OUR TRAVELLED PARSON.

(Will. Carleton in *Harper's* for February.)

I.

For twenty years and over our good parson had been toiling
To chip the bad meat from our hearts and keep the good from spoiling;
But finally he wilted down, and went to looking sickly,
And the doctor said that something must be put up for him quickly.

So we kind of clubbed together, each according to his notion,
And bought a circular ticket in the lands across the ocean;
Wrapped some pocket-money in it—what we thought would easy do him—
And appointed me committee-man to go and take it to him.

I found him in his study, looking rather worse than ever.
And told him 'twas decided that his flock and he should sever.
Then his eyes grew wide with wonder, and it seemed almost to blind 'em;
And some tears looked out o' window, with some others close behind 'em.

Then I handed him the ticket, with a little bow of deference,
And he studied quite a little ere he got its proper reference;
And then the tears that waited, great unmanageable creatures,
Let themselves quite out o' window, and came climbing down his features.

II.

I wish you could ha' seen him, coming back all fresh and glowing,
His clothes so worn and seedy, and his face so fat and knowing;
I wish you could have heard him when he prayed for us who sent him,
And paid us back twice over all the money we had lent him.

Twas a feast to all believers, 'twas a blight on contradiction,
To hear one just from Calvary talk about the crucifixion;
'Twas a damper on those fellows who pretended they could doubt it,
To have a man who'd been there stand and tell them all about it.

Paul maybe beat our pastor in the Bible knots unravelling,
And establishing new churches, but he couldn't touch him travelling,
Nor in his journeys pick up half the general information,
But then he hadn't the railroads, and the steamboat navigation.

And every foot of Scripture whose location used to stump us
Was now regularly laid out, with the different points of compass.
When he undertook a picture, he quite natural would draw it;
He would paint it out so honest that it seemed as if you saw it.

An' the way he chiselled Europe—oh, the way he scampered through it!
Not a mountain dodged his climbing, not a city but he knew it;
There wasn't any subject to explain in all creation,
But he could go to Europe and bring back an illustration.

So we crowded out to hear him, much instructed and delighted;
'Twas a picture show, a lecture, and a sermon, all united;
And my wife would wipe her glasses, and serenely pet her Test'ment,
And whisper, "That 'ere ticket was a very good investment."

III.

Now after six months' travel we were most of us all ready
To settle down a little, so's to live more staid and steady;
To develop home resources, with no foreign cares to fret us,
Using home-made faith more frequent; but the parson wouldn't let us.

To view the self-same scenery time and time again he'd call us,
Over rivers, plains and mountains he would any minute haul us;
He slighted our home sorrows, and our spirits' aches and ailings,
To get the cargoes ready for his reg'lar Sunday sailings.

He would take us off a-touring in all spiritual weather,
Till we at last got homesick like, and seasick altogether;
And "I wish to all that's peaceful," said one free-expressioned brother,
"That the Lord had made one cont'nent, and then never made another!"

Sometimes, indeed, he'd take us into sweet, familiar places,
And pull along quite steady in the good old gospel traces;
But soon my wife would shudder, just as if a chill had got her,
Whispering, "Oh, my goodness gracious! he's a-takin' to the water!"

And it wasn't the same old comfort when he called around to see us;
On a branch of foreign travel he was sure at last to tree us;
All unconscious of his error, he would sweetly patronize us,
And with oft-repeated stories still endeavour to surprise us.

IV.

And the sinners got to laughing; and that fin'lly galled and stung us
To ask him, Would he kindly once more settle down among us?
Didn't he think that more home produce would improve our souls' digestions?
They appointed me committee-man to go and ask the questions.

I found him in his garden, trim an' buoyant as a feather;
He pressed my hand, exclaiming, "This is quite Italian weather.
How it minds me of the evenings when, your distant hearts caressing,
Upon my benefactors I invoked the heavenly blessing!"

I went and told the brothers, "No, I cannot bear to grieve him.
He's so happy in his exile, it's the proper place to leave him,
I took that journey to him, and right bitterly I rue it;
But I cannot take it from him: if you want to, go and do it."

Now a new restraint entirely seemed next Sunday to enfold him,
And he looked so hurt and humbled that I knew some one had told him.
Subdued-like was his manner, and some tones were hardly vocal,
But every word he uttered was pre-eminently local.

The sermon sounded awkward, and we awkward felt who heard it.
'Twas a grief to see him hedge it, 'twas a pain to hear him word it.
"When I was in—" was maybe half a dozen times repeated,
But that sentence seemed to scare him, and was always uncompleted.

As weeks went on his old smile would occasionally brighten,
But the voice was growing feeble, and the face began to whiten;
He would look off to the eastward with a wistful, weary sighing,
And 'twas whispered that our pastor in a foreign land was dying.

VI.

The coffin lay 'mid garlands smiling sad as if they knew us;
The patient face within it preached a final sermon to us;
Our parson had gone touring on a trip he'd long been earning,
In that Wonder-land whence tickets are not issued for returning.

O tender, good heart-shepherd! your sweet smiling lips, half parted,
Told of scenery that burst on you just the minute that you started!
Could you preach once more among us, you might wander without fearing;
You could give us tales of glory we would never tire of hearing.

HOW MY FORTUNE CAME.

I had always been poor, and I had also always been a dreamer. The first fact was patent to any and every one; the last I hid as carefully as I could.

One of my favourite dreams had been that of suddenly finding myself a rich woman. I thought about it as I followed my daily duties; I dreamed of it as I taught Mrs. Brown's four little daughters. When I did a sum in interest for them, it was simply calculating my own profits; and when I drew maps, it was only to mark out my future travels.

O, yes, I was a dreamer. And yet I worked and worked, as well as I could, for my dreams were solace and strength.

It is said that only the unexpected happens. This is a mistake. I suddenly found myself a rich woman, and, though I had confidently expected some day to be rich, I will confess to a little feeling of surprise that was almost awe upon finding my silent convictions verified.

I had often fancied how I should feel when this delightful state of things should be attained. Truth compels me to say that my emotions were by no means of an exalted character. When it was borne in upon my mind, my first thought was that now I need not wear that rusty alpaca any longer, nor provide kindling for the morning fire. I hated rusty alpaca, I hated to think about the morning fire. And I had always had to think about such things. As a child, I had dimly realized that we were to make the wood or coal, the bread and butter, go as far as was possible, and as a woman, I had realized it as only the woman can who has to put all her strength of body and mind into the effort to obtain the wherewithal to be fed and clothed.

And, being a dreamer, I worked with a disadvantage. I was not skilled, nor thoroughly skilled, in any kind of work. I taught, but I am sure I did not teach well. Not that I did not know enough, for I was well educated, after a way of my own; but I had no systematic training for that vocation. I doubt greatly if I could be systematically trained. I could play and sing, but could not teach music. Still I managed, for two or three years, to pass the necessary examinations, and get my certificate, and a position in the public schools. And, as I see now what teaching is, and what it should be, and how important the work of the teacher, I am ready to beg pardon of the boys and girls, now men and women, upon whom I inflicted crudities in those days. Sewing I detested, that is the part of it that required thought. If I sewed, I wanted a long seam that would need no special attention, and so leave me free in mind to sit and dream my dreams. I will say, however, that I have gained in this. Long practice has made me perfect, and I can make over, twist and turn, and give my old garments quite the air of new ones.

Blessed be the latitude that the fashions give. It has, however, developed suspicion in the female breast. I and all my sisters know that the long overskirts and polonaises cover "sham" skirts, and bows are put on to cover seams; or if they do not, we think they do. Household work I did at arm's length, and if I did not study French while mixing bread, as one of the Bronte sisters did, I wove many a romance while engaged in kitchen warfare. As a consequence, both suffered; the romances were nipped in the bud, and the bread was the worse for being seasoned with poetry.

Sitting, to-day, removed by many years and the blessedness of plenty, from that time, I look back and see myself, poor, plain, hungering with a mighty hunger for that which I could not have; and from the standpoint of to-day I pity the girl and the woman of that bygone time. I see the room empty of ornament, and my eyes ached for beauty; I see the thousand and one little market bills, whereby the ends were made to meet, and didn't always meet at that. I remember the time when the want of a fresh frill for my neck or a bow for my hair was a serious want. And yet I am forced to say, in spite of all this, I was not an unhappy woman.

They said I was happily constituted. I think I was, but in a different way from what they meant.

My father left me his books, and a better legacy still, his love for them, and I had never seen a day, even when the meal-sack was empty and the fire on the hearth low, but what I found these a refuge; and if these failed me, was not the outside world left, and had not I a share in that? I felt, in no egotistical sense, I think, indeed I know, that I got more out of the oak trees in my neighbour's handsome grounds than he did from his whole estate. They were *mine*, and from the moment the buds began to swell in the spring, till the last brown leaf had fallen, they were a perpetual joy; and these bare branches, delicately outlined against the gray sky of winter, pleased my eyes with a pleasure he would have no more understood than he would the joy of the seraphs.

I think I had a rich nature. God was good to give it to me. So in dark days the sun shone.

And then there was that ship of mine which was to come in, "with gold in the ingots and silk in the bales," laden with love and all the sweet delights the soul cried out for. It was surely coming, and it did come.

It was in those days when it was low-tide with me, the days when I made acquaintance with want, yea, when he sat at my table, that I met Robert Tremaine, the son of my neighbour whose handsome house overshadowed ours, and whose beautiful grounds I enjoyed more than he did.

It was on his father's grounds, under one of his father's oaks, that I met him. I had gone out with a copy of Shelley, and sat reading, and wondering at the fire that burned so in this wonderful poet's heart—wondering at the divine madness that touched his brain. Suddenly I heard shouting and laughter, and, rising, in half a minute more received, straight in my hand, which involuntarily I extended, a large ball. In a minute more Robert Tremaine and his little nephew came up. I was intently examining the plaything.

"Oh, Uncle Rob, here's my ball. This—lady has it." The child had hesitated for an instant, but true to his childish intuitions, he then said, "lady."

Uncle Rob lifted his hat. "Really, your skill is something wonderful, if you did really catch this, for I threw it without aim or object. Are you in the habit of catching things so easily, Miss Margaret? See, now, I remember you. And you look as though you had no recognition in your soul for an old friend and playmate. Shake hands, and say you are glad to see me," and he held out his hand with friendly frankness that was wonderfully winning. I gave him my hand and said I was glad to see him.

"Come, Uncle Rob, let's go and play," teased the boy.

"No, I don't want to do that. I've found an old friend, acquaintance—for she does not like a very warm friend—and I am going to stay and talk with her."

"You had better go and play, Mr. Tremaine."

"I think not; I prefer to stay. It's cool and pleasant under this tree, and I want to stay; besides, this is my ground, and my tree, and I can stay if I please. I, at least, am not the trespasser."

"Rob Tremaine, this is as much my tree as it is yours!" I burst out.

"O, this is little Margaret, after all. I began to fear some one else had taken her place. I see you hold the same dangerous communistic sentiments as ever. Eight years since I have seen you, Miss Margaret; yet you see I have not forgotten. If you could manage to give me a smile with a little less ice in it, and could put an expression a trifle less frigid on your face, I should be glad."

"Mr. Tremaine, I am heartily glad to see you. I remember you well; but I presume you hardly expect me to look or act as the girl of fifteen looked and acted."

"I wouldn't like anything better," he said, smiling.

I flushed, for when he went away I had put my arms around his neck and kissed him a tender good-bye.

So we sat down and talked. He picked up my book. "Poor Shelley! poor, unrestful Shelley!" he said.

"Poor Shelley! Grand, glorious Shelley, rather. Mistaken he may be sometimes, but he was always sincere."

"You are an enthusiast. I admire him as a poet. But let us talk about something else. Tell me how it has gone with you these eight years."

"I really can't say. I've been working at starvation wages, trying to keep the wolf from the door. The rest of the time I've read and dreamed; and on days like these I've sat in the sun, and, well, yes, I do think I've grown some, though in a wayward sort of a fashion."

"I certainly think you have. Now we have the summer before us, and summers are short, so short but so sweet. Let us enjoy it. I've brought home curiosities from many a foreign shore, and I want you to see them. I've ever so many new books, and I want you to read them. We'll read them together, and—"

"Robert, my son!" It was an exceedingly well-bred voice, but it woke me from my little dream. "Oh, here you are. I have been looking for you. And this lady is—"

"Miss Margaret de Ruyter, mother. Our neighbour, you know."

"I do not know my neighbours as I ought, perhaps, so I have not the pleasure of Miss de Ruyter's acquaintance. But my ill-health is my excuse. I have not walked so far as this in many months. Now, if the lady will excuse us, I will ask you to go to the house with me."

It was smoothly said, and, so far as the letter was concerned, was true; but I knew, when Mrs. Tremaine took her son's arm and walked away, that she mentally resolved that the pleasant plan she had overheard would, if she had the power, be frustrated.

But she had not the power.

The summer was like no other summer the world has ever known.

Never was June so sweet; never, no never, were mornings so rosy and radiant; never were twilights so tender. The light "that never was on sea or land" enveloped me. And I walked in it not alone, for the glamour and the beauty came to me through Robert, who had grown to be so dear, so perilously dear.

The birds that sang, the flowers that bloomed, all the clouds that floated in that summer sky, the hill-sides and the green-growing things, were lighted and gilded and glorified by the light that shone from two brown eyes.

I knew that I was a captive, but I found captivity so sweet—nay, it was the freedom wherewith love makes free.

I remember one day in particular, and I refer to it, not because it was an exceptionally happy one, but because it was the type of many others. We had left our little village for a morning walk together. We took the way towards the great woods that for miles and miles covered the hills about us. Robert was as great an enthusiast as myself in regard to wild-flowers, and searched for the newest of them for me in the secluded nooks, and actually found at last a blue gentian. He helped me over steep places, climbed almost inaccessible rocks for me, and loaded himself down with ferns and grasses. Once he found a white rose, the last of the season, and gave it to me with a look that I remember even to this day. Ah! happy, happy time.

But the summer and our happiness had to end. Judge Tremaine and his wife had other plans for their son. Margaret De Ruyter was a most estimable person, but she was poor. Prof. De Ruyter had been a very fine man, a profound scholar, a thorough gentleman, but a man who never had the second good suit to his back, a man who preferred spending his money on what he called "rare" old books, to doing and living like other people. And Margaret herself was odd. Not much like other folks, and no match for Robert, who, rich, elegant and cultured, could find many a woman better fitted to be his wife. So they said, and it all came to me.

And it was true. I knew it to be so. And at the close of a beautiful day, when Rob came up the little walk to my door, I had made up my mind.

I remember that day so well. It is a bitter thing to stand face to face with a duty, which acknowledged and yielded to, will cover your life with darkness, but which, set aside, would bring to your own soul a sense of humiliation and contempt not less hard to bear.

And I made up my mind.

"There is no use in urging me, Robert," I said. "God knows I love you for your love, for your willingness to throw away your inheritance for my sake. But I will permit no such sacrifice."

"It is no sacrifice."

"Yes, it is. You have not the knowledge that I have. You do not know aught of privation or trial. Love in a cottage, with all the modern improvements, looks fair to you; but I fear that you would find that—

'Love in a cottage, with water and crust,
Is—love, forgive me—water, ashes, dust.'

If I were alone, I would go with you unhesitatingly; but I will not burden you with the aged mother who is my sacred charge. Oh, my darling, try to understand that it is for your own dear sake I put away all the beauty and loveliness of life. Go—go before I pity myself into repenting my decision. Some day you will thank me that I did not spare myself and you this bitterness."

He answered: "I would leave father and mother, houses and lands, for your sake; but since you will not permit that, I will do what is harder. I will leave you for your sake, not for mine."

O! the bitter, weary days and weeks that followed. He went away, I did not know where, but after a time I heard that he had gone back to Germany. He had been educated there, and had spent so many years there that it seemed like home to him—more like home to him, I knew, than the father's house he left.

And I took up my burdens again. I never for a moment in my wildest dreams imagined that this parting was aught but final. I knew that such experiences never repeat themselves. I had known the height and depth of joy and sorrow, and I looked into the future with little knowledge as to what it could do.

I still taught Mrs. Brown's daughters, and at night, after my work was done, and my mother asleep in her bed, I wrote.

I know that poets are born, not made, but I also know that sometimes this divine birthgift