being his real thoughts, he expressed himself as follows:—"We had better drop this subject, sir. The young lady will do as she pleases, and, reverend signors out of our depth, if we don't mind."

But the moment he got her alone he kissed her paternally, and said, "Rosa, it is not just on me, your fidelity to the dear, dear, years roll on, and your deep wound first closes, then skins, then heals—

"Ah, let me die first—

"Time and nature will absolve you from that vow; but bless you for thinking this can never be. Rosa, your folly of this day has made you my heir: so never let money trouble you, for you have enough, and will have more than enough, when I go."

He was as good as his word; indeed his will next day, and made Rosa his residuary legatee.

When he had done this, foreseeing no fresh occasion for his services, he prepared for a long visit to Italy. He was packing up his things to go there, when he received a line from Lady Cicely Treherne, asking him to call on her professionally. In the lady's servant brought it, he sent back a line to say he no longer practiced—medicine, he would call on her as a friend in an hour's time.

His found her reclining, the picture of lassitude. "How good of you to come," she drawled.

"What's the matter?" said he bruntquitly.

"I wish to consult you about myself. I think I ought to be brighter than I am to you. I feel such a languor—such a want of spirit; and I get palsa, and that is not desirable."

He examined her tongue and the white of her eye, and told her, in his blunt way, she was and drank too much.

"Excuse me, sir," said she, stiffly.

"I mean too often. Now, sir, let's see. Cup of tea in bed of a morning?"

"Yes."

"Dinner at two?"

"We call it luncheon."

"Are you a ventriloquist?"

"No."

"Then it is only your lips call it luncheon. Your poor stomach, poor little stomach, call it dinner. Afternoon tea?"

"Yes."

"At 7.30 another dinner. Tea after that. Your poor unhappy stomach gets no rest. Do you eat pastry?"

"I confess it."

"And sugar in a dozen forms?"

She nodded.

"Well, sugar is a poison to your temperament. Now tell me, you, sir, if you can obey. Give up your morning drams."

"What drams?"

"Tea in bed, before eating. Can't you see that is a dram? Animal food twice a day. No wine but a little claret. No sweets, no pastry, no sweets, and play battledore with one of your male subjects."

"Battledore! won't a lady do for that?"

"No: you will get talking, and not play enough."

"Ad sudavem! what is that?"

"In earnest."

"And will sudavem and the west put me better spirits, and give me a tinge?"

"It will incarnadine the lily, and make you the happiest young lady in England, if you are the best.

"Oh dear! I should like to be much happier than I am good, if we could manage it among us.

"We will manage it among us; for, if the diet allowed should not make you bouncer-only pay, I have a remedy behind, invented by your temperament. I am old-fashioned, and believe in the temperaments."

"And what is that remedy?"

"Try diet, and hard exercise, first."

"Oh, yes; but he mean know that remedy."

"I warn you it is what we call in medicine an heroic one."

"Never mind. I am desperate."

"Well, then, the heroic remedy—to be used only as a desperate resort, mind—you marry an Irishman."

This took the lady's breath away.

"Marry a nice man."

"A nice man; no. That means a fool. Marry scientifically—a thing eternally neglected. Marry a Hibernian gentleman, being as mercurial as you are lymphatic."

"Mercurial!—lymphatic!—

"Oh, hard words break no bones, ma'am.

"No sir. And it is very serious. I don't well pity you. Yes, I will. Hem!—I think I have noticed one."

"One what?"

"One Irishman—dangling after me.

"Then your ladyship has only to tighten the cord—and *he's* done for."

Having administered this prescription, our laughing philosopher went off to Italy, and then fell in with some countrymen to his mind, so he accompanied them to Egypt and Palestine.

His absence, and Lord Tadcaster's, made Rose Staines's life extremely tranquil. Lady Day followed day, and week followed week, each so surprisingly like the last, a retrospect, three months seemed like one day.

And I think, at last, youth and nature begin to rebel, and scarcely to crave some little change or incident to ruffle the stagnant pool. Yet she would not go into society, and would only receive two or three old people at the villa: so she made the very monotony which was beginning to bite her, and nursed a sacred grief she had no need to nurse, it was so truly genuine.

She was in this forlorn condition, when, one morning, a carriage drove to the door, and a card was brought up to her—"Mr. Reginald Falcon."

Falcon's history, between this and our last address, is soon disposed of.

When, after a little struggle with his better angel, he rode past his wife's gate, he intended, at first, only to go to Cape Town, sell the diamonds, have a lark, and bring home the balance, but, as he rode south, his views expanded. He could have ten times the fun in London, and cheaper; since he could sell the diamonds for more money, and also conceal the true price. This was the Bohemian's whole mind in the beginning. He had no designs whatever on Mrs. Staines, nor did he intend to steal the diamonds, but to embezzle a portion of the purchase money, and enjoy the pleasures and vices of the capital for a few months; then back to the milch cow, Phoebe, and lead a quiet life till the next uncontrollable fit should come upon him along with the means of satisfying it.

On the way, he read Staines' letter to Mrs. Falcon, very carefully. He never broke the seal of the letter to Mrs. Staines. That was to be given her when he had broken the good news to her, and this he determined to do with such skill, as should make Dr. Staines very unwilling to look suspicously or ill-humored into Phoebe's accounts.

He reached London; and, being a thorough egotist, attended first to his own interest; he never went near Mrs. Staines until he had visited every diamond merchant and dealer in the metropolis: he showed the small stones to them all, but he showed no more than one large stone to each.

At last he got an offer of £1,200 for the small stones, and the same for the large yellow stone, and £900 for the second largest stone. He took that, £2000, and immediately wrote to Phoebe, telling her he had a sudden inspiration to bring the diamonds to England, which he could not regret, since he had never done a wiser thing. He had sold a single stone for £900, and had given the doctor's £400 to her account in Cape Town; and, as each sale was effected, the half would be remitted. She would see by that he was wiser than in former days. He should only stay so long as might be necessary to sell them all equally well. His own share he would apply to paying off mortgages on the family estate, of which he hoped some day to see her the mistress, or he would send it direct to her, whichever she might prefer.

Now the main object of this artful letter was to keep Phoebe quiet and hoodwink her coming after him, of which he felt she was very capable.

The money got safe to Cape Town, but the letter to Phoebe miscarried. How this happened was never positively known; but the servant of the lodging-house was afterwards detected cutting stamps off a letter; so people said he had played that game on his master.

By this means, matters took a serious turn. Falcon, instead of, to fall his wife into a false security, lulled himself into that state of security.

When he had taken care of himself, and got £200 to play the fool with, then he commenced operations. This consisted of myself and he came down to Gravesend, to see Mrs. Staines.

On the road, he gave his mind seriously to the delicate and dangerous task. It did not, however, disturb him at all. It would yet, or you, madam. He had a great advantage over you. He was a—a smooth, *smooth*, accomplished liar—and he knew it.

This was the outline he had traced in his mind. He should appear very subdued and sad; should wear an air of confidence. But, after a while, should say, "And yet men have been lost like that, and escaped. A man was picked up on a raft in those very latitudes, and brought into Cape Town. A friend of mine saw him, months after, at the hospital. His memory was shaken—could not tell his name; but in other respects he was all right again."

If Mrs. Staines took fire at this, he would say his friend knew all the particulars, and he would ask him, and so leave that to tackle till next day. And, having planted his germ of hope, he would grow it, and water it, by private and confidential, till he could throw off the mask, and say he was convinced Staines was alive; and from that, by other degrees, he could say, on his wife's authority, that the man picked up at sea, entered her at her house, was the very physician who had saved a thousand lives, and so on to the overwhelming proof he carried in the ruby ring and the letter.

I am afraid the cunning and dexterity, the subtlety and tact, required, interested him more in the conspiracy than did the benevolence.

He called, sent up his card, and conquer his countenance for his part, like an actor at the wing.

"Not at home."

He stared with amazement.

The history of a "Not at home" is not, in general, worth recording; but this is an exception.

On receiving Falcon's card, Mrs. Staines gave a little start, and coloured faintly. She instantly resolved not to see him. Would! Was she not married? Was not her husband alive, it is all one to my, and he would be back in a fortnight or at the first week, and never thought of her, except to chuckle over the penalty she was paying for being so affectionate to him.

However, Sunday came; he saw a dull day before him, and, for a wonder, she thought he would give her another trial.

He went down to Gravesend by boat, and strolled from the river side.

When he was about a hundred yards from the villa, a boy, all in black, came out with a message and a shilling.

Falcon knew her figure all that way off, and he was in a fine condition, when he arrived. He followed her, and was not very far behind her when she reached the villa. She, hearing the bell ring, hoped the child earnestly, and gave the nurse some directions, and then entered the drawing-room.

"Come," said Falcon, "I'll have a look at her, any way."

He went into the church, and walked up a side aisle to "a pillar, from which he thought he might be able to see the whole congregation; and, sure enough, there she sat, a few yards from him. She was lovelier than ever, and looked, for her face from trouble. An angelic expression illuminated her beauty; he gazed on her, enchanted. He chose a pillar, and her beauty two mortal hours, and, when the church broke up, he was afraid she would see him, afraid to follow her, for he felt how hard it would be to say anything to her, but that he should be immediately recognized by her.

However, having watched her home, he walked slowly to and fro composing himself for the interview.

He had determined to make the process of informing her a very long one; he would spin it out, and, if possible, make it a interview with her; and, who knows, he might fascinate her as she had him, and ripen gradually into love, as he had conceived it.

He called, he sent in his card. The man went in, and came back with a scornful "Not at home."

"Not at home? nonsense. Why she is just come in from Church."

"Not at home," said the man, evidently stung by the imputation.

Falcon turned white with rage at this second insult. "Tell her I wait for her," said he, and turned on his heel.

He went home, raging with disappointment and scoundrelly malice, and determined to be his accident very far from home—he were she should see the effect from that that her husband was alive. He even moralized. "This comes of being so unselfish," said he. "I'll give that game up for ever."

By-and-by, a mere negative revenge was not enough for him, and he set his wits to work to make the world pay for it.

He wrote to her from his lodgings:—

DEAR MADAM,

"What a pity you are never at home to me. I had something to say about your husband, that I thought might interest you.

"Yours truly,

"REGINALD FALCON."

Imagine the effect of this abominable note. It was like a rock flung into a placid pool. Her husband, forgotten for a time, "Not at home?

"Oh, very well," said Falcon, with a bitter sneer, and returned to London.

He felt sure she was at home; and, being a tremendous egotist, he said, "Oh! at home, and I have a piece of intelligence her husband is alive, it is all one to my," and he actually took the trouble to write her a fifth week, and never thought of her, except to chuckle over the penalty she was paying for being so affectionate to him.

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