

THE LITERARY TRANSCRIPT, AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCER.

VOL. I. No. 33]

QUEBEC, SATURDAY, 5TH MAY, 1838.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.

MRS. JENNINGS.

“WHO WANTED SOMEBODY TO CARE FOR HER.”

Theophilus Bulfinch was a bachelor, middle-aged, and sufficiently stout to look respectable. A spare man conveys a feeling of spareness in all things. The eye never rests so contentedly as on a fat, and what is generally termed a “comfortable looking” personage; a stout person carries an appearance of wealth in the very folds of his coat, and so did Theophilus Bulfinch. But, alas! although temptation fell not in his way, he fell in the way of Mrs. Jennings!

“Time tells a tale,”—and we behold our bachelor located at a watering-place no less famous for the civility and unimposing character of its inhabitants, than the select nature of its visitors,—Margate. This, no one, we are sure, will venture to deny, who has “seasoned” it for three or four months. The kindly feelings of its inhabitants are perceptible even in its ass-drivers. Where will you find such fatherly boys to their donkeys,—such yellow shoes,—such society, as at Margate? We are sure our readers will say with us, Nowhere!

Theophilus felt this; and ventured a trip, and a house, for he bought one, urg’d thereof by a lady acquaintance, by name Mrs. Palaver,—a lady who drove not only her husband, but a pair of ponies, and astonished the eyes both of “quality” and “natives” by the way she did the general,—that is, as far as her ponies went: for herself, she had a soul above mean approbation. Among the “select” at the libraries, Mrs. P. was the ruling star; and to judge not only from the redness of her face, was her husband could testify Mars in petticoats. She sat in “old” and “one-in-three” even to the hindrance of “The Concert;” but no one bore interruptions of this nature with so much philosophical sweetness as *Old Bessie*, the proprietor; and as the “one-in-three” bore to him a profit of three to one, the dulcet tones of the signora of the rooms were often eclipsed by Mrs. P.’s *shake* or “go” as it is called. Our readers may be curious as to the name of the “signora;” it was Mrs. Nols by day, Signora Nopini by night. And such a voice! The little boys in Hawley Square heard, as well as the company inside,—in fact rather better, for they complained of its being a *leete* too forte.

But although Mrs. Palaver put down shillings, she picked up friends,—dear soul of the newest importation—and among the rest Mrs. Jennings. Mrs. Jennings was a widow who “wanted somebody to care for her.” She had a small independence, and, if we may judge from subsequent events, a very small independence; in fact it might be doubted if it were an independence at all. She was tall, scraggy, and thin—we use a homely simile—as a pancake; the effect of grief, doubtless. She had lost a husband, she had, who doted on her; and having lost so great a treasure, can we wonder at her unwearied exertions to obtain a fresh supply of affection? Theophilus was a man of money. Mrs. Jennings could not boast of the same golden fortune, and, as she wanted “somebody to care for her,” she fixed her eye—a grey one—upon Theophilus Bulfinch.

“They met,” not in a “crowd,” but at a tea and card party, as the mutual friend, Mrs. Palaver, where real eightpenny Cape and diamond-cut sandwiches of the size and thinness of three-cornered notes, indicated the gentility of the lady of the house. Theophilus and the widow were partners, a beginning not to be despised. Mrs. Jennings looked confusion over her hand, and vowed her heart must fall to his king of clubs. Theophilus blushed; she sighed, and, intent upon a new game, lost the rubber! Theophilus paid for himself; the widow had a mind above trifles. Theophilus was tempted,—what man is not at times?—and paid for Mrs. Jennings. The first stone was laid, and the widow saw the church already built, the door open, and the parson’s hand in the same inviting position. The next morning, Mrs. Jennings, our bachelor, and the mutual friend were to embrace

late the fields, or rather corn-fields, and numerous of the “quality” were drifting along the chalky roads on an equestrian tour; asses were at a premium, and young ladies legs going up. Our party veined their way, and Mrs. J. talked of the days when she and Mr. J. made love in a corn-field. If she had only somebody to care for her!—and Mrs. Jennings squeezed something very like a tear into the corners of her eye. We know not what effect they might have had on the dear departed, but to our bachelor they appeared the essence of affection,—pretty little drops, distilled from that great alchemist, the heart. Theophilus, we have before hinted, was unused to the sweet witchery of womankind, and in the simplicity of his soul thought tears must be a natural production! Let not the wise in the lore of matrimony laugh at his ignorance,—Theophilus was a bachelor!

He was touched by this unexpressed proof of, to him, affection; and, drawing himself into closer proximity with Mrs. Jennings than he had before ventured, began—

“My dear ma’am, don’t distress yourself. Men are like ears of corn.”

“I know it,” cried Mrs. Jennings, twisting one round her finger as she spoke.

“Like grass ma’am; and Time’s scythe mows down husbands and fathers.”

“Ca! on!” sobbed the widow.

“Is there any thing I can do to comfort you ma’am?” asked Theophilus inquiringly.

Mrs. Jennings looked assent, and kept twisting the ear of corn.

“A good wife, ma’am is a jewel,—the tears are still in your eyes,—and will you allow me to make you an offer—

“An offer!” said Mrs. Jennings; and the tears, spite of herself, shrank back, as though ashamed of what they were doing,—“as offer!”

“Of my handkerchief,” said Theophilus.

A clover field is a dangerous thing to walk in. Philosopher may divine the cause,—we only know it is so; sentiment is not for the high-way; love and clover are synonymous.

Mrs. Jennings knew this, and trotted the unexpecting, uninitiated Theophilus into one, accordingly. Poppies we know not why, do grow in clover; and Bulfinch—he was fond of botanizing—plucked one, and, lamenting that violets were out of bloom, gave it to Mrs. Jennings. This was enough; and she whispered to the lady who was doing *thirdly*, “if he must mean something.”

The town residence of Theophilus Bulfinch was in one of the squares in the neighbourhood of the Museum. But what is a house if it want a woman’s smile! So thought Mrs. Jennings, and she let no opportunity pass of popping in—“we are grieved to say the popping was all upon her side. She would call as she was passing—the day was so hot—to take a rest; or the day was so cold, and she wanted—the truth must be spoken—a warm! What could Theophilus do? With a grim welcome on his face, and a “d—n the woman!” in his heart, he grumbled out, “You’d better take a chair.” Mrs. Jennings did, and any thing else she could get. But getting was a point not easily arrived at; for if Bulfinch loved one thing more than another it was himself. She would bring him by way of treat, wrapped in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief, five or six nice little ginger cakes of her own making, of the size, and bearing a strong family likeness to what children call “sixes;” but finding all her entreaties thrown away, and her ginger cakes likely to be in the same predicament, she would in the liberality of her soul take them into the kitchen by way of present to the housekeeper who “pshaw’d!” as soon as her back was turned, and enlarged upon the merits of her own ginger-cakes, gave them to the maid, and, she—went no further; servant-maids have good appetites.

What woman could bear these slights of fortune tamely? We can take upon ourselves to say Mrs. Jennings did not; but, intent upon the one great object of a woman’s life,—a husband—she let no opportunity pass of reporting that herself and Theophilus were shortly to be one, fully convinced of the fact,

that, though marriages may be made in heaven there is nothing like speculating upon them on earth; and hoping, no doubt to discover the true philosopher’s stone, which, “turneth all to gold.”—Theophilus was a man of wealth,—she left no stone unturned to get him; and to give things an appearance, she sat herself down—we tremble as we write—in no less a place than his bedroom, determined not to quit it until, as she observed, “there was an understanding between them.” Theophilus was horror-stricken, the housekeeper no less, and the servant-maid all flutter and ribbons.

“Oh! oh!” gasped the widow, “you base man!—a weak woman as I am!”

“Very!” grunted Theophilus.

The housekeeper here interferred. “What’s the use of crying about it? Why don’t you look after somebody else?”

“Ah!” sobbed the widow, “you don’t know what’s a’wixt us!”

“I wish the street-door was,” thought Bulfinch.

The lady was inexorable. “The poppy,” she said, “had done the business! If she feelings overcame her, and she lay upon the bed in an agony of finely developed grief, we presume for the convenience of fainting.”

Theophilus was at his wits end, and something very like a “d—n me!” was at his tongue’s end; and “nursing his wrath,” and echoing the words of an Eastern sultan, that “he who finds himself in a fire ought to be resigned to the Divine will; but whoever is out of the fire, ought to be careful and keep himself in his happy state.” Thus far, he thought with Mahomet; so he put on his hat and sallied forth, leaving Mrs. Jennings in

this argued a want of taste, or was only a chastening of the spirit, we will not attempt to define; but certain it is he went out, and the widow, finding her efforts ineffectual, did the ditto.

Days passed, and so did Mrs. Jennings the house; the servant-maid with a prudent industry, answered the door in the area. Bulfinch (in a money getting lane in the City the curious reader will see the Co. written after it) was a merchant; and as, in the ordinary course of things, it is necessary to emerge into the streets previously to reaching the place

“where merchants most do congregate,” what was to be done?—for never did cat watch a rat-hole more patiently, more hungrily, than the widow the door-way of his house. His modesty was not widow-proof; and the only way to shun her, was by a back door, which opened into a mess: patiently picking his way through mire and dirty straw, did Theophilus, cursing widows and poppies, wend his way; whilst she—patience had ceased to be a virtue—vowed vengeance in the streets.

On a wet day, a day of gloom and splash,—the street running rivers, and the skies shedding drops like pebbles,—the passengers dripping, drenching,—and the new Police, all love and oilskin, sheltering themselves under

down and gateways,—sat Theophilus Bulfinch Esq in his easy chair, brightening the blaze of a warm fire by a fresh fire, snugly sipping

his wine, and in the uprising of his heart wishing confusion to all widows, and devoting a full glass to the particular condemnation of Mrs. Jennings. Every now and then he cast an eye to the pattering rain and floating streets, and thanked Heaven which had set the fruits of fortune ripened for his plucking, and given him that which made life like a full cup, that he could drink from, nor tire of. He sat in “contemplation sweet.”

“Whence comes that knocking?” he might have said, had not the servant maid saved him the trouble, by saying a young man wanted to see him.

“Me!” ejaculated Theophilus.

“Yes sir,” was the reply, and, after much scrubbing on the door-mat, in a vain endeavour to rub his boots clean, the young man was shown up, soaked to the skin, and dripping like a watering-pot. Theophilus opened his eyes; the young man took the same liberty

with his mouth, and inquired if his name was Bulfinch? The answer was in the affirmative. A chair was set; the servant left the room, and, looking at the muddy footsteps on the stair carpets, uttered sundry pretty little sayings about “dirty feet;” “her trouble in the morning;” &c. and related her complaints to the goddess of the kitchen. The young man commenced by saying he had brought a little account.

“And a great deal of wet,” gently murmured Theophilus. “A little account?”

“Yes, Sir,—for board and lodging.”

Bulfinch opened his eyes still wider, and echoed “Board and lodging?”

“The bill, Sir, is four and twenty pounds.”

Another echo, and still higher uplifting of the eye brows; “Where do you come from?”

“Blackheath, Sir.”

“Blackheath! What! through the rain?”

The young man ventured a smile as he replied, “No, Sir; I wish I had.”

“Board and lodging!—you must have made a mistake.”

“Oh no, Sir,” said the young man; “here is the bill—twenty-four weeks, at a pound a week, as a parlour-boarder, at Mrs. Twig’s establishment for young ladies.”

Theophilus looked suspiciously at his silver spoons, and eyed the bell rope. But a new light seemed to break upon him at the mention of the word “establishment,” as he replied.

“I am afraid, my good Sir, the establishment, you come from in St. George’s Fields. Is a parlour-boarder at a young ladies’ school?”

“No, Sir; not you?”

“Who then?” cried Theophilus.

“Mrs. Jennings, Sir.”

“Leaving, Sir.”

Bulfinch sunk back into his uneasy chair.

“Mrs. Jennings!—Mrs. Devil!” and in the bitterness of his spleen he deemed her no less a personage, “Mrs.——” The word, like *Lucifer’s amen*, “stuck in his throat.”

There was a pause. At length, plucking his courage by the years, he continued;

“And do you expect me to pay for this old——”

“We omit the word, no lady admires being likened to a dog.”

“If you please, Sir, I have put ‘paid’ to the bill.”

“That’s lucky, for it’s the only way you’ll ever have the satisfaction of seeing it ‘paid.’

Four-and-twenty pounds!—not a many farthings!” but the goodness of his disposition got the better of his anger as he added, “unless to buy her a rope.”

It is needless to dwell longer upon this occurrence, further than by saying, that the “young man,” finding the bill not in a way of being “settled,” of Mrs. Jennings either, took his heaver, or—we like to be particular—his four-and-ninety-penny, no longer a hat but piece of ornamented brown paper in a state of decomposition, and was in the act of leaving the room, when rat! tat! tat! went the door, and another young man was announced with a bill for acceptance, drawn by Messrs. Lutestring & Co. for silks, flannels, &c. supplied to Mrs. Jennings! Monsieur Tonson was nothing to this! Another knock, and a female was ushered up with a yard long bill for millinery, &c. done for—Mrs. Jennings! The “Storr” upon the grand piano was a mere puff to that raised by Bulfinch. He swore, raved, ordered them out of his house, and finally, thrusting his head between his hands groaned a bitter groan, and, smiting his brow, cried, “Oh, that—d—d poppy!”

The following morning, a suspicious-looking person, of a pick-pocket exterior, and belonging to a similar industrious calling—he was a lawyer’s clerk—knocked at the knocker of Theophilus Bulfinch, and with that gentlemanly ease and accomplished manner so peculiar to young men in the law, handed to the afore-said personage a letter, prettily worded, and headed “Jennings versus Bulfinch.” It was a notice of action for “breach.”

Tremble, oh, ye bachelors!—and oh ye spinsters! smirk in the hope of one day convincing the world you ought to have been