

Poetry.

A FRIENDLY WORD.

Ah! how many spirits wither,
While their sighs remain unheard,
Their hopes scattered here and thither—
Uncheered by kind or friendly word.
Flooding on in life's dark way—
Dark, for no sympathy is theirs;
Cold clouds obscure the light of day,
And chill them for coming years.

Look at those whom faith hath given
A life of poverty and toil,
All that for which they've striven,
Seems their heart's best hopes to foil.
Still on the stormy road of care,
'Twould cheer their hopes depressed,
And make their lot seem better far
To hear a soothing, friendly word.

See the stricken, sad forsaken,
Sinking 'neath the power of grief,
Like the reed that's bruised and shaken,
Trembling like the Aspen leaf.
Sympathy might chase away,
The tears from eye-lids blurred,
And darkness might be turned to day,
By force of one kind friendly word.

Misfortunes children, sternly driven,
For a fault from friends and home—
All their prospects blasted, riven,
Forced in loneliness to roam.
Oh! had kindness conquered pride,
And reason's voice been heard—
The aching heart would glad confide,
In one gentle, friendly word.

Should fortune lavish smiles upon thee,
Be not heartless, selfish, cold—
Mayhap 'twas kindness that won thee,
When in sorrows blighting mould.
Oh! then remember—'tis not dear—
The pleasant look or smile conferred,
But help the lonely soul to cheer
By kindly action—friendly word.

WANT.

God's providence this earth has filled
With all of goodly things,
And year by year its surface tilled
By man, to man life brings.
The summer sun it still doth shine
On countless miles of grain,
How is it then that men decline,
And die in hunger's pain?

Still, hand in hand with virtuous life,
Starvation stalks our land,
And daily 'mid the growing strife,
Some fall beneath its brand.
The wail is fierce, the cry is loud—
Almost to wake the dead;
A tattered, frail, and famished crowd,
They cry, "Bread! Give us bread!"

There is a deep and quenchless thirst,
A thirst that ne'er can bless;
With love of gold the age is crust,
Man's love to man grows less.
There is a gulf 'twixt rich and poor,
That widens every day;
A bitter, sad, one-sided war,
Ah! who shall stop the fray?

God and his pitying angels view
The scene from distant skies;
All men are equal, precious too,
In His Almighty eyes.
Then, man of wealth, cast down thy shield
Of selfishness and pride,
And walk life's suffering battle-field,
With succour at thy side.

Tales and Sketches.

CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE;
OR, THE REAL AND THE IDEAL.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Cambley was not one to whom to give is strange; further, she was even capable of carrying an act of self-denial far to benefit another; but she could not render to that other the tie of gratitude, a light and graceful ornament, which it is felt to be a privilege to wear; from her hands it was rather taken as a heavy and pressing bond, and worn as a fetter, all ways felt as very galling to a noble spirit. Few have learnt the art of giving in its true refinement; with Mrs. Cambley it ended, as it had begun, in one sacrifice, or one generous act, and by such she seemed to feel that she had bought the privilege, and gained the right, to count its loss, and reckon up its inconveniences or vexations, even in the presence of the individual for whom they were incurred; and by such a practice she would often give them a weight and a poignancy they were by no means really entitled to. Thus, in the case of Edith, she had willingly, almost eagerly, acquiesced in her husband's wish—when his sister died, and left Edith without other protection than that which he might afford her, she having been a widow for many years—that her child should be received into his family, and her education be carried on with Grace's; this plan was accordingly acted upon, and every comfort secured to Edith before Mrs. Cambley discovered how much extra expense and additional trouble she had incurred by Edith's admission into their family; from that time Mr. Cambley was frequently reminded of it by his wife's

remarks, and Edith herself had many a sad hour in consequence of their frequency. At his death Mr. Cambley, by special request, provided for Edith, who had entered his house almost penniless, leaving her under the guardianship of her aunt, her education to be perfected as well as Grace's. Perhaps this fact in itself excited a feeling of jealousy against her in Mrs. Cambley's mind, often convincing itself in an unreasonable harshness of expression, and sometimes in an untrue assertion that Mr. Cambley had loved Edith as well, or better than his own child—overlooking the wide difference between the bare sufficiency which was to become Edith's, and the really handsome fortune Grace would inherit; nor considering at how little additional expense Edith received the same lessons as Grace, and how much Grace was benefitted by having a companion in them.

From Grace, Edith generally met with but little affection; the relation subsisting between them was a good deal that of exaction and compliance; but then, as Edith very rarely offered any opposition to a desire of her cousin's, and as, in many respects, she really added to her happiness, they continued to be on very good terms, although with widely different tastes and pursuits.

And now Edith turned her thoughts to Frank's friend; there was a little soreness in her remembrance of him; her annoyance of the night before had not yet been forgotten, and she felt there was nothing she would not sooner undergo than be made the subject of his contempt or sarcasm; she then began to compare the personal appearance of Mr. Travers with the portrait her imagination had drawn of him, aided by Frank's description.

She acknowledged that the comparison was favorable to him; he was all she had pictured, perhaps more. Frank had pronounced him not strictly handsome; certainly men look more for perfection of feature, and faultless proportions, to form their ideal of manly beauty; than do women; they look more truly to the force of expression, and the power of a noble countenance. Edith had been greatly struck by these qualities in Mr. Travers, his deep-speaking eye, and broad, intellectual brow, but perhaps still more by the low rich tone of his voice, by feeling rendered peculiarly melodious; yet with all her admiration, Edith was aware that there mingled a something of awe; she had felt in his presence a fear causing a want of clearness in her ideas, which appeared to make their utterance difficult or powerless; perhaps it was his dignified and somewhat cold manner, perhaps his searching glance, or it might even have arisen from the very desire which she acknowledged to herself of not appearing to disadvantage in his presence.

Having arrived at the Lodge, Edith sought the presence of Mary, and having carefully broken the news to her of Frank's arrival in Lawborough, she stated the subject of the message she brought from him.

For a moment Edith feared she had been too abrupt in her communication. The color came to her face with quick excitement, but a flood of tears relieved her.

She then gave, at Edith's solicitation her confidence, and the reason why, in her changed circumstances from riches to penury, she had relieved Frank from his engagement.

Edith, however, obtained from her a promise to see Frank, and having succeeded in her mission, she returned home, and on her way met Frank and Mr. Travers.

"What news, dear Edith," he said, taking her hand, "what news do you bring me? you have kept me in a fever of expectation all the morning."

"Good news," said Edith, "the very best."

"I may see her, then?" interrupted Frank, "when? now?"

"Yes, as soon as you please."

Frank's delight expressed itself in a most affectionate squeeze, which he gave to Edith's hand.

"I will not attempt to thank you, Edith," he said, "but you may in some measure understand how happy you have made me, for you know Mary; but tell me have you had any conversation with her?—has she explained to you what has caused us so much distress?"

"Yes," replied Edith, "but when I remind you that you may hear all from her own lips, I am sure you will not have patience to listen to my relation of it."

"You are right, I believe," said Frank. "Am I not on the way to the Lodge now?—I will not delay any longer—you do not advise me."

"What design are you meditating now, Frank?" said Grace, coming up with Mr. Travers to where they were talking.

"Edith will tell you," he replied, "and, Ernest, yet will understand what Edith has effected for me, when you hear from her for what purpose I now leave you."

"It is no very difficult riddle, Frank," said Grace, laughing; "your inattention to us all this morning, your impatience for Edith's return, and your joyful looks now, are important helps towards guessing it. Besides that, very hasty steps," she said, as Frank, with a hurried good-morning, turned from them and ascended the cliff, with such rapidity that portions of soft rock and loose clay, detached from their original position, fell under his quick steps to the sands below. As this fresh token of his careless speed met his friends, he heard Grace's merry mocking laugh, and turn-

ing to wave a good-humoured defiance, he took his way across the fields which led into the lane, at the bottom of which Mrs. Lester's house was situated. It hardly needs that we should follow him to give a description of what ensued; do not all know what such a meeting would consist of; deep happiness must be there since each are conscious that they have not swerved from the original truth of their affection, or even in one feeling proved inconstant. When such is the case the hour of re-union must be one of intense joy, whatever lesser shades obscure its brightness; there were mutual explanations, and a little reproach was mixed with them; but as Frank looked upon the still altered form of his beloved, and recognised the lines of the sorrow she had endured through her very love for him, he felt that it was a more delightful task to soothe her now, than to complain that he had not been permitted to do so earlier. He knew her love for the brother whom she had hoped to serve, and understood and appreciated well her whole intention; although he could not help, in a tone of tender reproach, exclaiming, "And did you think then, dearest, that I could not have loved a governess?"

"I thought of your mother, Frank," she answered; "how would she have borne her son's wedding one who has labored for her bread? Could I, either, betrothed to you, consistently have done so?"

Frank was silent, and thought how much was the worth a heart of that fine frame, to pay this debt of love but to a brother, and a look of fonder love was the only reply he made.

The morning beams of a fair spring sun, passing through the thick-tined branches of the lofty trees just budding into life, entered in rays of softened light the rich stained window of the beautiful church at Lawborough, and fell in one deep-colored stream around the altar scene, giving to the forms there grouped a peculiar and beautiful distinctness.

It was an early hour, and a spell of solemn thought appeared to rest within those still and sacred walls. The voice that broke their silence destroyed no part of its charm; it rose in words of solemn meaning, with high impressiveness and simple fervour; words, unrobbed of their power through falling upon ears closed against their precepts, or hearts dead to their spirit; words, that blessed and made enduring the bond of love that had long linked together the hearts of those to whom they were addressed; henceforth to make as one their sorrows, joys, and hopes! Through life should this tie exist, and death even might only stretch its cords, leaving to the trusting heart a hope that Heaven would witness their nearer and abiding union.

Edith Burton repeated those vows in the low tones of steadfast faith and perfect truthfulness; the deep repose of her manner speaking eloquence of her all-perfect trust and confidence in him to whom she pledged them. There was no changing expression seen upon her countenance; no mark of sudden or transient emotion; all evidenced the unruffled calm of holy and intense feeling. Her expression was one of undoubting reliance; her posture that of fervent devotion; and from each tone of Ernest's voice her heart gained strength and trust; so full, yet so low; rich with tenderness and love, serious from the high sense of the grave weight and solemn import attached to his words.

Scarce had the blessings which the Church pronounces over her faithful children been uttered, in the awed, hushed tone of one who feels himself engaged in the discharge of a sacred, delegated duty, than Ernest turned to clasps that true heart to his. Bending over her tenderly, he murmured—"My own Edith! my wife!" Edith's smile was one of the purest love, as she lifted her eyes to him; and then removing from his embrace she turned to Mr. Enfield, this time to receive from him the blessing of a father, most dear to her, from the many proofs he had given her of a love hardly less. His last words to her were—"My child, you will be happy; for God has taught you where to find help in adversity; He also will direct you how to acknowledge Him in prosperity. Let happiness, Edith, ever lead to raise your thoughts to Him; be in prayer earnest as in love!"

Tears of fervent gratitude for the past, and humble rejoicing hope for the future, filled Edith's eyes as she returned his affectionate farewell. Her joy was, indeed, full, but her heart beat high in thankful acknowledgement to Him who has bestowed upon her so rich a treasure of happiness.

THE EXPRESS TRAIN—A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

The blood-red light of sunset was mirroring itself in crimson splashes in the turbid tides of the great Western river; the blackbird was sounding its sweet whistle through the old primeval forest; and Jonathan Beers, sitting by his cabin door, smoked his solitary evening pipe, and thought vaguely of the church-bells that used to ring at evening-time in the far-off eastern village where he had been born and brought up, with the roar of Penobscot Bay in his ears.

"I'd like to hear them bells once again afore I die," mused old Jonathan. "But it ain't likely I'll ever go back now."

Even while those disjointed meditations

passed through his mind there was a light step on the cabin threshold, and the rustle of stiffly-starched pink calice, and his niece Dorothy came to the door.

"Tea's ready, uncle dear," she said. "And I've baked a real New England corn bread, and some ginger snaps, such as grandmamma used to make. And see, uncle, I've sliced up the little red peaches from the tree you planted yourself on the south side of the hill. Israel Esmayne said it wouldn't grow, but it has. I mean to keep a saucerful and a little cream for Israel to-night, just to show him."

Old Jonathan laid down his knife and fork. "Do you mean that Israel Esmayne is coming here to-night?"

"Yes, uncle," said Dorothy, stooping to recover a tea-spoon she had dropped—a slim tea-spoon with an antique silver shell carved on its handle—and coming up very rosy from the search. "Why not?"

"Take care, Dotty. That's all."

"Uncle, what do you mean?"

"I mean, child, that I'd rather lay you in your grave in the new burying ground, where there's only one mound yet in the shadow of the church spire, than see you marry to a man who drinks! That's what I mean, Dotty."

Dorothy's head dropped over her plate.

"Uncle, that is hardly fair. Because a man had a bad habit once—"

"And has it now!"

The soft eyes glittered into a defiant flash.

"You are mistaken, uncle. Israel Esmayne has not touched a drop of ardent spirits in a year. He has promised me never to touch it again."

"I hope he never will, my girl," said Jonathan Beers, although his tone betrayed no very sanguine feeling. "But it ain't a safe thing to do. It's a madness love of liquor is, and nothing short. It's liable to break out at any time. I hain't anything agin him—but it ain't safe!"

Dorothy was silent. Why was it, she asked herself, that men were so severe in judging one another? Why did they always look at the blackest and least promising side of everything? Israel had promised her. She believed him. And that was enough.

And while she tripped lightly back and forth about her household duties, her mind was full of the undefined future. She could see herself, shadowy and undefined as in a mirror, moving about a bright little home where flowers bloomed in the casements, and birds sang, and a clock ticked, "He is coming! he is coming!"

"One of these days!" said Dorothy to herself, as she put away the saucer of peaches and the little pitcher of thick cream on a whitely scoured pantry shelf—"one of these days."

She was thinking of the future. And old Jonathan, smoking his pipe, was living in the past.

"You've somethin' to do with the railway, stranger; haven't you?"

"I reckon I have," said Israel Esmayne indifferently. "I'm switchman."

"It don't take much of your time, I guess?"

"It's got to be looked after just the same, though," said the tall Westerner, as he lifted the last monster log from the cart he was unloading to the thrifty pile at the north end of his house.

"What time does the way train come by?"

"At nine o'clock."

"Do you suppose I could go to Mellenville and see the lumber dealers there and get back to the station again by that time?"

Israel looked reflectively at the other shore of the river.

"Well, you might," said he, "but it would be a pretty tight squeeze."

"I'm a good walker," said the stranger; and as he spoke he drew a flat pocket-flash, from his pocket, uncorked it with his teeth, and drank a copious draught. Israel Esmayne watched him with eager, glittering eyes, like those of some famished wild animal that scents blood.

"Have a drink, friend?" said the stranger, proffering the flask. Israel Esmayne shook his head, with set teeth and lividly pale check.

"I never drink," said he hoarsely.

"You would, I guess, if you could get such stuff as this," said the man; "soft as oil and strong as fire. My father imported it. There's not much like it in the country. Taste, if you don't believe me!"

Israel stood for a moment, hesitating. Then he cast an eager glance to the right and to the left, as if half fearful lest some one should see him, and grasping at the bottle—drank!

The fevered blood mounted to his cheek; a strange sparkle came into his eye.

"Have you got more like that?" he whispered, hoarsely, approaching his burning lips so closely to the man's ear that he involuntarily started. "More!"

"I got another flask, but—"

"Will you leave it behind? I'll pay you a good price for it."

"What for?"

Israel's eyes fell guiltily. "In—in case of sickness, you know. We can't buy such liquor here—and it's a lonely spot."

"You're right enough there," said the man, laughing, as he drew out another flat flask; the mate to the first. "Here, take it. Pahaw,

friend, put up your purse. You're welcome to it as a gift."

And he was gone, plunging through the high grass and bushes, all fringed with scarlet cardinal flowers, and nodding marigolds, before Israel could stay him.

Israel Esmayne crept back to his house, or rather the rude log cabin which was a sort of hostage that one day a real home should rise on its foundations, holding the flat bottle close to him, and glancing round with furtive, wandering eyes.

"I needed it," he said to himself; "yes, I needed it. I didn't know how much until I tasted it. Just one more taste. It slips over one's palate like glass, so smooth, so rich, so full of strength. One more taste, and then—"

When the clock struck nine the whistle of the train sounded faint and far off, and Israel Esmayne rose uncertainly to his feet. The subtle, burning fumes of the liquid flame had entered into his brain; the walls seemed to reel about him, the stars to swim in the great blue firmament overhead. Nothing was real—all was faint and far off and visionary. But the chains of habit are hard to shake off, and Israel had gone out at nine o'clock every night for a year. Groping his way and walking with slow, unsteady steps, he went, still clasping the partially emptied flask to his breast in the inner pocket of his coat.

He could hear the rush of the river below; he could see the rails of the track glistening in the faint starlight; and mechanically feeling under a cluster of spice bushes for the switch key, he knelt down and stupidly fumbled there an instant.

"The way train," he muttered to himself. "It's all right. And then the freight train—half past nine—a quarter to ten; and—"

He stooped down by the river shore and wet his burning forehead with the cool drops he could scoop up in the hollow of his hand. He sat down on a fallen tree, and let his head fall on his palms.

"Am I—drunk?" he muttered half aloud. "O God! have I come to this, in spite of everything?"

And the memory of Dorothy Beers and his sacred promise to her rose up in his mind, as one sometimes remembers promises made to the dead. In all the wild, wide, reeling, rocking world of his brain there was but one certainty. He had lost Dorothy, his soft-stepping, sweet-eyed, redeeming angel—the one in all the world who loved and trusted him most implicitly.

"I don't deserve her," he thought, scarce able to shape definite thought in his chaotic mind; "but—if I had only fallen down dead before—before I touched the accursed stuff! She would have believed in me then."

The fresh cool night air on his brow was sobering him a little; the touch of the cold river water cleared the mists of his clouded brain in some degree. He rose up, steadying himself by the slender stem of a young white birch tree that grew close beside him, and looked around.

Hark! A clear whistle, half a mile away, cleaving the silence like the call of some sweet throated bird.

It was the express, whose plume of lurid smoke spanned half a continent—the long, serpent-like train, glittering with lights, and carrying a great eye of fire in front, which nightly thundered over the line of rails, and shot like a meteor out of sight into the hush and silence of the woods, westward bound.

The way train passed at nine, making a brief stoppage at Hurstley Station beyond, a mere wooden shed with a platform on either side. Half an hour afterward a slow and heavy freight train followed it, running off on a side track toward the river shore until the express should have safely passed. And it was the special business of Israel Esmayne to set the switch for the freight, and subsequently replace it for the hurrying express.

Had he done this?

With the awful doubt poisoning his heart, he pressed his hands to his temples and tried to think. He had been there—he could recall just how the dewy rails looked, wet and glistening in the starlight. He had had the switch key in his hand—that he could also remember. But was that before or after the freight had switched off? He could not remember whether the freight had passed or not. He did not know whether he had locked the switches twice or once, or good heavens! not at all. The past was a swaying vacuum, the future strange and dream-like. He closed his eyes, he pressed his temples as if either hand had been a vice of iron, in the wild agonizing effort to recall the last half hour.

"O God!" he groaned aloud, as he threw himself on his face in the wet grass, "am I going mad?"

Something hard struck against his breast-bone as he flung himself down; it was the fatal flask. He tore it out, half-full of dark red poison, and dashed it passionately into the bushes. It was that—that had done all the mischief.

"O heavenly Father!" he cried aloud in his great anguish, "if it please Thee to avert from me this awful crime of murder done a thousand fold—and naught but one of Thy miracles can avert it know—I swear before Thy pavement of stars to touch that devil's broth no more! O God, hear me! O Christ, save me!"

The earth beneath his groveling breast thrilled and quivered as the express train flew