

SONG.

(From Victor Hugo.)

My songs, poor ephemeral things,
Would fly to thy garden so fair,
If they had but the tremulous wings
That speed the light bird through the air.

Like fire-sparks that gaily up-spring,
They would fly to thy welcoming hearth,
If they had but the venturesome wing
That lifts thought afar from the earth.

Night and day, they would faithfully bring
Sweet messages, dearest to thee,
If they had but Love's butterfly wing.
To waft them o'er land and o'er sea.

Montreal.

GEO. MURRAY.

A DEEP-LAID PLOT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "POPPIES IN THE CORN,"
ETC., ETC.

I.

"What is't you do?
A deed without a name."—MACBETH.

"No, dear; I can't think what to do."
And Eleanor Lyfingdog let her hands fall helplessly, in despair, upon her lap. This was at a meeting, with closed doors, in her working room, between the rector's wife and her bosom friend. Poor girl, she had married, some ten years before, the curate of her father's parish. Many experiences had been theirs during that period. Her husband seemed to have been especially fatal to incumbents. After two years, at the outside, of his abiding with them, they were almost sure to die. Not through his vexing their souls, poor man; for although tenacious in exacting obedience and deference where he held it due to himself, he was entirely consistent in yielding it to others whose just claim upon him for such tribute he acknowledged. He held principles most strongly; no one more so. He had for a long time now, made up his mind upon certain subjects, and upon these he was inflexible. But upon these he would always secure complete understanding before entering upon the relation of rector and curate with any man. So the almost-despot to those in any way owing him homage was meekness itself to those justly claiming it. A good man he was—an earnest man, albeit not a perfect man. It may be that in some cases the points for which he stood out were not of that vital importance which justifies martyrdom. But having once made up his mind about a point of Church discipline or ritual, not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could turn him from his practice. Whether men agreed with him or not, they at least respected him; for the rule of expediency, the thought of what would be popular or would pay best, never entered into his calculations. He had, illuminated and suspended in his study, as the motto of his life, those sinewy lines of Tennyson's—tonic words for languid lives—

"And because Right is Right, to follow Right
Were wisdom, in the scorn of consequence."

The character of Daniel, and of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were often exultingly enlarged on by him; and he would fret and fume like a lion in a cage over the spirit of compromise, the shilly-shallying, the well-meant weakness, the amiable timidity of the would-be leaders in action and thought, in Convocation, in Parliament, in print. Then the clarion utterance, never faltering, or uncertain, of a Denison, or a Burgon, or a Wordsworth would smooth his bristling mane. The castigation administered, after the Pan-Anglican Synod, by a certain American Bishop to a certain English Dean must have added quite five years to his life. It was the safety-valve for an accumulated indignation that might otherwise have blown the man to fragments.

Thus we see his character, noble and manly even in its excesses; and we return to him now in an East-end rectory, to which he had been, some two years ago, presented, and into whose most laborious work he had thrown himself with that unsparing energy which was part of the character of the man. Rather we return to his anxious wife, and to her chosen sympathizer and counsellor, busy in gravely discussing the unconscious rector, who, pale-faced and furrowed, was up to his neck in work in his study.

"I can't think what to do. You see Dr. Bildad tells me that entire rest and change for three months are absolutely necessary for him. He says he fears that nervous debility may bring him so low that he will not be able to rally. He assures me that if he took any low fever, or anything like that, in these alleys and courts (and it's always going on here, you know), he never could recover. He says that if he goes on as he's doing now, it is only a matter of months with him."

"Don't cry, dearest. Have you told him all this?"

"Oh, yes; I thought I'd try to frighten him; but he only settled into a sort of abstracted upward look at that strip of sky which you see at the top of his window over the brick wall. And when I cried, and talked about me and the children, he laid his hand on my arm, and murmured something about Leonidas and St. Paul and Decius, and what not; and said, 'What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready.' You know what St. Paul said."

"Well, I've no patience with such people.

They've no business to marry and have families. Then, if they were alone, and if they liked to kill themselves, nobody need mind. A man's first duty is to his wife and children; and I call his conduct very selfish and cruel and unjust."

"O Katie, how can you talk like that! You know that wife and child mustn't be first to a clergyman; no, nor even to a Christian. And I never heard any one call Richard selfish before."

"Well, I do; and I can't help it. Why can't he take decent care of himself for your sake, and get a good change and rest, instead of snuggling up at strips of sky?"

"I shan't talk about it if you speak of him in that way, Katie. I wanted you to help me, and not to abuse him. You know he says he can't afford to get away, we have been so crippled with many moves, and have spent most of our little capital. Then he says that life is short, and he can't board, but must trade with what talents he has; and that three more active clergymen are wanted here, rather than that one should give up before he is really obliged. And he thinks a man ought to go until he drops. 'When I can't do any more,' he says, 'or when the Christian Prosecution Association gets me suspended, I'll take a holiday; but not before.'"

Katie did not immediately reply; and the two friends sat in silent thought for a while, poor Eleanor wiping her eyes, and mournfully anticipating her widowed condition. How headstrong men are! If only they would listen to their wives, and take life (especially clerical life, in which they seem responsible to nobody) easily, how much longer they might live! But Katie broke the silence:

"I have an idea."

"Have you! What is it, love?"

"Well, it will require great care in carrying out. You say that, unless he can be compelled to rest for three months he may collapse entirely!"

"The doctor says so."

"Then I suppose you would be prepared to risk something in order to bring this about?"

"Well—yes—I suppose so. But what possibly can you mean? How can a man be made to rest if he won't! And you don't know what a man my husband is when once he has made up his mind. Nothing can turn him."

"Oh, nonsense! A man's no match for a woman when she has made up her mind. I'm just going to show you how he can be made to rest, though he won't. One plan would be to make him catch low fever; but (don't cry out so!) that, you say, won't do. Well, then, the other plan is—"

And Katie poured into the ear of the astonished and alarmed wife her deep-laid plot for the saving of the headstrong husband's life. The coming pages will develop it, so it need not here be detailed to the reader. Enough to say that the dutiful and reverencing Eleanor turned pale with horror at the very idea of the plan at first; made her friend impatient with interruptions of "Oh, it would never do!" "O Kate, I should be too frightened!" "Oh, it's impossible; he'd never forgive me!" "O Kate, do be quiet! I'm afraid even to hear you speak of such a thing!" until Kate began to get cross, and to give symptoms of ceasing from her advising; then the anxious wife, inconsistently enough, besought her to go on.

"Do you," Katie asked, "really believe what Dr. Bildad says?"

"Oh, yes; there's a constant sickness and great exhaustion; and—"

"And do you wish to keep your husband with you for some years longer?"

"O Katie, how can you ask?"

"Well, then, listen to me quietly, and take my advice or not, as you think fit. If you don't care to save your husband, leave him alone. If you do care, don't be afraid to risk something to do it."

So Eleanor did listen, and fidgeted, and grew red and pale by turns, as the astute and fearless campaigner developed her plans; she interrupted no more, afraid of silencing her only counsellor; she pleaded for time to think about it—a demand inexorably refused by her friend; and, finally, she assisted, rather by non-resistance than by aught of active co-operation, in the composition of a letter (anonymous, to her distress and horror, but what was she to do!), which was directed, sealed and posted.

II.

"MICHING MALLECHO."

"A chiel's amang ye, takin' notes."

It is Sunday evening; Mr. Lyfingdog is reclining in his easy-chair, after the fifth service of the day. To him his wife said, "Let me give you a glass of port, dear."

"Thank you, love; you know we can't afford it; besides, I do not feel more tired than usual. Do you know I can't make out that man who was at church at every service to-day. He was taking notes, I'm sure; and I may be mistaken, but he certainly had the look of a spy of the Christian Prosecution Association."

"Nonsense, dear; how could you tell! Do take a glass of wine; it's like medicine to you, and you know the doctor ordered it."

"Well, there's a look about them, I fancy. You see he took no part in the service, only he kept a sharp eye on everything. Barnett noticed it too, and told me that when my back was turned, he never took his eye off me, except to write."

"O Richard, surely nobody could send spies into church to watch clergymen! It would be too wicked and base. Of course they only go by what they hear, in that Association."

"Now don't you see, dear, that they must have evidence for their prosecutions! And hearsay isn't evidence. There were the fees for these spies openly set down in the costs charged in the case of 'Swift vs. Hartwerker'; they do the thing unblushingly. But some one must have put them up to it, if they have sent one to me—what's the matter, dear! Don't you feel well! There's no need to be frightened for me. I'll not give in an inch. I'll go to prison before I desert the services at the will of a persecuting society of busy-bodies—a society for the promotion of universal slovenliness in the Church of England."

"But, but—surely they can't touch you! Do have the wine, Richard!"

"Well, well, if it will make you happy. Why, silly child, how your hand shakes; and you have turned pale! Give me a kiss, love, and never fear for me; I'm in my element in a storm. We want a few examples of unflinching steadfastness in this day of weak collapse. Besides, foolish little wife, it may be nothing, after all."

"What—what could they find fault with in our service, Richard?"

"Why, you know that in the last Privy Council judgment but one certain practices were, by implication, ordered. I, with many other clergymen, gladly availed myself of the liberty (to say the least of it) thus given; and, indeed, the bishop himself adopted these practices, and enjoined them on the clergy. Very well; all went on quietly until the Christian Prosecution Association, finding that, coming to curse, they had been forced to bless altogether, set to work to get a reversal of the former judgment in another case of brotherly persecution. This they succeeded in doing. The clergyman attacked declined, mistakenly, as I think, to be represented by counsel, and, on a one-sided hearing, that which by implication had been enjoined before, was now definitely forbidden. I had altered my practice upon the former hearing, but declined to alter it again, at least until it was certain whether the Supreme Court had yet made up its own mind. It has multiplied itself to court popularity, which is always securable by the 'No Popery' cry, and I positively decline to follow its example in the church and before my people. They may imprison me for life; they may deprive me of every penny; but I will not yield one inch."

"O Richard, do you think they will! Oh, what shall I do? Don't you think you could give it up?"

"I cannot imagine, Eleanor, that you would wish me, really, in your heart to do so. I should think you would utterly despise me for such baseness. No; if I know myself, I shall not flinch, even if the consequences should be utter ruin."

"Oh, I wish I hadn't—that is, I wish you didn't—I mean I wish we were just quiet curates still. I thought they could only—I mean that I—"

"Come, come, silly girl, sit on my lap, and don't cry about it. It may be only my fancy, you know; at any rate, you can't help it. It really is hardly likely that any one could have informed against me of the people here. I don't envy the feelings of the person who has, if it really is the case. But let us go to supper."

III.

BEFORE THE FIGHT.

"Press where ye see my white plume shine,
Amidst the ranks of war."—MACCAULAY.

Down came the fist of the impulsive rector upon the breakfast-table, one morning not very long after the above conversation.

"There, Eleanor, I was right about that man! He was a spy of the Christian Prosecution Association!"

The poor wife started in absolute terror at the energetic declaration. Every morning of late she had nervously glanced at the budget of letters as her husband opened them by degrees, attending to them alternately with toast and bacon—too busy to eat without reading. Every morning had she nervously stolen down to inspect the letters before he should see them, dreading, apparently, for some unexplained cause, the advent of some particular document. Was it a bill for some female extravagance that she had so apprehended? No, for she was scrupulously economical, though always elegant and neat in her dress. Had she committed forgery? This does not seem probable. At any rate, this morning she had satisfied herself that the storm she seemed to dread was not imminent, and she began to discuss some mushrooms with more of appetite than she had for some time felt at breakfast. The effect of her husband's vehement announcement was striking. She turned perfectly white, her lips blue; she felt that another morsel would choke her; she seemed as though she would fall from her seat. Her husband, receiving no response, looked towards her and started up.

"Wife, wife! why, you little goose! how can you be so silly! I'm positively glad myself. I like a fight in a good cause. It's refreshing to be able to have the opportunity of nailing one's colours to the mast, and setting an example of non-compromise to the timid and the trimmers of our day. I'll add five years to my life. I'll fight to the last penny of my money—to the last obb of my strength. What-

ever pains and penalties I may incur, I'll bear them all rather than flinch from what I know is right—if they tear me to pieces with wild horses!"

"O Richard, surely, surely they can't!"

"Well, well, perhaps not quite so bad as that. But they may beat me in the courts, and then admonish, and then suspend me. Of course I shall disregard the suspension."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! Then it's all of no use after all!"

"What do you mean, child! It is of no use. I shall be mulcted in many thousands of costs, and probably imprisoned for the rest of my life; for, of course, I shan't pay one farthing of them. I'm glad of the opportunity of making the protest. The statute of *præmunire*—"

But here Mrs. Lyfingdog entirely collapsed.

"Oh, I feel so faint; do give me your arm to the sofa!"

The anxious husband, for a minute diverted, applied his energies to the recovering of his wife; who at last revived enough faintly to gasp out, "What was the letter, dear?"

"The first note of a good tough fight," he replied, rubbing his palms together joyously.

"The Christian Prosecution Association have taken the first steps against me with regard to certain practices provable to be in use at St. Olaf's Bishops-gate Street, pronounced illegal by the latest judgment of the Privy Council; but, as I contend, pronounced by implication, not only legal, but binding, by the penultimate decision of that Protean court. I shall go at once to the 'Defence Union,' and we'll fight the matter inch by inch."

"Won't you—wouldn't it be right to ask the bishop's advice?"

"Oh, *nous avons changé tout cela*,—at least, that is to say, I should only have, like Nelson, to turn my blind eye to his signal of retreat. Of course I don't mean to say but that I ought, in some cases, where I know he'd decide for me to consult him. At least, not exactly that. But at any rate, you see, here the question has not been fairly argued; so it's necessary to help the bishop to a correct decision. Don't you see, dear?"

"I don't know that I exactly do. But, oh, I do wish people would let other people alone, and mind their own business! At least—"

Here, unaccountably, she stopped short, and turned scarlet. Unobserved, however, for her husband was already half in his overcoat; and anon, with a vehement hug, and hasty but fond kiss, was steaming along the pavement at the rate of five miles an hour.

Poor Eleanor watched him, and then turned away into the room, with a countenance of abject dismay.

"O Katie, how could you! What shall I do! And he won't get any rest, a bit. And he'll be ruined. Oh, to think of his being sent to the treadmill or to pick oakum all his life! And he so intellectual, and so kind, and dear! And all through—"

Here she fairly broke down, and sobbed for an hour with her head in the sofa-cushion. "I'll kill him and me," she said desolately at last, rising with swollen face. "And he'll never forgive me, I know, if I tell him. And it's so dreadful to feel such a hypocrite. Oh, I wish I hadn't! Oh, how would Katie—"

But here the head went down into the cushion again.

IV.

SUCCESS IN FAILURE.

"A woman fair and stately,
But pale as are the dead."

Needs not to detail the process of the fight. Enough to say that it did not in this case, as in most like cases, drag its slow length along; hindered and hampered with numberless technical objections and demurrers. The complainants were not more eager to close than the defendant to receive their onset. The "Defence Union" took the matter up; the first counsel were employed, the newspapers and many weakling divines mourned plaintively concerning the folly which could seriously contend for such trifles, when so many most important interests demanded all the energy and zeal of churchmen. Somewhat unjustly, however, blaming not the society which had guaranteed some £50,000 for the express purpose of setting parishes by the ears about these so-called trifles, but the man whom they had attacked, who was content enough to let them alone, although presenting many salient points of attack, if but they would let him alone. But who could not see that, at the mere dictation of a self-constituted and appointed synod, he was bound to give up certain practices and even minor observances in divine worship, conducive, in his opinion and that of many others, to reverence and devotion, and not yet, after full inquiry, proven illegal.

So the fight went on, from stage to stage; and at last the arguments on this side and on that were concluded, and their lordships, comprising, as it happened, among their number, the two Archbishops, a Quaker, a Roman Catholic, a Jew, an Independent, and a Mahometan, reserved their sentence. The issue was uncertain, for in such nice points, which had better, surely, be left open questions, the impression was strong that some considerations of expediency and policy do give, as it were, the casting vote. And while the "No Popery" cry was a sure passport always to popularity, there was, on the other hand, a bane, a minority it might be, in the whole mass of the nation, yet a majority of the picked intellect, intelligence, energy