

POETRY.

THE OLD FOLKS' LONGING.

Don't get to the theatre, lecture or ball,
But stay in your room to-night;
Deny yourself to the friends that call,
And a good long letter write—
Write to the sad old folks at home,
Who sit, when the day is done,
With folded hands and downcast eyes,
And think of the absent one.

Don't selfishly scribble, "Excuse my haste,
I've scarcely the time to write,"
Lest their brooding thoughts go wandering
Back to the old folks at home.

To many a by-gone night,
When they lost their needed sleep and rest,
And every breath was a prayer
That God would leave their little babe
To their tender love and care.

Don't think that the young and giddy
Friends,
Who make your pastime gay,
Have half the anxious thoughts for you
That the old folks have to-day.

The duty of writing do not put off,
Lest sleep or pleasure wait,
Let the letter for which they waited and
Longed
Be a day or an hour too late.

For the sad old folks at home,
With locks fast turned to silver,
Are longing to hear of the absent one,
So write them a letter to-night.

SELECT STORY.

A TIMELY WITNESS;
OR
THE COXSWAIN'S SENTENCE.

BY RUFUS HALE.

For many long days the Dauntless, brig-of-war, one of the vessels of our commander's squadron for the suppression of piracy, had vainly cruised about the rocks and islands in search of the fierce desperadoes who were said to infest those shores. One morning, while the red sunlight was struggling through a gathering haze which had just veiled from our sight a ship in the offing, a man was seen standing on a distant rock signaling the brig. The captain sent Mr. Marker—a rather suspicious young midshipman—with a cutter, containing a sailor and twenty armed men, to ascertain if the signaling stranger wanted to come aboard. As the boat proceeded, and the fog thickened, Mr. Marker began to upbraid the coxswain, Granger, for his steering, though it could not be excused.

"If you don't do better," he shouted angrily, "I will have you reported."

This coxswain was particularly obnoxious to Mr. Marker, because he had lately saved the life of one of the midshipmen while he (Marker) was thinking about it. It had happened during a heavy gale. A little middy—the first lieutenant's son—had fallen overboard, and while Mr. Marker—who, though brave, was also cautious—was hesitating as to whether he could rescue him by tying a rope to his breast and jumping overboard after him, Granger, one of the fore-mast hands, who was a spirited, intelligent young fellow of seventeen, full of quick decision and ready daring, performed the manœuvre successfully, and brought the little fellow safely aboard. For this act Granger was promoted coxswain.

"Now mind yourself," continued Mr. Marker, as the boat approached the rock on which the form of the stranger could be dimly made out through the fog. "Be careful how you steer; I will have you broken and put back where you were before."

The young coxswain controlled his temper, though it was hard to do so. Meanwhile the stranger descended the rock.

"You want to board the brig?" said the midshipman, watching him askance.

He was a middle-aged man, with keen eyes, a nose slightly beaked, and he wore a long, closely fitting surcoat.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Well, my orders were to bring you aboard—so step in, if you please."

The other entered the boat, quietly seated himself, and then came the order to give way.

As the boat dashed along the midshipman peered warily about him, and now and then stole a glance at the passenger.

"He does not look like a pirate," thought the youth, "but I shall keep my eyes upon him."

Just then, emerging from behind a rock, and taking a position directly ahead of the cutter at the end of a narrow passage, between two low reefs, appeared a large boat containing about twenty desperate-looking cutthroats, wearing wooden caps, broad sabres, and armed with pistols and dirks.

There was no mistaking these swartly fellows by their fierce, lowering visages; they belonged to the numerous horde of pirates for whom the man-of-war's men had been searching. On the evil face of the steersman, a giant in size, might have been observed a triumphant, sardonic grin.

"Ho! my fine fellows, we have you fast," he shouted. "The hunted now have the best of the hunters!"

"We will see about that!" replied Mr. Marker. "Now, boys," he headed, addressing his crew, "we must fight, and I hope you will give a good account of yourselves."

As he spoke he looked at the stranger who had been taken off the rock. The keen eyes of this man were fixed upon the outlaws, and he had produced a pistol from under his coat; but Marker suspected that he was some traitor who had purposely brought about this meeting with the pirates.

"Had not you better make use of your swivel before you close with the rascals?" he said, in a deep voice.

"I know my own business best," answered the midshipman.

Then a troubled look crossed his face, for now another boat containing a dozen more pirates, appeared from out the mist, astern of the cutter!

"We are hemmed in!" he muttered. "Traitor!" he added, addressing the cutter, "this is your work!"

"You are mistaken," was the cool reply.

"I shall keep an eye on you, at all events. Back water!" he continued, speaking to the crew. "The rascals are too many for us."

"What do you propose to do?" inquired the stranger.

"To get out of this the best way I can, if you would like to know. Sight the swivel!" he added, to the bowmen, "and ply the fellows ahead with it, while we try to get through that opening in the reef. Lively, boys!"

Some of the pirates already had begun to fire their pistols at the cutter's people, while the rest pulled towards the receding boat.

An old man-of-war's man was shot dead, and two others were wounded.

Then the report of the swivel was heard, but the pirates, lying well over, avoided the shot.

Before the piece could be re-loaded, the bullets from the foe were again flying thick and fast, and another man fell dead. This was a shoal strait, as it is called. We shall probably ground upon it," cried the young coxswain, Granger. "Then the pirates will have us at their mercy. Had

THE SEXTON'S STORY.

BY BLANCHIE MYRTLE.

It was in a pretty, old-fashioned, country church-yard that I heard the following story. The sexton had been at work at a little distance, but he observed the interest with which I had stopped to gaze upon a straight shaft of white marble, on which was cut the simple inscription—

BRUCE MARZELL.

They are shrewd readers of the human countenance, these old sextons, and mine must have told him that I longed to know the story attached to that brief epitaph.

"She was an Italian," he began, "but for the reader's benefit I will translate his queer phraseology into ordinary English, since I cannot reproduce the queer and quavering voice of the speaker. "I never beheld a prettier girl; eyes so big and dark and alive, a complexion like ivory, and the reddest lips. She was a fine figure of a girl, too; tall and elegant, though slight; and the regular blue-black hair that I've heard belongs to that kind of beauty. Her family consisted of an uncle and aunt, and they, to whom she was engaged to be married, and whom she seemed to hate worse than poison.

"It isn't likely that I would ever have known the family affairs of folks so far above me, even in a country place like this, where everything goes on so quiet, more or less, but for the circumstance that I possessed a nephew, who was about the handsomest young fellow that ever the sun shone upon. He was as fair as the Signora Morelli was dark; his eyes were blue like violets, and his hair like gold; and, bless you, sir, when these two young people first saw each other, it was as clear as a case of love at first sight as any other Romeo and Juliet, and just as natural as the flame between fire and tow.

"My nephew, his name was Reginald, and we called him Rex for short—was the organist of the little church over yonder, and the young lady sang in the choir, though she was such a grand one. She had a voice like an angel, and she used to say that God gave women such voices to sing His praises.

"In that way the two young people first met, and their acquaintance progressed rapidly, as you may suppose. The cousin to whom the Signora was engaged used to come to church with her, I reckon those I know. Rex was a regular Italian, as far as his ways were concerned, he would do anything, though it was thought he cared most about her money. Of course he was as jealous as a Turk, and if looks could have killed, poor Rex would not have been long in getting the girl in his clutches. My brave Rex nor Miss Bianca cared a bit for the Signora's black looks; and then, you must know, the young lady never really agreed to the engagement. It was all made up by her relatives, and she always declared she would rather marry her cousin, declaring boldly that she loved Rex Haywood, and would never marry any other man.

"For my own part, I must own that I often trembled and turned cold at the look that, so often, she would cast at me, used to throw at my nephew; but when I used to warn the daring young fellow, he just answered with a shrug or laugh; and once he added:

"This time next year, uncle Bianca will be my wife, and I shall be a married man, for she will be of age then, and will end the guardianship of as black-hearted a pair as ever had power over an angel. How they ever dared to bring her here more than I can imagine, but, of course, they have powerful hold on her property in her native land, or they never would have taken the risk to bring her to a free country like this, and then they hoped she would have been homestead and lonely, and more easily lured to their wretched clutches."

But they didn't count on me, you see," he finished off, with a gay laugh. "It didn't occur to them that this country produces enterprising young men."

And with his bright face shining with triumph and content, he hurried away to the church to practice his music for the next Sunday. But it was a very different music that he played when that day came, for on the very next morning I tolled the bell for Bianca Morelli, who had been found dead in a room at the house where her maid entered to dress her for breakfast. This was Friday, and the funeral was set for Sunday, and you may be sure, in a place like this there was plenty of talk about the sudden death and burial of the young lady. But when I was asked nothing, he seemed turned to stone, but he played the most beautiful music that ever was heard in our church for the funeral services of the girl he loved, and, though they wouldn't allow him to play the grand magnifico coffin in the church, I took care he should help me to lower it into the grave, and he stood beside me and dropped a great bunch of red roses down on it as I began to shovel in the earth. Well, well, my poor Rex! I hope I never may see such a face of despair again, and as I glanced at him from time to time, I felt sure that his would be the next grave I would fill in.

"It was late that night, and I was just thinking of going to bed, though Rex hadn't come home, and I was uneasy about him, when I heard the click of the door down stairs as it opened and shut, and then I recognized his step, quick and hurried, as he came up stairs—not a bit like the usual dragging steps of the last two nights, but even lighter and quicker than it used to be; and I hadn't done wondering when he was beside me, and the next moment he was beside me. Wild, haggard, pale as death, and with his great blue eyes, most staring from his head! I scared that if I had seen a ghost. Before I could utter a word, for my voice failed me, Rex caught me hard by the arm and whispered hoarsely:

"Don't speak, uncle, but just listen. Bianca ain't dead! I hope you believe she is not dead! Look!—read!" and he held before my eyes a scrap of paper, on which was scrawled these words:

"Rex my darling, if I die, or seem to die, believe them not! Have me taken from the coffin within the twelve hours of my burial, and all may yet be well. You will not fail me, dearest. Adieu!"

BIANCA.

"I read this extraordinary message over more than once before I took in its meaning, but as it flashed on me, I saw as well as Rex how little time we had to lose, and I forestalled his words.

"Come on, in God's name!" I whispered. "It must be close on twelve o'clock, and as safe as it will be for me to go to work. Fortunately it's a pitch black night, and all the moon there has been gone hours ago. Come on!"

"While I spoke I found a little dark lantern, and we were already descending the stairs, and next moment we were stealing through the church-yard, with my pick and shovel in hand, which I caught up as we passed by the out-house where I kept them. It was terrible work, but in less time than I had ever used a spade before, the newly made grave was opened, the coffin rifled of its precious contents, which Rex and I carried to our boat, wrapped up in a huge shawl which I had brought for the purpose. Oh, my! But it was the uncanny night's work that ever I did since the hour I was born! We laid the body on the bed, and

THREE PAIRS OF SHOES.

There they are in a neat little row under the mantle in the children's bedroom, a pair of twelves, a pair of nines and a tiny pair of fives belonging to the baby.

They are all more or less wrinkled and worn and the pair of twelves have holes in the toes which caused me to say a little while ago to the sturdy warden of them that there was "no sense in his kicking out shoes like that," and if he were not more careful he would just have to go barefooted.

He heard me with the utmost indifference as I know from the fact that the threat was hardly out of my mouth when he asked me if I knew whose little boy he would have been if I had never been born.

"You might have been the little boy of some papa who couldn't have bought you any shoes at all," I said reproachfully.

"Oh, well," he says, calmly, in the fullness and beauty of his childish faith, "God has millions and trillions of shoes and I could just ask Him for a pair whenever I wanted them. Don't you see, papa?"

Three pairs of shoes! Three pairs of tender little feet upon the untried border of life's mysterious land.

I sit and look at the little shoes wondering where the feet that wear them will be in the time to come, the little feet that were so small and so sweet when I first saw them.

Must wander on "old hopes and fears." How much I would give to know the future that I might stand between them and the temptations so sure to assail them, that I might guide their feet aright, that I might shield them from pain and sorrow if I could.

There is something strangely appealing and half pathetic to every loving father and mother in the sight of a row of little shoes like those I see before me now. They arouse the tenderest instincts of one's nature. I don't know why.

The wearers of the little shoes may have been very fretful or mischievous or trying all day.

"You may have been 'all out of patience' with them. You may have whipped the little hands or put the rebellious little ones to bed, declaring that they were 'worrying the life out of you,' but they are not 'worrying' you now, and you go about picking up a little stocking here and a little skirt there with nothing but tenderness in your heart toward them.

You think only of how precious the wearers of the little shoes are, and there is no melody on each one half so sweet to you as the music of the baby voices when they kneel around you in their little white caps saying 'God bless mamma and papa and keep us all safely through the night.' You will hear no sweeter music than that of this side of Paradise.

You reproach yourself for your lack of tenderness and patience as you look at that little row of shoes, and sometimes you fall to thinking of the unutterable sorrow that would fill your heart to breaking if the wearers of any one pair of the little shoes would wear them no more—if you should awaken some morning, as heartbroken fathers and mothers have sometimes awakened, and find that the wearers of one pair of the little shoes had gone from you in the night to wear the garments that were not old.

Three pairs of little shoes! There are tears in your eyes as you look at them now, and perhaps you steal softly to the bedside of the little sleepers to make sure that they are sleeping sweetly and safely and to touch their little hands or their cool, moist brows with your lips, or your heart filled with tender memories, with hopes and fears, with unspoken prayers.

Three pairs of little pilgrims setting out on the voyage of life, their frail bark as yet untouched and unharmed by adverse winds and waves. God bring them all to port!

THE LOBSTER DISAPPEARING.

Notwithstanding all the laws made for its protection the lobster is disappearing gradually from the coast of Maine. In 1880, 20 millions of lobsters were taken on the coast, a falling off of five millions, or 20 per cent from the catch of 1885 and 10 per cent from 1889. Conclusive evidence of the decrease of the lobster supply is given in the steadily lessening size of the fish sent to the market. In 1889 and 1890 the average length of the lobsters offered for sale was about 10 1/2 inches, and the average weight two pounds. Ten years ago the average length was 13 inches, and the weight three and one-half to four pounds. There are 36 factories for the coast of Maine, for whiting, salmon, herring, and mackerel are packed.

Mackerel are getting scarcer every year, and the fleet which once coined money in catching them is forced to seek other business. The Maine catch of 1890 was only 15,000 barrels, or 17,200 barrels in 1889, and 40,706 in 1888. In 1884 the Maine fleet took 422,187 barrels of mackerel, and in 1884 the catch amounted to 303,033 barrels, many of them large fish. The mackerel taken last year were nearly all of the No. 30 size.

Last year menhaden suddenly reappeared on the Maine coast after an absence of 12 years. It is estimated that 10 millions of these fish were caught last season, one steamer having taken 25,000 barrels. Four factories were in operation along the coast, producing in the aggregate 17,500 barrels, or 875,000 gallons of oil, valued at \$183,700, besides 8,000 tons of scrap, worth \$160,000. Four hundred men were employed in the business the average wages being \$20 a month and board.

Large quantities of smelts and tom cods, or frost fish, are being taken on the Penobscot river this winter, and while some of the fishermen are simply in quest of sport a great many make their living by angling for the stony little fish. Most of the large smelts are shipped to New York, where the best prices are obtained. The frost fish are eaten by the poorer people here or fed to poultry and hogs.

THE GALLANT SKATER.

They stood beside the frozen pond, The ice was clear and thin;
The girl was timid, he was brave,
And straightway tumbled in.

She screamed, he smiled; then tenderly,
Though shivering, he said:
"Be calm, my own; for fools rush in
Where angels fear to tread."

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