

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

LOST THOUGHTS.

My heart's lost children, whither have you fled?
Or wherefore have you left me comfortless?
Ungrateful children, whom I nursed and fed
With my own soul's pure milk, and hoped to bless
By your ensuing presence the sad days
When love and friendship shed no more their rays.

Lost in the mighty wilderness of Mind!
Gone, it may be, to other souls less kind
Than she who gave you birth, and without care
For all the little charms to me so fair!
Will you return no more? Return my own?
Perhaps you have but slept and will awake.
Awake to bless me—I am all alone—
And let no other your sweet solace take!

JOHN READER.

DROPPING AN ACQUAINTANCE.

PERHAPS, reader, thou didst never chance to have a too highly respectable acquaintance; if so, pass on without perusing this experience, and thank thy stars that thy life has been so fortunate. Many persons, more particularly those who move in the first circles, and those, upon the other hand, whose lines have fallen in the back-yards of life among the oyster-shells and broken ginger-beer bottles—the Alphas and the Omegas of society—are never troubled with a single too highly respectable acquaintance. It is the youth of the middle-classes, among whose ranks I had myself the misfortune to be born, who alone suffer in this respect, and for the most part without hope of remedy. This dreadful scourge is generally of an age varying from forty-five to sixty, and has almost always, as he is continually telling us, enjoyed the friendship of our father. "I was your father's friend, sir, for many years; I knew him, sir, before you were born or thought of; I wish you may be half so good a man as he," are sentences which our too highly respectable acquaintance carries about with him, as it were, phylactery-wise, or embroidered upon the borders of his garments, so that, meeting him, it is quite impossible to escape from them. I am inclined to allow—for I would be charitable even with an incubus—that he takes upon himself the triple functions of guide, philosopher, and friend, in the first instance at least, from a kindly motive; but afterwards, when he merges all these attributes in the Unmitigated Bore, he has no such humane feeling, but watches our young eyes grow dim, our young mouth open despairingly, our entire being collapse beneath his withering influence with a hideous joy. It is impossible that he can be ignorant of what he is doing in this respect. The serpent, who, after having lubricated his victim, takes the head of him into its mouth, must needs be aware of its own intention of swallowing him, however tedious the process may be, and however great a distance his fore-doomed heels may project at the commencement of the operation; and our Bore is intelligent enough to know that likewise. This cruelty is generally the single crime of our too highly respectable acquaintance; he is a man, I regret to say, without any one of the pleasant vices except, perhaps, that of over-lining; and even this, since he rarely asks us to dine with him, he might, as far as we are concerned, just as well be without. He often, however, invites us to drop in and take a glass of wine in a friendly way, after he has concluded his repast. If we don't go, he tells us on the ensuing day that he is afraid we do not find him the good company he always strives to be to young men, and begs us never to miss a pleasanter invitation for the mere sake of coming to listen to an old Twaddle like him; by which means he, of course, irrevocably binds us to his fatal mahogany, upon the next occasion of his asking us thither. "An old Twaddle!" Think of our too highly respectable acquaintance venturing to make use of such a phrase as that! The very term which defines his too respectable self to a hair! What hope can there possibly be of this dear old gentleman's reformation, when he can employ such an expression as that with the most callous indifference, and without one shadow of self-reproach! If, on the other hand, we go to this wine-party—which consists of himself and ourselves, although there is a glass always placed for the chance (another of his absurd self-complacencies) of somebody else voluntarily "dropping in" and joining us—the port we confess is old and excellent, but the conversation—that is to say, the monologue, the endless narration of anecdote—is not new either, but parades of what has been not ill termed the "fine old crust" character. There is some story of his, in connection perhaps with the calling out of the Rutlandshire Yeomanry in 1826—"Or, let me see, would it be in '26 or '27? (he never gets this right by any chance), which we have probably heard nearly one hundred times. When we enter the room, he is surprised to see us not in full dress; he does not care about such things himself, in the least, but he thinks that not dressing is a bad habit; he may be old-fashioned, and even antiquated, but that is his opinion; all which he, however, prefaces with "My very dear young friend," the lubrication which I have above referred to as being practised by the great serpent family. Presently, and after a story or two, our too highly respectable acquaintance, with a shadow of paleness observable upon his usually glowing countenance, inquires whether we ever do such a thing as smoke tobacco? The first time this occurs, we hasten, under the delusive impression that he is about to offer us some grateful sedative, to affirm that we do, and are extremely fond of doing it. Upon which he replies that he is truly grieved to hear it, and that the very smell of tobacco about the clothes or hair—"And, my dear young sir, you must excuse me if I liken you at present to the Fitcher, a very intense description of polecat"—always makes him exceedingly unwell. Our too highly respectable acquaintance, who is never rude, treads, indeed, upon the very borders of unpoliteness in respect of this matter, until we solemnly promise that he shall not have cause to find fault with us again. There is no end to the deep influence which this sort of person may obtain in the mind of a youth by diligent boring; and if it were always to be exercised in the anti-tobacco direction, there would perhaps be little cause to regret it.

He, however, seldom rests satisfied until he has separated us from the companions of our own age and choice; made us engage a seat for a term of years at his particular chapel; with drawn us from our own profession, and placed us in the office of one of his relatives who generously receives us without premium, but gains at the same our gratuitous services for an indefinite time; and finally married us to his niece, after which we cease to be responsible beings, and only by the visibly increased importance of our too highly respectable

acquaintance—the external swelling of the monster consequent upon the total absorption of its victim—announce our own existence at all.

I first met with my own Mentor, who may very well stand for a type of all his class, at a great Whitebait dinner at Black-wall. I was a lad then only just escaped from school, and of course entirely ignorant of how to conduct myself aright at such a solemnity. Instead of husbanding my magnificent appetite in the proper manner, I actually commenced operations by going twice to Turtle as well as to the Ice Punch which goes along with it, like music with words. A reverend sage, however, portly and dignified, but with an eye which seemed benign, who sat on my right hand, interposed judiciously, and arrested for the time what would have been—and was eventually—a very serious catastrophe.

"Young man," said he, in unctuous but impressive tones, "beware of what you do. Appetite, a gift vouchsafed by the gods to youth, and to youth alone (he sighed), is a talent which, misapplied and recklessly wasted, is almost worse than apathy to food. There is many a man of matured judgment who would have given twice the cost per head of this entertainment—and that will not be less than three guineas, if so little—for the power which you have just been manifesting with regard to that soup. But consider what is to follow; think of the Future, my dear young friend, and guide yourself at all times by the carle. See here, what an enormous distance—no less than five courses off—is that whitebait which we are nominally assembled here to eat. Does the prudent rider, however confident of his generous steed, urge it to full career at the first beginning of the race, or, far less, compel it to surmount any fence a second time? Be temperate, my dear young friend, and restrain your natural impetuosity, or, take my word for it, you will be exceedingly ill."

My highly respectable acquaintance spoke like a book; his prophecy was not unfulfilled. The last thing which I remember, before I succumbed to the various unaccustomed influences of that whitebait feast, was the spectacle of this gentleman refreshing the tips of his ears by means of a napkin dipped in rose water—"A device, my young friend, very noteworthy, as oftentimes renewing the enjoyment of food when your case would seem otherwise hopeless."

I have reason to suspect that, upon the golden grace-cup being handed round on that occasion, I behaved myself somewhat indecorously, and instead of bowing in a stately manner to my opposite neighbour over the goblet, that I put its cover on the top of my head after the Chinese manner, and winked at him. My highly respectable acquaintance, hinted at least at something of the sort next day, but blandly added that, being touched with my youth and inexperience, he had made it right with the company. From that moment the yoke was placed upon my neck. This terribly bland old gentleman, with all his faults and weaknesses, became my Old Man of the Sea. Ridicule itself in vain attempted to shake the throne of my tyrant. My once familiar friend, Dick Wildotes, discovered to me the following incident in the past life of my self-constituted guardian, in the vain hope that such a knowledge would set me free. He told me that Mr. Pawkins—which was my too highly respectable acquaintance's inoffensive title—was called by his equals—although I did not then believe in the existence of such persons—"Presence-of-mind Pawkins;" and he also told me why. My mentor never narrated the anecdote in my hearing, but, as I am given to understand that he has often done so with much complacency, there is no harm in my retelling it.

Mr. Pawkins, then, was once in a pleasure-boat with some ladies out at sea, the only male in the company, and one of his fair companions had the misfortune to fall overboard. It must have been long indeed before the crinoline epoch; but something or other of that nature buoyed the unfortunate young woman up, so that she was able to take hold of the boat. This was the opportunity which my too highly respectable acquaintance seized to make himself a name, as above. "I saw," said he, "that the boat was a very frail one; I perceived that the young lady's admission amongst us over the gunwale would very probably upset and drown us all; therefore, although I deeply sympathised with her in her misadventure, I caught hold of an oar, and, with the greatest presence of mind, rapped away at her knuckles until she let go." Wherefore he is well called Presence-of-mind Pawkins until this day. I felt that this was by no means a creditable achievement; but the man was still a hero to me. He had somewhat fanatical views upon religious questions, Dick used to tell me, but I went to my too respectable acquaintance's house of worship for all that. He possessed a great deal of house-property, and had christened an entire street of his "Agur's Buildings;" instead of calling it after the name of Mr. Plimlins, who was the actual architect. "Agur's prayer," he observed, "was for neither riches nor poverty, and these buildings are only for the middling class of people." I could not but see the vulgarity of this sort of practical piety, but I felt obliged to forgive my eminent house-proprietor even that.

I ascribe my first determined aspirations after freedom to the continuance of the war in the Crimea; but for that and the unparalleled sufferings to which it exposed me, I might be still bearing my chain; it galled me, however, in such a manner during that epoch, that I was resolved at any hazard to be freed from it. Upon the subject of that campaign, I repeat, my too highly respectable acquaintance out-Pawkinsed Pawkins, bored me beyond the limits of human endurance. Upon every commander, and upon every military movement, he gave an opinion as tedious and as positive as though he had been paid thirty guineas a sheet for it. The late Lord Raglan haunted me like a dreadful phantasm; the very names of Lucan and Cardigan became to me as the beer which has been left in yesterday's tumbler; the bare mention of the Times—whose conduct I admired in secret because he hated it—was to my ill-used ears like Cayenne pepper to the back of a flogged soldier. At last, at a little breakfast-party in my own apartments, whither he came, uninvited, to tread upon me, and patronise the rest of the company, he overstepped all limits, and presented me, involuntarily, with my manumission. The conversation having been directed in the usual Criméan channel, my poor friend Wildotes had the temerity to give it as his opinion that the Sebastopol garrison would continue to have provisions supplied to them in abundance.

"What, sir!" roared my too highly respectable acquaintance, choked with unwonted opposition, "why, how should that be, when even now, in Archangel, they are giving for the coarsest wheat fifteen roubles the chetwort?"

I am not sure about the number; it may have been fifteen or fifty, but I am certain about "roubles the chetwort."

"I do not know what a chetwort is," cried Wildotes angrily, "and I don't believe that you know either."

I trembled at the audacity of this young man; but the ground-floor, upon which we happened to be, remained firm beneath us nevertheless; and presently, upon the production of a tobacco-pipe, my too highly respectable acquaintance left his youthful enemy in the possession of the field.

"I congratulate you, my dear fellow," cried Wildotes as the door closed with rather a slam behind that portly figure—"my friend, you are a free man."

"Sir," said I with indignation, "it is you that are free, and even impertinent. How am I to defend myself, think you, when Mr. Pawkins catches me alone?"

My position had indeed become such that no choice remained between bidding an open defiance to my too highly respectable acquaintance, or becoming his cringing slave for the remainder of one of our lives. Wildotes and myself, therefore, having resolved ourselves into a committee of private safety, determined upon a course of action which had for its object the immediate dropping of my philosopher and guide.

Our arrangements being completed, I remained in my own apartment, awaiting his august presence in a frame of mind far from enviable; not, as I well knew, that he would manifest any signs of anger—his feelings, when irritated, always taking the much more fatal form of injured virtue—but because he would be sure to proceed to absorb me, with a more than usual amount of previous lubrication. "My dear young friend, in whom I take so great an interest," and "the son of my esteemed old friend" (he travelled in the company of my father once, in an Islington omnibus), were, as I expected, among the opening expressions of his harangue; then he bewailed my choice of associates, and my habits of extravagance exemplified in having hot meats at breakfast of which he had partaken, by the by, himself, with considerable relish; he predicted my certain ruin if I continued in these courses instead of sticking to my desk. As he pronounced this prediction, he approached that article of furniture, upon which a small square piece of card was lying, half-covered by a pen-wiper, as though it courted obscurity. This card he took up and waved in his hand, as was his frequent custom, in order to give effect to his oratory. I turned pale with agitation, and protested that it was a private document. Mr. Pawkins observed in reply that, considering our mutual relations, there could be no such thing as any privacy in documents, and then perused it with attention.

It was now his turn to grow pale.

"Is it possible, young man," cried he, when he had quite finished it, "that this can be yours? Have I nourished you in my bosom so long?"

"Mr. Pawkins," said I, plucking up all my courage, with the knowledge that Wildotes was in the cupboard listening to us, "you have done nothing of the sort."

"In my bosom so long," continued Mentor, as though unconscious of the interruption, "without rendering you incapable of possessing such a!"

"Sir," cried I, as he approached the fire with the evident intention of destroying the memorandum, "that paper is a legal tender; it has a value expressed upon it of three pounds, fourteen shillings, and sixpence; if that is consumed, we shall have to pay the money."

"He!" ejaculated my too highly respectable acquaintance with contempt, but altering his fell purpose nevertheless—"see, young man, did you say? Miserable, hard-nosed, unprofitable, disreputable prodigal, I abandon you for ever!"

My Mentor left the apartment with quite a halo of respectability surrounding the very back of his head.

"Wildotes," cried I, as the young man burst from his concealment, "my friend, my benefactor, I will give you a dinner; your ingenious device has saved me from all further persecution; I have dropped for ever my too highly respectable acquaintance!"

And so, in truth, I had; the simple medium of this effectual release having been merely a *presence-of-mind* trick.

In conclusion, I need scarcely add that, in publishing this veracious history, I have no sort of intention of throwing ridicule upon that friendship which is found to exist not seldom between an old man and a youth. Than such a feeling, born of a kindly regard upon the one side, and of an affectionate respect upon the other, there seem to me few things more beautiful. But where there is no real regard, but only officiousness, against which whatever real respect there be must needs be sooner or later chafed away, where dictation is in the place of authority, and a spirit of meddling in that of kind solicitude, the spectacle of an unfortunate young man with a too highly respectable acquaintance is pitiable to see.

CURIOUS SONG OF A LOVER TO HIS SWEETHEART:—

Your face	your tongue,	your wit,
So fair,	so sweet,	so sharp,
First bent,	then drew,	then bit,
Mine eye,	mine ear,	my heart.
Mine eye,	mine ear,	mine heart,
To like,	to learn,	to love,
Your face,	your tongue,	your wit,
Doth lead,	doth teach,	doth move
Your face,	your tongue,	your wit,
With beams,	with sound,	with art,
Doth blind,	doth charm,	doth rule,
Mine eye,	mine ear,	mine heart.
Mine eye,	mine ear,	mine heart,
With life,	with hope,	with skill,
Your face,	your tongue,	your wit,
Doth feed,	doth fast,	doth fill.
O face!	O tongue!	O wit!
With frowns,	with cheek,	with smart,
Wrong not,	vex not	wound not,
Mine eye,	mine ear,	mine heart.
This eye,	this ear,	this heart,
Shall joy,	shall bend,	shall swear,
Your face,	your tongue,	your wit,
To serve,	to trust,	to fear.

The lines may be read either from left to right or from above downwards. They may also be read in various directions.