

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD.

I would that I might twine a laurel wreath
To place upon thy brow;
But thou art standing on Parnassus' height,
High o'er this laurel bough.

A few are clustered on the mountain-top,
Serenely at thy side;
Below, a multitude are gazing up
To where our bard abides.

Once gladly through a Castle in the Air
Thy fellows walked with thee;
Now, standing with white locks, they list to hear
Thy grand Hymn to the Sea.

And they have roamed the storied Eastern land,
Have heard its poets sing;
And they have listened eagerly to hear
The bells of Felix ring.

At length it rang when Felix clutched the cord;
The sound died not away;
Far down the changeful vista of the years
I hear its peal to-day.

We, too, have mourned when thou hast sadly sung
The passing of thy youth;
Yet was there need for sorrow had we asked,
"Can poets die, forsooth?"

Now, though I cannot weave the laurel crown,
I send on breezes fleet
This simple leaf, plucked from the laurel bough,
To flutter at thy feet.

[Written for the News.]

TIM'S LITTLE LASS.

By the Author of "Lozy Dick," "Prose and Poetry," "Constance, a Lay of the Olden Times," etc.

So a week went over and one afternoon Tim tells me with a look of relief that that cursed French chap is going away with his troupe that night.

"It isn't that the fellow tempted me, you know that, Tom," he finished up; "but I can't abide the notion of his hankering after my little lass."

Two hours later, just as we were going to tea, the gong sounded.

"There's a big fire somewhere," Tim yells to me, as he buckles on his helmet and snatched a kiss from Lady-bird; a thing he always did before he went out, for you see sir, we carry our lives in our hand, and no man knows when he goes out hearty and strong that he will ever come back again. I was up beside Tim in a jiffy; and a big fire it was as we soon found. Engine after engine arrived: the whole brigade turned out and for some time it was feared the whole town would go; the wind was that high, and the flames was like starved mouths, swallowing down hungrily everything they came across. The men had a hard time of it. Some of them were scorched and blistered dreadful, you would hardly know them. However by twelve o'clock we got the fire under and home we went pretty well spent. Before he takes food or drink Tim goes as usual into the bed-chamber to give a glance at the little lass to satisfy himself she was covered up warm as she lay sleeping. In a minute more he comes out white as a ghost as I see in spite of the smoke and scorch.

"Tom," he gasps out, "she's not there."

"Nonsense!" I answer sharp, and follow him back to the room. Sure enough the bed was empty, and more than that there wasn't any sign to show that she had been to bed at all.

"Come, Tim!" I cried, "it's all right. Mrs. McCarthy has come and taken her home for the night, thinking she would be all alone, poor baby."

She had done this once before, so, though Tim looked uneasy, he followed me out again, and being hungry and tired we soon made short work of supper, and lay down together to snatch a wink of sleep, for there was no knowing when we might be called out again. It seemed no time at all when I opened my eyes from the soundest sleep I saw Tim standing putting on his coat.

"Bless me! are we wanted again! It can't be morning surely!"

"It's quite light: past four o'clock, so I'll just step across for Lady-bird," he answered.

I yawned. "You are as bad as an old hen with one chicken," I said; thinking him really this time rather a fool about the child, and I turned round again. I was just in the middle of a queer dream in which I thought myself the hose in our new engine, when I woke up with a start at the sound of Tim's voice. It was loud enough, but there was something in it that scared me dreadfully and made me think he was dying.

"What's wrong?" I cried, leaping up.

If I live a hundred years I shall never forget his face.

"She's not there," he screamed, "she's lost Tom, lost!"

There was no need to tell me who she was.

"Come, come man!" I cried, though I was all of a tremble myself, "there's plenty of places where she may be; it would never do to take on like that all for nothing. Two are better than one on the rampage;" and I up and start the search in good earnest.

But all to no purpose. We hunted the city from end to end, high and low, but never a trace of her anywhere. No one had seen a sign of her. Poor Tim went on like one crazy. It was only at the end of the third day I bethought me of the foreign chap, and how keen he had been to get her. Then I had it at once that he had stolen the child. Tim was wild at the very thought; all the more, because he was certain

sure my guess was right. For if she had been lost or killed somehow, at least we would have found some trace of her; but now how we were to get her again we dare not think. The troupe had gone to the States we did not know where, and telegraphs and railroads were only just beginning in those days. All that poor men could do we did, and that cost a heap of money; but Tim and I had been steady men and what better way could our earnings go than in finding the little lass. We had the steamers searched in any well-known ports and employed detectives here and in New York. Through them we learned that the troupe was anything but respectable, and the manager known to be a rascal; but nothing of our Lady-bird. Day after day, week after week, month after month, no tidings. After the first week Tim was as silent as the grave, but the look upon his face was awful. Did you ever see a man's heart breaking, sir! It's not a thing you are ever likely to forget. Many and many a night I have had to hold myself in from praying for a fire just to set Tim stirring. Before that he had always shown plenty of pluck, but was prudent too, knowing as there was no use risking his life for nothing with no one but him to provide for a little one at home. Now, the very devil seemed to possess him, and he would dash in among the flames altogether reckless and yet was never hurt. As the child once said, you mind, sir, "I suppose it was because he wanted to that he couldn't die." And indeed those times were not the worst for Tim, not by a long chalk. It was the idle hours that were hardest to bear. How I dreaded them for Tim I cannot find words to say. He would sit looking straight before him hours and hours with never a word. There was gray hairs in the curls as bright and sunny as Lady-bird's own. It was easy to see where the child had got her hair from. Then what he lived upon I cannot say for it was rarely I could get him to eat a mouthful. I believe it was just the burning hope of finding her again that kept him alive. Sometimes he would utter under his breath deep curses against the French chap, but even that was better than his awful fits of silence. Suffer, did you say, sir! Good Lord how that man did suffer! He just "died daily" as the Bible says. If ever a child came near him he would look the other way, but if he heard one cry, or saw one hurt, or punished, he would turn white as death and shiver like with ague. The way we all missed that child I couldn't begin to tell; not a man among us but would have lost a right hand to get her back again.

It was in the early spring we lost her, though the boats were running, for the navigation opened early that year. Well the summer went by and then the autumn came. It was very late too and the very first snow that year fell on Christmas Eve. I knew what a sad time it would be for Tim, and though maybe he'd not speak a word all the evening I couldn't bear to think on him sitting solitary whilst I, that loved him like a brother, was alive to sorrow with him; so I put my pipe in my pocket meaning to try and coax a smoke out of him, and up I go to his room. He was sitting before the fire in the dark, so I lit the lamp and fetched out the tobacco, but he put it from him with a shake of the head. It was as much as I could do not to break down as I looked at him, all thin and wasted, with the old smile in his blue eyes changed to hate and despair. Yet when he glanced up and saw me he put his hand on my shoulder in something of the old way:

"Don't mind me, Tom," he says, suddenly, "for I think my heart's broken."

I put my head on his shoulder and man though I was, cried like a baby. I think it did him good.

"Poor Tom, poor Tom!" he says in the tone he used to pet Lady-bird, "don't dear old fellow, I'm not worth anything. Nothing is worth anything unless it be death."

"Oh, Tim!" I cries, sitting up and trying to get calm, "I would give my soul to see you happy again."

He looked at me with a sad, tender, believing look, which melts the hardness out of his face that had lain there so long.

"I know you would, Tom," he says.

Just then there came a queer noise at the door; a faint rattling of the latch as of some one not tall enough to reach up to it. The very same sound Lady-bird used to make trying to get in. I fell a-baking all at once, for it struck me it might be her ghost coming back on this Christmas Eve to have a look at her old home; but though Tim heard the noise as well he never stirred, for all hope was dead in him, for even of her ghost he would not have been afraid. The firelight fell on a long shining track straight to the door and in another moment it opened wide, and then, covered with snow, not one bit bigger, but with the same shining curls, sweet eyes, and angel face, stood the little lass. I still quaked, taking it to be a spirit; but Tim turned slowly in his chair, and then like mad he sprang up with a great cry and clutched her in his arms, sobbing his very heart out.

"Oh, dad, you're not sorry to have back your little lass?"

Then I knew it was our real, live darling; and that was how our Lady-bird came home again.

"Sorry!" sobs Tim; "it'll well nigh kill me for joy. My blessed, blessed little lass. God forgive me for all my bitter anger against him. Sweet heart, where have you been?"

That was a long story which she never could be got rightly to tell, for she had been in many strange places and seen a great number of folks, and being so young and tender she got mixed

up over it all. But one thing was certain: the foreigner had stolen her away. It was he who came that night when every one was away at the big fire. She never would have gone with him, but he told her that her dad was much hurt and had sent him for her. So then she goes with the rascal with all the will in life. When they walked on a little way (and this part of her story never altered) he took her into a house and told her she must take a drink to make her keep wide awake for dad would want her to sit up with him all night he was that sick; and she, being always an obedient child, does what he tells her. It was in a big glass she said, and tasted sweet but rather queer. After that she remembered no more till she found herself on board a steamer. None of the troupe knew of his stealing the child, and soon after he parted with them all except one woman, whom Lady-bird took to be his wife. She took great pains in teaching the child to sing, and from what we could put together she had sung in public many times; but they had to keep a close watch on her for all the time she was trying to escape. How she ever found her way back to us I cannot pretend to say. It would seem impossible to any one who didn't think as Tim and I did, that she had been led straight by the Hand of God. All we ever knew was that one day when they were setting off on a long stage journey she gave them the slip, and, remembering the name of the town as plain as plain could be, she told every one she had been stolen away from her dad and was going home again. That every one believed her story and passed her on I make no doubt, and may God in Heaven reward them. And, so improbable as it may seem we had her back, safe and sound, I was going to say, but indeed that would be going too far. For the love-hunger that had starved a strong man like Tim, had been at work too with the little lass, and who could count either the sufferings from terror, of that tiny child. She was as thin as a shadow, and her eyes were bigger and sadder than ever, and her cheeks two snowflakes, so wan and white. Then she had a cough that fairly seemed to wear her out it was that constant, and when you remember that her mother died of consumption you can fancy all our fears. All this, however, we noticed after, for that night Tim was too full of finding her to be caught but glad. The sight of them two together again! That's how the dead look, I'm thinking, their first day in Heaven.

Next day there was such a cram of neighbours it was just as much as I could do to get them all quiet away without hurting their feelings; they were so bent on seeing the child. They were all taken aback at her sick looks-like, and indeed as time went on we all saw as plain as could be that we had only found her to lose her again. "It would go hard with Tim," the men said soft-like among themselves; but I kind of think he knew it all along. For after the first day or two he lost his merry ways (as if his heart was laughing out loud for joy) unless he was with the child. He took her to a doctor too, who had a big consultation with other doctors, and then they said as how the seeds of the disease her mother died of had always been in her system and any great shock would have developed them suddenly; but with care she might last a long time. And that she got, you may guess, from such a father as Tim.

Month after month she faded slow, like a snowdrift melting in spring: always so soft and white and as pretty as pretty! Folks said Tim would never hold up his head again, but I could see as this second loss would be eased by the first: for suspense is full of a bigger pain than certainty, and having the child again, though even to die, was not so bad as not knowing what had become of her. Just as one would rather trust a treasure in the hands of God than those of man. The hard look had gone out of Tim's face for all it was so thin and sad, and when I saw him tending Lady-bird I could understand how even a big rough fireman might some day turn into an angel maybe.

The child had grown much older in that one year than in all the rest of her short life and the baby stories that used to amuse her, she did not care for now; but Tim told her long ones with big words in them that pleased her fine. Stories from the New Testament she set most store by, specially that one of the little daughter that was raised again. I'd see the big tears in Tim's eyes that he would brush away and never let her catch a sight on as he told it.

"Dad," she said, once after being very still, "I have been thinking on Munser that stole me away. Not that she pronounced it my way, (for she spoke the word as pretty as a born Frenchman.) "He didn't know how bad it was perhaps, and he was never cross to me. I hope some day you will do him a good turn, dad."

Tim went red and then white and did not answer; but as proved afterwards he never forgot her words.

We never told her she was dying, for where was the use of frightening that blessed baby by putting into her head questions we could not answer. Whatever death may mean to us older folks it couldn't be anything but good for such as her. She lasted longer than any one expected, for it was not till next Christmas Eve, just a year from the day she came home, that she went away again, but this time farther off. All day she had suffered sore from weakness, and Tim was just spent with walking up and down with her to try and ease her a bit, for he would suffer none to touch the child but him.

"Dad," she says at last, "I wish Him that raised the little girl would come and make me rested."

"So He will," Tim answers
"When?" she asks, very feebly.
"To-night, I think," says Tim, a little choked.

At that she seems quite satisfied and whispers: "Kiss me, dad," and then dozes off and goes straight from the arms of her father on earth to those of her Father in Heaven.

Afterwards when I see her lying on the bed in her little white nightgown, all the long curls shining on her breast, and the look of pain gone out of her dear face, and her sad eyes glad forever, I think it must be well with the little lass. Folks thought Tim took it very quiet because he made no noise; but what man does when the light and joy of life is over! It cuts too deep.

He did his work better than ever and got set on religion, but didn't talk about it; only he was ever fond of reading the Bible which he told me was his best comfort.

"I'll try to make the best of life, Tom," he says once, "though the sweetness is gone out of it; for I am thinking it's not the manly thing to break down, nor what Jesus Christ has a right to expect of me. It's only by making Him my law of life that I may expect to pull through at all."

He'd rarely talk of Lady-bird but think of her all the more. He and I were greater chums than ever; after she died we lived together and shared the same bed.

"Do you mind the time the St. Louis Hotel was burned! It was in the dead of night, pitch dark it was, and a high wind blowing. Three minutes after the alarm as Tim and I spring up on the waggon, the driver shouts out that there is more than twenty new arrivals at the hotel that night. When we reach the square the building is all in flames and some of the other engines are there before us. Every hand is needed and we fall to with might and main. My place is at the hose and by and by above all the hubbub and swish of the water I heard an awful shout. I knew what that meant well enough. And the rumour spreads in the crowd that there is a man asleep in the left wing of the hotel. In another minute the window flies open and I see a dark figure standing there, and then two of our men come up with the ladders. They place them against the wall but neither of them are long enough. We hadn't the 'Skinner' in those days, sir, more's the pity. Tim of course being guardian is directing it all and is close by me. All of a sudden there comes a great long tongue of flame round the corner and lights up the face of the figure in the window, and in that moment Tim and I knew our man. For it is not likely we would ever forget the foreign chap that stole Lady-bird! There he stands yelling like a mad-man a stream of words we do not understand. There is no time to lose for the flames are all around that window. Over Tim's face I see flash out a strong resolution. He seized the shorter ladder. For one moment a so far forgot myself as to stop my work and lay a hand on his arm.

"Not that," I cried, thinking of the cruel wrong suffered from that rascal; and now—to risk his life for him. Tim's foot was already upon the lower ladder and as he hoists the shorter he says to me with a queer smile, "She bid me do him a good turn," and up he goes.

At the top of the first he stops and plants the second and hails to the other to come down. It just reached him and when the crowd see him safe on the ladder they shout for joy. But to keep it there firm and steady was an awful strain on Tim. Whether the foreigner recognized Tim as he neared the bottom and drew back like the cur he was, I can't say, but at all events the upper ladder tottered, I saw Tim's arms go up like a flash round his enemy and grip him firm. Then the lower ladder, being old and weak, couldn't bear the weight of the two, and there came a loud crack. The next minute Tim was lying scorched and senseless at my feet with the other man in his arms more frightened than hurt, for he was a little skinny chap and Tim's big body had covered him from all harm. After that night he was never more seen or heard, and the town raged against him for weeks after because he never stayed to see how it fared with Tim, though seeing how he had treated him I don't wonder. Eh, but it's an awful thing when God punishes a fellow for an evil deed in that way!

There was little more to be done after this, and being so thick with Tim they sent me home with him, and I sat with his head upon my knee blubbering like a child; for he never spoke or moved.

All day long he lay like that and the doctors could do nothing for him; they said he was just living, that was all. But in the evening he stirs a little. I leaned over him very eager.

"Tim," I cried, "dear old Tim! how are you?"

He knew my voice though he was nearly gone, for he gave me a smile that meant more than words. The nurse gave him something in a spoon which he couldn't swallow. But just as I thought all was over he opens his eyes with a strange, solemn brightness shining there and though the words were very low I hear every one.

"Good Lord, now mayn't I have my little lass!"

Back he fell, straight and calm, and cold; but I think by the look on his dead face, God had granted him his heart's desire.

THE END.

MAPLE-LEAF.