

TO THE SILENT BIRD.

Oh! why hast thou so long been silent, bird!
For though thy song was passing sweet to hear,
And though its notes were grateful to my ear,
'Tis long since I that welcome song have heard.

And oh! 'twas sad; methought it seemed to tell
(Perchance unto a sympathising breast)
A tale of captured mate or riven nest,
Or some misfortune, which to thee befell.

Thereby I loved it; for a heart like mine,
That often hath a weight of misery borne,
Loves no glad piping, while itself doth mourn,
But leaps to welcome such a lay as thine.

I pray thee, bird, resume thy wonted strain:
With myriad melodies comes gentle Spring,
But none like thine, to me delight can bring,
I wait to hear thy pensive song again.

Montreal, March 28th, 1877.

M. J. WELLS.

OVER A GLASS.

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF ALEXANDER HERZON.

We are surrounded in the world by people who are but shadows to us, vague *silhouettes* appearing in our lives for a little, and then vanishing. Their very faces, even their brilliant qualities, are soon forgotten in the changing scene in which we move; for the world is ever changing, though it is always progressing, and like eternity, has no known limit to its progress.

Yet these shadowy forms which cross our path are there in virtue of certain laws. We cannot define these laws, because we never get more than mere glimpses of those with whom we come thus casually into contact. They never assume a definite shape. Memory loses its hold of them as life runs on.

Yet if one sets himself to watch some little incident, to examine one grain of dust out of the whirlwind of life, one drop from the bucket ere it disappears, the same laws and the same forces will be detected in operation as those which produce revolutions of nature in the physical world, and catastrophes in the history of humanity. . . . A tempest in a teacup, which is a phrase often laughed at, resembles more than might be expected a tempest in the ocean.

I.

Last summer I was looking for a country house to rent. Tired with putting the same eternal questions and getting the same eternal answers, I stepped into a tavern, in front of which there was a pillar, surmounted by a portrait of George IV., wearing a mantle much similar to that which decorates the figure of the King of Clubs, his hair daintily brushed and powdered, and his cheeks of crimson hue. George IV., raised on high like a street lamp, and painted on a large iron plate, announced to passers-by the vicinity of the tavern, not only by his striking portrait, which caught the eye, but also by an intolerable grinding of the hinges on which he hung, which caught the ear.

You could see through the garden gate a little green plot where they were playing at skittles. I went in. Everything was in the usual order—I mean the order usual in such tavern-gardens in the neighbourhood of London—tables and benches covered with trelis work—shells arranged so as to look like old ruins—flowers planted so as to form letters or figures. The tables were full of shopkeepers solemnly occupied in drinking beer in company with their wives and clerks, and workmen with pipes in their mouths which they never thought of removing, were hurling about balls as large as cannon-balls in the alley.

I asked for a "grog," and sat down on a bench under the trellis.

A fat waiter, in a black coat much too tight for him, and very far gone with decay, wearing also a pair of black trousers with a greasy gloss on them, turned round suddenly as if he had just burned his fingers, and called to a boy opposite, "John, whisky cold for No. 8." An awkward potboy, horribly disfigured with small-pox, brought me my "grog."

Notwithstanding the rapid movement of the fat waiter, I thought I recognized him. I watched him for a little. He was leaning against one of the trees, carefully keeping his back towards me. I began to feel sure I had seen him before, but for the life of me I could not remember where. At length I determined to satisfy my curiosity and taking advantage of a moment when "John" had gone for a pot of beer, I called the waiter.

"Yes, sir," he replied, from behind the tree, which kept him out of my sight, in the tone used by a man who has to do something disagreeable, but which is inevitable. With the attitude of a general about to deliver up a fortress, he approached me—brandishing a dirty napkin to keep himself in countenance. His assumed dignity confirmed me in my opinion, that I was not wrong in thinking he was an old acquaintance.

II.

Three years previously I had been staying for a few days in one of the most aristocratic hotels in the Isle of Wight. Hotels in England are not particularly distinguished either for good wine or for *recherche* cookery. Their chief attraction is their magnificent outside appearance, and the excellent attendance one gets. The servants perform their duties there with all the gravity of councillors of State of the olden time, or Dutch chamberlains.

The chief waiter in the Royal Hotel was scarcely approachable; supercilious to passing guests, and by no means accommodating to those who came for only a few days; he never condescended to be civil to any but those who were

habituals of the hotel. No one could accuse him of spoiling by obsequiousness those inexperienced travellers who chose to inquire how it happened that a cutlet and potatoes, followed by a morsel of cheese and a lettuce, should cost five shillings.

When such questions were asked he put on an air of supreme contempt. Every gesture was elaborated. From the depth of his bow, from the expression of his face, from the way in which he said, "Yes, sir," in reply to your call, any stranger in the room might have guessed without difficulty the estimation in which he held you. He had an instinctive art of finding out all about you. One or two glances told him your probable age, your position in society, and enabled him to form a very shrewd estimate of what your hotel bill would amount to.

One day I was sitting in a room in the hotel of which the window was open. I asked if I might smoke in the room. He drew himself up. His hand was on the door. Fixing his eyes on the ceiling, he replied in a voice full of ill-suppressed indignation—"I do not understand what you want, sir!"

"Can I smoke in this room?" I repeated in a higher tone of voice—the kind of tone that succeeds in England with their "excellencies" who wait at hotel tables, and in Russia with their "excellencies" who wait at the tables of the bureaux of State. But this waiter was not an ordinary "excellency." He drew himself up without losing countenance, and replied, with all the dignity of Kariatyguine—playing Coriolanus: "I am unable to say, sir—the question has not arisen during my engagement here. No traveller ever before asked me the question. I shall inform the 'governor,' and bring you his reply."

Of course it is needless to say that the "governor" sent me, in punishment of my insolence, to a *Smoking Room*, the atmosphere of which was too suffocating for me to enter.

With all his hauteur, and in spite of his consciousness of his own dignity and of the dignity of the Royal Hotel—things which he never forgot for a moment—the waiter at last became exceedingly friendly to me. It is only right to say that this was not due to any merit of mine, but to the fact that he had discovered that I was a Russian. I wonder whether he had any statistical information about the Russian exports of hemp, or tallow, or wheat, or woods from the Crown lands? I can't guess. But he certainly did know that Russia exports to foreign countries an enormous quantity of Princes and Counts, and that all of them have plenty of money. (He knew nothing about the emancipation of the serfs.)

An aristocrat at heart, both by his imagined social position and by instinct, he had learned with pleasure that I was a Russian. To raise himself in my estimation, and make himself agreeable to me, he one day entered into the following conversation with me, playing gracefully all the time with a branch of the ivy that overhung the garden gate.

"Only five days ago, sir, I had the honour to wait on your Grand Duke, when he came to Osborne with her Majesty the Queen."

"Ah," said I.

"His Highness took lunch—the Archduke is a very nice young gentleman," added the waiter, closing his eyes with an approving air. So saying he lifted the silver cover from a dish of cauliflower.

When I left the hotel, he pointed out my portmanteau to the hall porter with his little finger, and as a parting mark of regard for me, he actually with his own hands lifted my common-place book from the table and handed it to me in the carriage. In taking leave of him I gave him half-a-crown in addition to what I had already paid for attendance; but he took no notice whatever of the gift, though it disappeared as if by magic into the pocket of his white waistcoat, which was starched with a perfection that no gentleman's laundress can ever equal.

"Surely we are old acquaintances," said I to the waiter, as I sat down on a bench, in the suburbs of London, while he handed me a light.

It was the same man.

"I am here now," said the waiter, who was now very far from resembling either Kariatyguine or Coriolanus.

He had evidently been crushed to the very ground with sorrow. His whole demeanour, his very features, were expressive of suffering. The man had been half killed by misfortune. It pained me to see him. His coarse red face, which reminded you of a Ukraine water-melon, hung in flabby wrinkles, each of which looked like a separate muscle. His black whiskers, shaved up to the middle of his cheeks, and dexterously sloped off towards the corners of his lips, were the only monument of the past that remained intact.

He did not, at first, respond to my claim of acquaintanceship.

"I could hardly have believed," I said, as awkwardly as possible.

He looked towards me as a culprit does when taken in the act. Then he looked all round the garden—at the shrubs, at the beer, at the skittle-alley—at the shop-boys and workmen who were playing. No doubt there arose then in his mind's eye the vision of a table gorgeously appointed, at which sat a Grand Duke and a Queen, behind whose chairs he was respectfully

A Russian tragic actor.

bowing; yet before his bodily eyes there was nothing but a garden arranged with all the rigid regularity of a cheap pictorial keepsake, and as trim as a lady's boudoir. His mental vision recalled a *salle à manger* filled with vases and all sorts of splendid ornaments, and hung with rich heavy silk hangings. No doubt he thought of the irreproachable black coat of the olden time, and the white gloves with which he used to hold out the silver salver for payment of the bill—a trying sight for the inexperienced traveller.

But the *reality* present to his sight—how different it was! Noisy brawling players at skittles; a green strewn with the remains of dirty old tobacco-pipes; vulgar gin and water, and beer, and the eternal *pale ale*!

"They were other times with me then," he said, at last, "not like the present."

"Waiter!" shouted a half-drunk shop-boy, rattling on the bench with a pewter pot, "a pint of half-and-half. Look sharp!"

My old acquaintance looked piteously at me, and went to fetch the beer—he looked so humiliated, so ashamed of himself and of his position, and he showed such symptoms of that melancholy which ends in suicide, that my very blood ran cold. The customer paid him in coppers, and I turned away to avoid seeing my friend receiving the customary penny "*pour-boire*."

The ice was broken, and he seemed anxious to tell me of the misfortunes which had driven him from the "Royal Hotel" into the George IV. Tavern. He came back to me of his own accord and said, "I am happy to see you again. I hope you are quite well, sir."

"Quite well, thank you. I am never ill."

"How did you think, sir, of coming to an out-of-the-way place like this?"

"I am looking for a house to live in."

"There are plenty to let hereabouts; there is one a few yards to the right, and another just beyond. I have been very unfortunate. I have lost every farthing that I had gained from my youth upwards. You have heard, no doubt, of the failure at Tipperary. I have lost everything through it. When I read the news of it in the papers, I would not believe it at first. Afterwards I rushed off to a solicitor."

"You need not put yourself to any trouble," he said; "you cannot save anything; you will lose your all; in the meantime hand me six and eightpence for this consultation."

"I walked out into the street. I walked all day, trying to make up my mind what to do. I thought of throwing myself from a cliff into the sea and of drowning my children with me, but when I looked at them I shrank from it. I had not the heart to kill them. I fell ill—the greatest misfortune that can befall a waiter in a hotel."

"At the end of the week I was able to resume my work. It does not need to be said that my spirits were gone; my misfortunes filled my mind."

"The landlord told me twice that I must look more cheerful—that the gentlemen who came to the house were not all returning from a funeral, and that travellers did not like to be waited on by melancholy-looking attendants like me."

"One day, soon afterwards, I dropped a plate at dinner. I had never done such a thing in my life before. The people laughed. That same night the landlord told me to look out for another situation, as he could not put up with such conduct."

"The reason is that I have been ill, sir," I replied. "I have been—"

"Get better," was the reply. "We don't want unwell people here."

"One remarked to another, and the discussion ended in a quarrel. To revenge himself for some things I said, the landlord maligned me in all the other hotels—calling me a drunkard and charging me with insolence. I found it useless to apply for employment. Nobody would have me. At last, changing my name—like a thief—I determined to seek any sort of situation for a time, but the result was the same. I could find none—none—none!"

"During this time everything I had, even my wife's earrings and her brooch—jewels given her by a duchess—whose upper lady's-maid had been for four years—everything had to go for it. I had even to pawn my clothes, and you know that clothes are articles of the first necessity for a waiter, for without good clothes he cannot be admitted into any respectable establishment. I have often served in temporary bars, and I have managed to exist in that wandering sort of life."

"I don't know how this tavern-keeper consented to take me in (in saying this he looked down at his faded old black suit of clothes), but I am glad to be able to earn a little bread for my children; as for my wife—"

He was silent for a moment. Then resuming he said—"My wife has now to wash linen for others—if you require a laundress, sir, this is her address—she can wash very well—yet in former times—she never had to—but what is the good of thinking of old times?—beggars have no power to choose their work—only it is very hard—for a lady!"

I saw a tear tremble and glisten in his eye. It fell on his bosom, now no longer covered with a waistcoat of clear starched pique.

"Waiter," shouted a voice in the distance.

"Yes, sir."

He left, and I did the same.

III.

It was long since I had seen such a case of real affliction. The man was evidently bent down under a weight of misfortune which had broken his life. He did not certainly feel his position any less keenly than any of those decayed nobles who, shipwrecked in this country or in that, take refuge within the shores of England.

Any less keenly?—No, that is not the word for it. He suffered ten times more—nay a hundred times more—than Louis-Philippe, for example, who lived not far from the "George IV. Tavern," at Claremont.

The great examples of misfortune—those which arrest the attention of the world—are nearly all to be found in the history of extraordinary men. These men have grander natures than those of common humanity, and they have generally more means of relief from misfortune at their command. The strokes of the axe plied against the stem of an old oak resound through all the forest; but they scarcely stir the top of the giant tree; yet the grass falls to the ground noiseless under the scythe, and we tread it under foot as we heedlessly pass over it.

I have witnessed so much misery that I have had a sad experience to look back upon. I have seen many of the miserable great, but I felt my heart melt at the sight of this waiter of the "Royal Hotel" fallen into such wretchedness.

Do you know what the word "*beggar*" means in England? It means this—excommunication, such as it was in the middle ages—civil death; contempt from the mob; forced humility; want of legal rights; want of justice; want of protection; deprivation of every right, except that of imploring assistance from your neighbour.

When this man, crushed with shame and fatigue, leaves the "George IV. Tavern" for his lodging, carrying with him the memories of the past and his inward sorrows, what repose will there be for him? His wife will be waiting for him—she who had once been the upper lady's-maid of a duchess, she who was by his conduct reduced to the condition of a washerwoman! How often, too weakened with misery to withstand it, has he sought some comfort for his ills in gin, that only consoler of the poor suffering, the fatal reliever of so many over-burdened minds, of so much sorrow, of so many lives which without it would have been one long inimitable agony, but a process of grief and sorrow buried in the blackness of darkness.

This is all very well, you will say; but why does not the man learn to think less of his wordly position? What real difference is there between the condition of a double or triple-chimney waiter, pampered in a "Royal Hotel," and that of a poor potboy in the "George IV. Tavern"?

To a philosopher the difference may not be very great; but this man was a hotel servant, and philosophers are rare in that class of society. I have tried to remember some of them, but I can only think of two—Esop and Jean Jacques Rousseau and Rousseau abandoned, this line of life in early youth.

To conclude—Is there any use arguing in that way? Certainly the man would have done better by far if he had shown himself superior to his misfortunes; but what if he could not?

Why could he not? Ask Macaulay, and Lingard, and the other historians. For my own part, rather than answer the question, I should like better to tell you the tale of other sufferers and other beggars.

Ah, yes! I have known miserable sufferers among the great; and it is just because I have known them, that I reserve my sympathies for the waiter of the "George IV. Tavern."

HYGIENIC.

THE cremating of kitchen garbage in one's own stove or furnace is a profitable transaction; it saves fuel. Potato parings, cabbage, or other leaves thrown on the fire train the heat and prevent its rapid passage up the chimney.

A PHYSICIAN says that the cry for rest has always been louder than the cry for food. The best rest comes from sound sleep. Sleep will do much to cure irritability of temper, peevishness, and uneasiness. It will restore vigour to an overworked brain. It will build up and make strong a weak body. It will cure a headache. It will cure a broken spirit. It will cure sorrow. The cure of sleeplessness requires a clean, good bed, sufficient exercise to promote weariness, pleasant occupation, good air, and not too warm a room; a clear conscience, and avoidance of stimulants and narcotics.

ONE result of the discussions as to the difficulty of carrying lime-juice in Arctic expeditions, owing to its own weight and bulk, and the weight of fuel said to be required to melt it, has been to cause certain experiments to be instituted as to the best means of concentrating it and diminishing its bulk and weight. This is proved to be exceedingly easy. Thus it has been found practicable to make lozenges two of which represent the solid constituents of an ounce of lime-juice mixed with sugar, and which are both portable and extremely palatable. Moreover, it has been found that lime-juice may be concentrated to one-tenth of its bulk very easily, and fortified with a ration of rum so as to occupy very little space indeed. This combination of rum with lime-juice is also agreeable to the palate, and can hardly be frozen at the lowest temperatures.

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