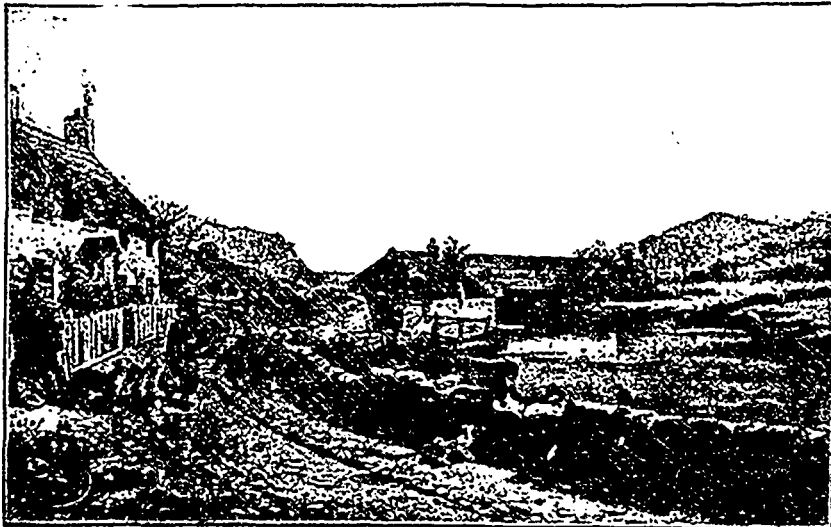




The Old Mill.

.. LITERARY ..

No. 107 of the "Cassells Sunshine" books is a series of short tales by Robert Barr, (Luke Sharp), entitled "In a Steamer Chair and other Shipboard Stories." The author, who is a close follower of Mark Twain, is best known in Montreal as the writer of a humorous newspaper account of the burning of our last ice-palace. Notwithstanding its utter absurdity it was believed by many persons at a distance who did not know that the materials of the structure were solid blocks of ice cut from the river in midwinter, and measuring from a foot to a-foot and a half in thickness. They probably fancied the palace to be of wood, with a thin coating of ice. Several of the tales in the volume before us are in the author's best style. The first and longest brings together in an Atlantic steamer (1) the newly made junior partner of a large retail dry goods house, (2) one of the numerous pretty shop-girls employed in the warehouse who knows the partner but is not known to him, and (3) a newly married couple, the husband in the sixties and the wife in her teens, the latter engaged at one time to the junior partner—before his promotion—and who jilted him for the wealthy old man by her side. The dialogue on shipboard is ably sustained, but becomes flat when the newly engaged young people proceed to visit the former home of the girl, whose mother, contrary to the wishes of her family—people of station—had married a penniless young man and who removes to New

York where after many years the only child is left an orphan. The tale ends abruptly.

"The Terrible Experience of Plodkins" was probably written after an hour or two of Poe. It describes the visit of a passenger to the bath, in the bottom of which "lay Plodkins on his back, with his eyes staring wildly." He had, after taking a plunge, risen and touched one of the electric light wires overhead, and received from it a shock which produced a collapse of the muscles but did not deprive him of all sensation. He had presence of mind enough to pull up the chain attached to the water escape in the bottom of the bath and to hold his breath while the water above him was flowing out. He had luckily forgotten to lock the door and the man whose turn was next had mistaken his hour.

The story entitled "A Society for the Reformation of Poker Players," is doubtless not the least interesting to certain readers, and as it points a moral and affords a good idea of Mr. Barr's style, we reproduce it in part.—

"The seductive game of poker is one that I do not understand. I do not care to understand it, because it cannot be played without the putting up of a good deal of the coin of the realm, and although I have nothing to say against betting, my own theory of conduct in the matter is this: that I want no man's money which I do not earn, and I do not want any man to get my money unless he earns it. So it happens, in the matter of cards, I content myself with euchre and other games which do not require

the wagering of money. On board the Atlantic steamers there is always more or less gambling. I have heard it said that men make trips to and fro merely for the purpose of fleecing their fellow-passengers; but, except in one instance, I never had any experience with this sort of thing.

Our little society for the reformation of poker players, or to speak more correctly, for the reformation of one particular poker player, was formed one bright starlight night, latitude such a number, and longitude something else, as four of us sat on a seat at the extreme rear end of the great steamer. We four, with one other, sat at a small table in the saloon. One of the small tables on a Transatlantic steamer is very pleasant if you have a nice crowd with you. A seat at a small table compares with a seat at the large table as living in a village compares with living in a city. You have some individuality at the short table; you are merely one of a crowd at the long table. One small table was not quite full. I had the honor of sitting at the head of it, and on each side of me were too young fellows, making five altogether. We all rather prided ourselves on the fact that there were no ladies at our little table.

The young Englishman who sat at my right hand at the corner of the table was going out to America to learn farming. I could, myself, have taught him a good deal about it, but I refrained from throwing cold water on his enthusiastic ideas about American agriculture. His notion was that it was an occupation mostly made up of hunting and fishing, and having a good time generally. The profits, he thought, were large and easily acquired. He had guns with him, and beautiful fishing-rods, and things of that sort. He even had a vague idea that he might be able to introduce fox-hunting in the rural district to which he was going. He understood, and regretted the fact, that we in the United States were rather behindhand in the matter of fox-hunting. He had a good deal of money with him, I understood, and he had already paid a hundred pounds to a firm in England that had agreed to place him on a farm in America. Of course, now that the money had been paid, there was no use in telling the young man he had been a fool. He would find that out soon enough when he got to America. Henry Storm was his name, and a milder mannered man with a more unsuitable name could hardly be found. The first two or three days out he was the life of our party. We all liked him; in fact, nobody could help liking him; but, as the voyage progressed, he grew more and more melancholy, and, what was really serious, took little food, which is not natural in an Englishman. I thought somebody had been telling him what a fool he had been to pay away his hundred pounds before leaving England, but young Smith of Rochester, who sat at my left, told me what the trouble was one day as we walked the deck.

"Do you know," he began, "that Henry Storm is being robbed?"

"Being robbed?" I answered; "you mean he has been robbed."

"Well, has been, and is being, too. The thing is going on yet. He is playing altogether