

SONNET TO CONSTANTINOPLE.

Fair city by a shining southern sea,
Constantinople, ghosts of glories gone
(Glide round thee as the mists around the dawn—
Shadows of what was once the pride of thee.

Whoe'er approaching shall thy beauties see,
Thy golden domes, gay glancing in the sun,
Shall deem thee of deceits the hollowest one,
Seeing thy squalid homes, thy misery.

But thoughtful minds must view thee as thou art—
Brightest of all those Oriental stars.
The Crescent's ministers, the Moslem heart,
The heart's desire of all the Russian Czars;
Key of the East, to grasp which Russian art
Is vain, while Britain from the spoil debars.

May 21.

R. J. McM.

THE BATH-CHAIR MAN.

BY FLORENCE MARRYATT.

He was leaning idly upon the railings which surmounted the cliff, turning a flower about in his mouth, and looking out across the sea. I had often noticed him before, toiling about Brighton with his bath-chair, and knew those shoulders so rounded by constant stooping that they almost gave the old man the appearance of being humpbacked; that bottle-green coat, patched here and there with pieces of brown cloth, and that napless hat of which he was so careful, at a glance. To-day I saw the old hat had a morsel of rusty crumple bound round it, and that circumstance, combined with the absence of the bath-chair, gave rise to the impulse which made me address him.

"You have parted company with your chair to-day, friend?" I observed, taking a seat on the bench beside which he stood.

He turned his head at the sound of my voice, and touched the brim of his napless hat.

"Yes, sir, I have; I've given it a holiday to-day, as well as myself, for we've done the last of work that has served us for a good twelve months."

"I do not quite understand you," I said.

"Well, sir, I mean that one of my best customers has gone where she won't need no such thing as a chair any more; and I feel no heart for dragging them as would have spit upon her, about in the vehicle she sat in this blessed day a week ago. So I says to the old chair, 'Come you, bide a bit, and rest yourself, and so will I; and I have just come from the cemetery where they've been laying the body.'"

"Her death must have been very sudden," I remarked.

"Yes, sir! It did come sudden, very sudden to me; but not so much so that they couldn't have kept her above ground for several days to come yet. But it's all a piece with the rest of their treatment. They, who wouldn't see justice done to her alive, weren't likely to begin to think of respecting her after she was dead. It's cut up altogether."

"You raise my curiosity," I said. "If it's not a secret, may I ask of whom you are speaking?"

"If you mean that you want to know her name, sir, it's what I can't satisfy you with. We chair-men don't often ask the names of our customers; we've no call to do so. When we're wanted we're hailed, and when we've done our work we get our money, and there's an end of the matter."

"I've dragged out several residents here regular for years past, and I couldn't tell you their names, not if I were paid for it, and that's the truth."

"A shilling an hour, sir? Yes, that's what we always get; neither more nor less. I don't know that it's an unfair payment. I've never complained, but it's tidy work sometimes, dragging about stout parties on a hot day, and there are some who never seem to consider the man as pulls them can get tired, but go on for a couple of hours at a stretch, up hill and down hill all the same, without once coming to a stop to let a poor fellow get his breath. The poor creature I've just seen laid under the ground wasn't of that sort; she'd got a heart as tender as her body. It can't do no manner of harm, sir, to tell you where I first saw her, and why it is that this afternoon seems somehow like a sort of Sunday to me."

"It was a year ago last month, that I was on my stand, in my old place, sir, when I saw a maid-servant on the steps of a lodging-house in one of these numerous streets that run across the east cliff like waving her hand and beckoning to me. Being disengaged, in course I went, but having just come off a long spell of work with a very heavy party sojourning in the Steine, I was pretty well knocked up; and as I drags my chair up to the door, I says to myself, says I, 'Well, I hope, whoever it is, it will be a light weight.'"

"In a few minutes a young lady came down the steps, and when she stopped before the chair, and made as though to get into it, it gave me quite a turn, for I had never thought this was the party I was expected to drag out. She looked too young and too well, to my mind, to need such a thing as a bath-chair; for though they are a convenience, I suppose, sir, at times, I've never ridden in one myself, and I never wish to. However, this young lady took her seat in mine, quite natural like, and as I was arranging the footstool for her feet (Lor! what little feet they were, to be sure!) and buttoning the apron over her dress, I took the opportunity to look at her face."

"I don't know if I am right, sir, or if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me then, as it does this

day, to be the sweetest countenance as I ever clapped eyes on. 'Twasn't so much that her eyes were large and blue, or that her hair curled all about her shoulders in such a lavish manner, as that there was a sort of look in her face—well! I ain't no hand at description, sir, but 'twas such as we chair-men, don't get every day from genteel folk; it was a sort of 'Thank you!' look, as if I wasn't quite a beast of burden and nothing else. As I caught her eye she smiled at me so sweet, and she says in a low voice: "I'm afraid you're tired, man?"

"Ladies are very fond, as perhaps you know, sir, of calling chair-men and fly-men, and such like, 'man,' if they don't happen to know their proper names. 'Tis a way they've got with them, and I've never objected to it; but it seemed to come out different from her lips to what it does from some—she said it so softly."

"I was tired, and I did not care to deny it, though I couldn't for the life of me think how she'd found it out. So I made answer that I was a trifle so, for the day had been warmish; and then she says, 'Please go very slow, and when you come to a less crowded part of the cliff, you can stop and rest yourself.'"

"I put the check string in and began to pull her along. She was no weight to speak of, not more than would steady the chair, and I started off quite briskly, and was turning toward the Esplanade, for it's mostly there that folk like to be taken, when she pulled the string and directed me t'other way."

"Go where there are few fewest people," she said. "All I want is a little fresh air."

"I thought it a queer fancy for a young lady to like to be alone, but my duty was to go where she told me. When I had pulled her along for about half a mile, she make me place the chair close to the railings, where she could look at the sea, and sit down on a bench to rest myself. It was just about this part, sir, that we stopped; I fancy that's what drove me here to-day."

"She didn't stay out above an hour, but I liked her pretty face and ways so much, that when she paid me my shilling, I asked her if I should call on the next to see if she should want the chair again. It's a common custom with us to call of a morning at the houses we know best, to hear if we shall be wanted in the afternoon. But the young lady was not sure if she should do so, and said something about the trouble it would be to me."

"No trouble, miss," I answered, "as my stand is close by." So then she said that I might do so, and I took note of the number of the house. I assure you, sir, I felt quite pleased on the following day when I received an order to call at the same time in the afternoon to take her out again. When the hour arrived, I was alone. People don't often go out alone in bath-chairs, particularly such a young person as this was; they mostly have a gentleman or lady, a brother or sister, or some friend, to walk by the side and converse with 'em. It must be dull work to be dragged past a lot of strangers and strange sights, and have no one with whom to exchange a word on what you see."

"But she didn't seem to have no one, nor did I see a single body make recognition of her as they passed. The gentlemen mostly stared, as well they might; to see a young creature being dragged about as if she was a feeble old woman, to say nothing of her face being an attraction; but still no one appeared to know her. As she was paying me on that second day, however, and I said, 'Thank you, miss,' as before, she grew very red in the cheeks, and she says, 'You must call me ma'am,' she says, 'not miss.'"

"I'm sure I begs you a thousand pardons, ma'am," I replies removing my hat; 'but the mistake lay in your looking so young; I should never have gone to think you were a married lady.' She didn't make me any answer, but she said 'Good night' rather hurried like, and she went up the steps of the house. Well, sir, to make a long story short, I dragged her out several times after that; not every day, though, for she told me she only needed the chair when she was too tired to walk any more, and yet couldn't bide quiet in the house. One morning I was rather later than usual in going for orders, and as I stopped my chair before the door (always take it wherever I go, for the boys play tricks with it if I leave it on the stand), before I had time to ring the bell she steps out into the verandah, and calls me in such a happy voice:

"I don't think I shall want the chair to-day, thank you, man."

"I looked up, and there she was, all fluttering in a white dress and blue ribbon."

"I can't abide them little verandahs to the lodging-houses about here. They may be an ornament to the house, though I can't see it; but they're nasty dangerous things, and I've known lives to be lost by them in my time. I felt quite nervous as I saw her leaning over to speak to me, so I answered quickly, 'all right, ma'am; thank you, ma'am,' and was going away, when a gentleman came out of the open window, and stood by her side. He was a young man, and by the way she looked at him I see at once that he must be her husband."

"You had better let him call, Amy," he said; 'you will be tired by that time, and he shall take you on the pier, while I go there to smoke.' She looked up so fond at him, while he spoke, and she says:

"I shall never be tired to-day," but he urged her to it again, and then she spoke to me to come up at the usual time that afternoon, and I promised her that I would."

"It was summer, then, sir, the same as now,

and I had been used to drag the young lady about from 6 o'clock till 8, or after, and as I went to fetch her that evening I felt quite glad to think that she should have a gentleman to go about with her and look after her, the same as other ladies."

"I couldn't help wondering, though of course 'twas no business of mine, why such a sweet creature should be left alone as much as she was; but I know as there are many gentlemen engaged in business who are obliged to live in London, and send their wives down to some such place as this for change, and I concluded it was the case here, and that the lady had come to Brighton for the sake of her health. Brighton's a fine air, sir; there's no sickness hardly as can stand against it, except one, and that's sickness of the heart!"

"I took her on the pier that evening, on the old pier (she wouldn't on no account go on the new one, though the gentleman tried to persuade her to it), and I think I never see two people more happy than they seemed, nor more fond over one another. He walked close to the chair, with his hand resting on the side, and as we were off the road, she put up both her little hands, and clasped them over his. When we reached the end of the pier (which is mostly deserted now that the new one is all the rage), the young lady got out, and bid me wait for her, and they strolled about together—he, with his arm round her waist most of the time—till it was close upon 9 o'clock, and the moon had been up for an hour. As he put her into the chair again, and wrapped a warm shawl round her shoulders, I hear her whisper to him, 'O, Harold! I am so happy!' and she looked it too: she was beaming all over, like the sun."

"No, sir, I ain't deaf, not rightly so, but we chairmen mostly give out that we're rather hard of hearing. Not that we wishes to know what people are conversing about, for it's not of much interest to us, but we find that they're more at their ease, and like it better as they fancy as the party dragging them can't hear a word they say."

"I suppose the lady—bless—her!—said something to the gentleman about me, because when he came to pay me he gave me two half crowns instead of three shillings, and as I was looking for the change in my old leather purse, he says he (that was his fun, you see, sir), 'keep it to drink the lady's health,' which I thought a most becoming act on his part, though I've often wished since he had acted in every particular as open and generous as he did to me that night. I thanked him kindly and moved on, and I suppose he left Brighton again the next morning, for I didn't see him for some time after that."

"One day—I mind me it was of a Saturday morning that this happened—when I called for orders at the lodging-house, there was a new servant-maid cleaning the steps, as I hadn't seen before, and she stared so when I told her to go and ask the lady on the first floor if she should want the chair that afternoon, that I decided in my own mind that she was stupid, particularly when she finished by saying as there wasn't no lady there. I knew the woman of the house, however, and as I was confabulating with the girl on the doorstep she come to speak with me herself, and a more vinegar look in any woman's face than I see in Mrs. Jellicoe's that day I am thankful to say I never come across before."

"Who may you be inquiring after?" she said, though she knew as well as I did."

"For the lady on the first floor," I answered. "Will you be so good as to ask if she will need the chair this afternoon?"

"There ain't no lady on my first floor," says Mrs. Jellicoe, 'nor has been for the last six weeks. The party as persuaded me to take her under a delusion, was give warning to yesterday. My rooms have been used to be let to the most respectable of persons; such a thing never happened to me before, and it'll take months to wipe out the harm she may have done to 'em. Golden guineas wouldn't repay me for the infamous deception as has been practised upon my good nature. As I told the gentleman only last when he tried to patch up matters, which he see how wrong he had been, and persuade me to let that young person remain here till morning. Not another night, I say, not another hour. There's 'arm and enough been done a'ready, I says. And such a name as I've bore through Brighton.'"

"She had worked herself into such a fume, sir, that her breathing was quite a pain to listen to."

"You can't be speaking of the young married lady as I've taken out so often in my chair?" I says; when she was that caught up by reason of the shortness of her breath that she couldn't but make a pause."

"Married lady?" she screamed at me; 'she ain't no more a married lady than you are! O, the deception I've laboured under. Took her in, I did, with never so much as a suspicion in me; but there! I've always been the most open of mortals; no one can breathe a word against my character, and how was I to guess at such a wickedness?'"

"Between you and I, sir, old Mrs. Jellicoe ain't been quite above the talk of Brighton herself, and so her talk sounded very much like smashing her own windows; but 'twould be no manner of use my reminding her of the circumstance then, for I was not only rather taken aback by what she told me, but I knew I should want to learn the lady's new address from her before we parted. So beyond saying: 'In course no, ma'am,' I held my tongue."

"I had heard rumours of the case," she continued, 'from Mr. Puddle, the pork-butcher, (who is quite the gentleman himself, I am sure), and putting that and some things I had noticed together I was determined that I would know the truth. So I walks up to the first floor yesterday afternoon, when the gentleman was here, and as I entered I says quite promiscuous: "If you please, ma'am, or miss, whichever it may be, I should wish to ask you, before this gentleman, if you happen to be married to him; for if not, I'd have you know my apartments is not for sitch."'"

"And what answer did she make?" I asked quickly. "I'm an old man, sir, and not over polished maybe myself, but it made me feel quite bad to think of that pretty gentle young creature being insulted by such a one as Mother Jellicoe, and I felt glad that the gentleman had been there to protect and speak up for her."

"Answer?" says Mrs. Jellicoe; 'what answer could she make? She got as red as a carrot, and she ran across the room to the gentleman's chair, and knelt down by it. He got red enough, too, I promise you, and he says, says he, "What do you mean by this conduct?" But Lor! I know them sort well enough, and none of their gammon won't do for me. "Show me your marriage lines," I says, 'or you go out of my house this day. I've reasons for believing,' I say, 'that the name this young person goes by ain't your name; and if so, why these rooms have always been let to respectable parties, and we don't want no others here.' At that she began to cry, but I wasn't going to have any of her nonsense, and so I told her pretty plainly. I gave her the rough side of my tongue. I can tell you, and the end of it was that they cleared out, bag and baggage, before an hour was over their heads, and went, the Lord knows where; but they never darken my doors again."

"What was the name the lady went by?" I asked of her as quiet as I could command myself to speak."

"Mrs. Harold; but she ain't no Mrs., take my word for it; nor his name ain't Harold, either."

"The lady have called him so in my hearing," I said."

"Ah! it may be his Christen name, but that's a common trick. It ain't his surname. His portmanteau, or what-not, was marked with three letters—H. A. L., and Mr. Puddle, he says, as in the billiard-rooms above here he's known as Captain Lawton. Anyway, that don't alter the case. Whatever's his name, he must find another house for that young person, for she don't lodge here."

"And you can't tell me where they've gone to?" I asked, as I made ready to start again."

"No! that I can't; and I wonder at a respectable man like yourself for wanting to know. There's many a real lady in Brighton as would never use your chair again if she knew you had pulled such as her in it."

"Well, sir, I felt down enough as I dragged the old chair away again; for, if you'll believe me, the woman was right, and there's plenty here mean enough to refuse to employ a chairman or fly-man if they found out such to be the case—as if the chair could hold the infection, and they'd take it. It always sets me a thinking when I see a lady so very careful over her character, that maybe she hasn't got much of it left to lose, poor thing! However, that's neither here nor there."

"I'm most 'shamed to say that I gave up the idea of finding out the young lady's new address (which had been so strong upon me at first) because of this very reason, and that I had a wife and family, and a poor man must think of his bread. But I often caught myself wondering whereabouts she lived, and whether justice would ever be done her by the gentleman whom I had liked so much before I heard Mrs. Jellicoe's story."

"But you must be getting fairly tired of my talk, sir," said the old chair-man, interrupting himself, and turning to where I sat on the bench beside him. I assured him that I was not; but on the contrary felt much interested in his narrative and anxious to hear how, and under what circumstances, it was that he had met with the poor young lady again."

"It wasn't till three months afterwards, sir," he said, resuming his story, "and though I saw her constant from that time till this day one week ago, there don't seem much more to tell. Work seemed sluggish up at the east end, and so I took a fancy one day to move a little lower down; and as I was crawling along outside the Esplanade railings, looking out for a fare, but thinking of anything but the young lady I have been speaking of, I see her again. She was walking slowly along the Esplanade, leaning on the arm of the same gentleman, and looking, I suppose, for a chair, for as soon as she came alongside of mine, she calls out, 'O! there's my old man, Harold. Do let me have him!' so he beckoned to me, and I stopped at once, quite pleased to think she should know me again."

"She came up to my chair, and as the gentleman put her in it I couldn't help observing how much more delicate she looked than she used to do."

"I pulled her home to lodgings somewhere near Cliftonville (which is the new name they've got for a part of Hove, sir, and no improvement, in my opinion), and as she entered the house she sent the servant out to me with a message."

"O! if you please, Mrs. Anderson says, will you call for orders to-morrow as you used to do?" and I promised that I would. So she was going by another name now, and Anderson wasn't Lawton, nor anything like it. So I gave up my hope