

And pulled her up on the common
 To gather a few late flowers
 (Such a one she was for a posy,
 That little girl of ours).
 But we made up time at the turnpike,
 And never slack'd speed at all,
 Till the mare prick'd ears at the gateway
 Of the County Hospital.

The old gatekeeper, he knew me
 Well, but he looked right queer
 When the shay drew up at the entrance,
 And I called out my name—'John Lear,
 Come for his little baby.'
 Says he, stammering like, 'You're to wait—
 I've—I've just had a special order
 To let no one inside the gate.'

'Twas odd, but there's rules in them places,
 And it wasn't a strangers' day;
 So I sings out, 'All right, my hearty,
 Just call Nurse Jane, I say,
 And give her this shawl for baby;
 The wind, it blows pretty free,
 And she'll want a wrap, my pretty,
 As I take her home with me.'

I waited there quite contented
 Till that there nurse came out;
 Strange she looked, too, half frightened—
 What were they all about?
 Following her comes the parson—
 The chaplain they call him here—
 Says he, 'Mind the horse, please, porter;—
 Come to my room, John Lear.'

He looked so grave, I was minded,
 As I clucked the reins to a lad,
 To say, sort o' light and cheery,
 'Tis only my little un's dad
 As has come to fetch his darling,
 No need to disturb yon, sir;
 Thanks all the same for your kindness,
 But nurse, she will fetch me her.'

Has any one put on paper
 The feel of a lightning stroke?
 'Cause that's what I felt next minute,
 Afore the smile of my joke
 Was off my lips. Them two silent!
 The faltering man at the gate!
 It struck me sharp to the heart's core,
I had come for my child too late!

They say I'd a face like marble,
 And I spoke, I know, firm and clear;
 Says I, 'Parson, nurse, have it out now,
 Tell me about my dear.'
 But *he'd* a choke in his voice then,
 And *she* were crying—Nurse Jane,
 Sobbing, 'Twere all in a minute,
 And never a thought of pain.'

Then they took me to see my darling,
 Lying so fast asleep,
 Never to wake for father.
 Lord! but that wound went deep.
 No one on earth could heal it;
 It almost drove me wild;
 I must get me home to the mother,
 Give me my little child!

The kindly folk would come with me,
 But I bade 'em fiercely 'nay!'
 Only my little baby
 Should ride home with me that day.
 With the shawl round the tiny coffin,
 I cradled it on my knee;
 No wind of God should chill it,
 Though His blast had pierced through me.

That was a ride in a thousand!
 The company was three;
 My one little dear dead darling,
 Almighty God, and me!
 You'd have said as we all kept silence,
 But my God, He spake through the gloom;
 And I answered, 'Amen, *Thy* will, Lord,'
 Afore I got baby home.

They'd sent from the hospital early
 (I'd missed the man by the way),
 And there wasn't no need for speaking
 When the horse stopped short with the shay,
 And *she* comes out of our cottage,
 And says, with tight-holden breath,
 'Give me my own, own darling;'
 The women are brave to the death!

And she presses the cold white coffin
 Close to her mother-breast,
 And carries it into the house-place,—
 God only knows the rest.
 I'd to put the horse in the stable
 Afore I was free to come;
 So there, sir, I've told my story
 Of how I fetched baby home.

H. A. F.

