

JUNE.

SONNET BY HENRY PRINCE.

On gentle gales, up-blowing from the West,
She comes! like long-expected friend, of whom
I oft have said, "She cannot come too soon,
So long'd have I to press her to my breast."
How sweet her breath, that falls upon my cheeks
Like odorous incense from a thousand flowers!
Her gentle voice, like song from elfin bowers
In tones mellifluous to my spirit speaks;
I gaze enraptured on her azure skies,
I feel the pressure of her hand so fair,
As tenderly I part her golden hair,
And give my look of love to her blue eyes.
Then grief steals o'er me, thinking oh! how soon
The halcyon days will pass of my beloved JUNE.
Montreal, 1877.

THE FRIEND OF THE HERO.

I.

THE BRUTAL LIFE.

"What would the world be without passion?" asked Thomas.

"A better place," said Orlando, "and a healthier, as it would be without champagne."

"And romance?" asked Thomas, plaintively. "Romance is to passion as the morning soda-water to the champagne of the evening. We should be better without either."

"Thank heaven I don't take the rough view of the world," said Thomas, hotly.

"The brutal life for me," said Orlando, rolling over on the inn lawn. "I have had enough of culture for this year, and enough of society. Now I shall eat when I am hungry and always have room for my elbows, dance when I feel light-hearted and always have space for my legs, burn my white ties, free my neck from the collar, and, above all, breathe air."

Here Orlando filled his capacious lungs and stretched his long limbs, which were covered with spotless white flannel.

Thomas looked at his friend with an expression of disappointment and perplexity.

"Let us be brutal for a change," continued Orlando, with an air of moral earnestness; "or vegetable, and drink in sun and air. Waiter, a pot of ale."

When he had refreshed himself with a draught, he sprang to his feet, and said, "And now let us be off."

"I hope you won't think I am annoyed," said Thomas, anxiously, "but I think I should like to walk to-day, and join you this evening, if you don't mind sculling the boat down alone and taking my bag."

"I shan't expect to see you," said his friend, shaking his head with much solemnity. "In an hour you will be settled under a hedge with one of the ten volumes of 'A Placid Existence,' or 'Thoughts of a Suburban Grandmother,' or 'Gayer Moments of an Upper Tooting Curate,' or 'Gentle Dreams for Gentle Souls,' or—but enough. You see the effect of forcing such food upon me. I am suffering from a reaction. I am wedded to the brutal life." Then he laughed aloud, shook his friend playfully by the shoulders, and betook himself to the boat.

Thomas watched his friend as he rowed away with an expression half admiring, half pathetic. It seemed very sad to him that so glorious a creature should be so hard of heart, strong, bright, and as cold as a diamond. And yet he could not find fault with one who swung so grandly forward, filling his broad chest and straightening his shapely arms, and then with scarce an effort of strong back and thighs sent the boat flying along the water. Orlando shouted a farewell, and Thomas sighed and smiled, went indoors and paid the bill, and so started on his journey.

It was still early morning, and the dew was on the grass; the sky was not a pitiless blue, but tender and made softer by little fleecy clouds; and about the low green hills in the distance a wayward shower was sweeping. An April day had come to freshen the close of a thirsty June. The heart of the young wayfarer grew light, and his lips began to babble of little joys. Surely before the close of such a day something wonderful must happen. The fitful air was full of vague promises; each scent, as it grew fainter with the growth of day, hinted a memory too sweet for a regret. Thomas stepped out as gay as troubador. The hours seemed endless before him, each moment a new joy, and surely somewhere a great surprise to crown the day. He thought with pity of Orlando, for whom no wonderful thing was reserved. He was full of whimsical thoughts, laughing and blushing now and then at his own absurdity. He pulled off his hat to the honeysuckle in the loose grown hedge, and stepped aside from the path of a beetle magnificent in green: he stopped to whisper to the sweet-brier rose, and to hear the sage counsel of a pragmatical finch. He lingered by the cottage porch if haply some little damsel might step out to fasten the loose spray of roses. He watched a light cart come jogging towards him, and wondered who was in it: till lazy Sally was jolted by in the sunlight, and he began to wonder if she had a lover. While his thoughts were yet busy with Sally, and he was humming some words to a girl, who was no lazy or beautiful, and who knew she ought not to walk with a gentleman; while he was musing on dairies and daisies and cool pastures and three-legged stools, and fancying the Corydon with ribbons at his knees, and Bob Halker in corduroy; and when day was still young,—he heard the quick feet of ponies behind him, and before he had time to

imagine a lovely driver, she had passed. Only a vision of soft fair hair, a face half curious, half shy, but very sweet shadow; and yet the young man thought that something remarkable had happened. He stood still and stared with the murmured song hushed on his lips. Away went the ponies, sleek, round, and sure of foot, happy in the thought of corn and in the light hand of their lady. Thomas pushed through a gap in the hedge, and ran up the sloping field, whence the hay had just been carted. From the high ground he looked far down the road, till the little carriage was but a speck in the distance. Then he signed and solemnly shook his head, and then he looked across the country with a new sense of its loveliness. Fields of ripening corn stretched away from his feet to the bank of the delaying river. The wheat was scarcely stirred, and the hazy hair was murmurous with the hum of insects. Beyond the river lay meadows where cows were lazily feeding—meadows which far away rose slowly and softly into grassy hills. The sky was tender as the memory of an old love-story—everywhere was rest; and the impressionable Thomas, staring upward with wide eyes, gave himself up to dreams, and, dreaming, slept.

When Thomas woke the sun was high, and the charm of morning had passed away. He stretched himself rubbed his eyes, and wrinkled his eyebrows plaintively. Then he stared down the road, and was absurdly disappointed because he could not see the pony-carriage. There was nothing but hot and dusty miles laid out before him, plain and monotonous as the path of every-day duty. He gave a great sigh, and braced himself for the work. As he plodded on, he began to think himself a very unfortunate young man. Nothing ever came up to his expectations. How different the day would have been, if those pampered ponies had taken fright, and he had flung himself at their heads! So his imagination busied itself with that which might have been. He fancied Beauty in distress and Heroism flying to the rescue. It did not occur to him that he might have been run over; but he was sure that he would not have minded a slight injury. Suppose, for instance, that he had sprained his wrist, and that she had bound it with her own handkerchief. Suppose—but, after all, life was a poor affair; and romance was of the dark ages; things never happened exactly right; and the day had grown oppressively hot.

For uneasy thoughts there is no cure like walking. Abuse of the age sank gradually into a mechanical accompaniment of the footsteps, and finally vanished before a growing consciousness of hunger.

When Thomas entered the low porch of the village inn he was tired and hungry, but the burden of the day was gone. He found Orlando lying on another lawn, and breathing the evening as he had breathed the morning air—a little browner and a little stronger, but otherwise unchanged. He had ordered a stupendous dinner, and had tried the beer.

"A good day?" asked Thomas, throwing himself on the ground by his friend.

"Great," said the other; "and you?"

"Yes," said Thomas, doubtfully; "good enough."

"By the by, I fished out a woman."

"A what?"

"I pulled a woman out of the water."

"You have saved a woman from drowning?"

Thomas felt a sinking. He had left Orlando for a day, and on that day Orlando had had an adventure.

"An old woman?" he muttered.

"I should guess about twenty."

"Dark?" Thomas thought he should not mind so much if she were dark.

"Fair, tall, and—"

"Beautiful?"

"Women don't look pretty when they have just fallen into the water; but I think—"

"You think she was handsome."

"Yes. Come and dine."

"Tell me how it happened first."

Thomas listened eagerly, while his friend told his story as quickly as he could.

About two hours previously he was drifting lazily down the stream, when he heard a cry. He drove his sculls through the water, turned the corner, and saw a boat floating, bottom upwards, in the middle of the stream. He pulled off his shoes and flannel coat, and stood up. Then he saw a woman struggling in the water trying to reach the boat, but hampered by petticoats and weeds. Of course he plunged, and of course he pulled her out without the least difficulty. Indeed, as he was careful to explain to his friend, the girl kept her presence of mind so well that it was quite unnecessary to hit her on the head, or seize her by the ears, or adopt any of the authorised means of saving drowning persons.

Thomas shuddered at the idea of seizing a young lady by the ears.

"And now to dine," cried Orlando.

"Who is she?" asked his friend.

"She is Jeanie. Her father is a Mr. Dorian, and his place is one of the nicest on the river. The bore is, that I must scull up there in the morning. I never should have got away from the paternal gratitude if I had not promised."

"And what shall I do?" asked Thomas, feeling painfully unimportant.

"Oh, I told them about you, and they said I might bring you."

"And you are a hero," thought Thomas as he followed his friend's broad back to the shoulder of lamb. Then he thought of himself as the friend of the hero, and sighed once more over the good behaviour of those ponies.

I.

"Here's flowers for you."

The next morning, after an early swim and a great breakfast, the two friends turned their boat's head up stream, and set out for Raynham Farm.

Orlando, overflowing with delight in oar, and stream, and summer air, burst ever and anon into conventional expressions, uttered in a fine tone of mockery. "May I ask for a dance?" he shouted. "Where are we to sit? When do you ride?" and then with a great burst of laughter he hazarded the observation, "I think I know your brother."

Thomas, swinging steadily behind his friend's broad shoulders, could not keep his eyes from the bank, gracious with river-flowers—the iris standing tall, strong, and graceful in the stream, or crowned with gold among the meaner reeds; the forget-me-nots nestling by the dimpled water; the fair, white water-lilies withdrawn shyly into shadowed nooks; and loose strife frequent in the more common crowds. The boat passed on by cows standing deep in the pool; by the swan-mother busy in a stately fashion among the rushes, while her mate sailed near, proud as a king, and ready ruffled for war; by grand clusters of trees, and creeks half hidden in the tangled thicket; by trim gardens and wild hanging woods. So the rowers moved from beauty on to beauty, with ears charmed by the gossip of birds, and soothed by the rushing of the far-off weir. So they bent to the oar, and were not aware of rowing when they came to the smooth shelving lawn of the sweetest of river-side places. And on the lawn fair girls were moving gladly, and they tossed the ball from one to another. Now when they saw the two young men run their boat carefully by the old water-steps, and ship their oars, Letty and Jo, who were young girls, and still in the schoolroom, shrank back, and began to whisper together, and to glance, and Jo almost to giggle; but Jeannie, although she paused for a moment like a startled deer, and let the ball lie idle at her feet, came presently forward with her head up, and looking with open honest eyes. She came neither quickly or slowly, giving the young men time to fasten their boat, before she met Orlando with a little sun-burnt hand outstretched. "Please let me thank you again," she said, "and don't be angry."

The young man laughed somewhat sheepishly. "It was very hot," he said, "and I was glad of a plunge."

"But I might have drowned you."

"Not much fear," said he in the pride of his strength; "and besides, you behaved so well, and kept your head. It was nothing; and I feel such a fool when I am thanked."

Now, while these two were talking, Thomas was thinking many thoughts, as his custom was, and had all sorts of feelings; for the girl whom his friend had saved in the afternoon was she who had driven the ponies in the morning. All in a moment he was preposterously glad and absurdly wretched. It was a great thing that wonders should happen in an age when miracles are announced by telegram; but how might they not shatter a sensitive and sentimental man!

When Jeannie looked at Thomas, she wondered why his face had so many expressions, and what they all meant. She thought he was shy, and so when Orlando said, "This is Thomas, my friend," she smiled very kindly, and held out her hand. Then she explained to her guests that her father had been obliged to go to town, but would be back in the afternoon; that they were to dine and sleep there; that they might remain in flannel; and finally that their rooms were ready.

Before the friends had time to expostulate they found themselves and their bags being conducted by a servant to the house.

"What a wonderful little manager!" said Orlando, in a voice which he believes to be low.

"What a perfect child!" said Thomas to himself.

When they came back to the lawn Miss Dorian was alone, having sent her younger sisters to the schoolroom. She played the hostess with strange simplicity, and showed them all the small beauties of the place without a doubt of their interest. Orlando was unusually gentle, and Thomas thought of Una and the lion as he watched the pair before him.

Nor was the young woman unmindful of the shy man. She made many little remarks to him, and sometimes turned to look at him with sympathetic curiosity in her eyes. She laughed at something which the big Orlando said, and betrayed by the sound of her laughter a delight in fun which thrilled the hearers. When Una laughed, the lion roared with laughter; and so laughing and talking they went to see the shrubberies, the copperbeech, the monkey-puzzle, the hollow tree with the peep-hole towards the river, the old kitchen-garden half filled by intrusive flowers and sturdy lavender-bushes, the field with the new haystack, and the farmyard where the pigeons sunned themselves on the dull-red and the geese walked in procession, and the sweet-smelling stalls were ready for the heavy cows. Orlando talked of his admiration at every corner, but Thomas said little until they came to the stables.

"These are my ponies," said Miss Dorian with pride.

"I saw you driving them yesterday morning," said Thomas briefly.

"Did you?" asked she, kindling with interest. "How strange! It must have been you

I passed walking alone close to Darley Court. I remember wondering if my ponies would take fright."

"I wish they had," said he.

"You wish they had taken fright?" she asked, round-eyed with surprise.

"No, no. I beg your pardon. I meant something else."

He laughed uneasily as she still looked at him with frank curiosity. She thought him a mysterious young man.

When everything else had been duly admired the attention of the guests was called to the merits of the house, so roomy yet so modest, so near the river and so free from damp, with its old brick weather-stained and laced, but not strangled, by ivy, and its deep veranda cool all day long. Indeed it is in all respects what a house by the river Thames should be.

At luncheon Miss Jeannie Dorian presided with perfect self-possession, now checking her youngest sister with a glance, which it was equally impossible to defy and to resent, now encouraging that of meekest governesses, Miss Tubb. It was clear that this lady regarded Miss Dorian, who was at least ten years younger than herself, with extraordinary deference. When she ventured on a remark, she seemed to plead for her approval, and she put to her a series of chance questions, which had evidently been rehearsed in private. She blushed a good deal at finding herself in the society of two strange gentlemen, and was driven into desperate conversation by the eyes of her two pupils. She was painfully conscious that a new chapter would be added to the false history of her life, on which Jo, most imaginative of biographers, was always engaged. For many years romantic incidents had been growing round her uneventful life, and Jo would have long since raised her to the rank of the most heroic heroine that had ever been, had she not been checked by the chastening criticism of the more prosaic Letty. This romantic chronicle was the great delight of the schoolroom, and, on the whole, a not unpleasant torture to the victim. Yet when Orlando suggested a glass of ale or Thomas handed the strawberries, Miss Tubb trembled to think what was passing in her pupil's mind; while Jo shook her curly head at the governess, and burst out laughing at the surprised expression of Thomas. This contemplative young man was still more surprised when Miss Jeannie, who had been indulging herself with trifling talk, began to question him with becoming gravity about the Oxford colleges. Was not this too fast, and that too slow? She must find one where exactly the right amount of encouragement was given to athletics. Could a man row and read? Could he read and hunt once a week? When Thomas had answered several questions of the kind, Orlando began to laugh and ask her if she were going to the University.

"No," she said, sedately, "but I have a brother at Eton between me and the girls."

"The girls!" muttered Orlando under his breath—and presently asked her, almost diffidently, if she arranged everything.

"Yes," she answered, raising her eyebrows a little: "I am the eldest, and I have to do things."

Then she turned to the governess, and asked her if she and the girls would join them later on the lawn. Miss Tubb murmured her thanks, blushed under Jo's eyes, and looked appealingly at Letty, who got her out of the room.

"She is quite invaluable," said Miss Jeannie, gravely, to the young men; and then a sudden flush came over her face, and her mouth was round as a child's as she said, "Oh, do you play lawn tennis?"

In a few minutes she was ready, clad in a suitable gown, and armed with her favourite racquet, and was quickly absorbed in a tremendous struggle with Orlando. She laughed when the genial young giant reached strokes which seemed impossible, and he laughed twice as loud admiring her skill and quickness, her eager looks, and all the beauty which seemed nothing to her. Thomas, watching the players, thought how much alike they were, and yet how different, and how very quickly they had become friends. For some reason he could not feel their gaiety, and his thoughts wandered off with sympathy to Miss Tubb, who had of course been disappointed in life, as anybody could see.

This was one of these rare summer days which seem to have no end. Each is a life as happy as uneventful, and its chronicle must be tedious as the biography of a maiden aunt. Yet they are the great slumberous flowers of that garden where memory loves to wander in idle hours, as the laden bee goes back, and cannot have enough of sweetness. This long day was scarcely old when Mr. Dorian came home. He found his family drinking tea in the veranda; and Miss Jeannie, who had run to meet him like a child, came leading him by the hand towards the young men. This father was evidently the kindest of men, for Letty proudly claimed his other hand, Zoe flung herself upon him, and Miss Tubb expanded in his presence. He had been all his life in business, and had made constant efforts to believe in the wickedness of the world, but to no purpose. There were tears in his eyes as he held out his hand to Orlando, and said, "I must thank you again for what you did yesterday. I don't know how to say—I don't know how to think of what might have been," and he put his arm round his eldest child as he spoke.

"Please don't speak of it," cried Orlando in a great hurry, "it was nothing: I could not have done less for a cat."

Hereupon Miss Dorian burst out laughing,