

ONLY A YEAR AGO.

BY WILL HENRY GANE.

Only a year ago!
So short, and yet so long!
Its memory soft as the summer wind,
Or a wave of the angel's song.
Only a year ago!
And yet what changes have been!
How many stars have been lost to view,
And, oh! how many seen?

A head of golden hair—
An eye supremely blue—
A good, and noble, and brave heart,
And Christianlike and true;
That was a year ago!
To-day,—ashes and dust!
It tells how much the heart will bear—
How much it can and must.

And thus we might be hanging
Sweet pictures in memory's hall;
And let a flood of sunbeams
Over our idols fall—
Just as we did a year ago!
Where are they all to-day?
Ask of the wave, as it thunders by,
What it did with yesterday's spray.

MY UNCLE IN MANCHESTER.

In the *Belgravia Annual* for 1872, I told the reader of my first unfortunate start in life, and what a mess I made of my first commission. You don't remember me? Aæth is my name, pronounced Yaacht, if you please. If you don't care to look back to that story, you need only take for granted that my outset was unfortunate, and resulted in my being thrown once more upon the world. But something becomes of people, under the most unfavorable circumstances even; necessarily, also, something eventually became of me. A family council was held to consider what should be done with me. It was attended by all my uncles and aunts except one, that one being uncle John, who lived in Manchester; and of course it was unanimously agreed, that he, the absent one, was the very and only man who was able to do anything for me. He had written a letter, indeed, saying that if his nephew was a smart active youth, who was willing to turn his hand to anything, and make himself generally useful, there was no harm in his knocking about in his warehouse, but that it was no use sending any kid-gloved young chaps up there.

"Arthur never does wear kid gloves," said my sister; "always doeskins, don't you, dear boy?"

"O, if that's all," I said, "I'll wear white buffin, if it will please the old fellow. I don't think that need stand in the way."

The end of it was, that I went off to Manchester, by parliamentary train too, in an access of economy, which stopped at all the stations, and took the whole day on the journey. It wasn't bad at all, the first part of the way. Plenty of smoking, and drinking out of square bottles, and chaff, among fat farmers and their wives, and nice plump young women, and jolly rustic sort of people. But when we came near Manchester, and to a place called Stockport, and trundled across a viaduct right over the top of all the tallest factory chimneys, and looked down into a great chasm filled with smoke,—in fact, if you can imagine the crater of Vesuvius lined with eight-storied buildings, and all the smoke from the subterranean fires coming out of long pipes stuck on the top of these buildings, you'll have a very good idea of Stockport, as seen from the railway bridge,—well, when we'd rolled over this viaduct, as I say, we seemed to have tapped quite a fresh barrel of humanity. Crowds of people trooped into the carriages—there had been a great dog race in the neighborhood, and I heard a good deal of the triumphs of one Fan, a bitch—who seemed of altogether a different race from the population I'd left behind. They were not, however, without characteristics homogeneous to the rest of their countrymen. They swore a good deal, outraged decency in their language, were very much tipsy for the most part; they seemed, too, to value dogs more for their powers of speed than other qualities; but they differed specifically in their feet. They divided the hoof; wore clogs with two iron bound ridges in lieu of soles, which ground your toes most cruelly if you had the misfortune to get in the way of them. I don't know that they were much rougher than south-country roughs; but they had far more verve and vigor and originality about them, and seemed to form more the staple of the population.

My heart sank a good deal as we fairly got under the pall of smoke that hovered over the whole country, and I felt as if I were leaving hope and daylight behind me; but when we'd fairly landed in Manchester, I didn't find things so bad. I'd been put up to a few wrinkles about Manchester by young Saugbotham, who ground with me for the army, and I knew from him that the Queen's Hotel was the best place to go to, and very comfortable I was there.

I had thought that perhaps uncle John would have sent to meet me at the station. I knew he kept a carriage, and I looked out all along the curb of the arrival platform to see if I could make out a carriage with the Aæth crest; but there were no carriage waiting for the parlia-

mentary train, so I took a cab and drove off to the Queen's.

Next morning I went to look for uncle John. I found myself first of all, in a place they called Piccadilly, but how unlike the real thing! On my left was an open space with some insignificant-looking statues on it, and some basins with iron pipes round them that might have squirted water once. Flanking this open space was a neat barrack-looking building; that was the 'infirmary' or hospital, and from this infirmary, as a sort of nexus, several streets branched off. Big omnibuses, with horses three abreast, came leisurely along, crowded outside and in exclusively with males, all on business bent. Right before me was Market-street—a grimy shabby street—and at the corner, where Market-street debouched upon the open space, was an inn—the Mosely Arms, I think—where many of the buses pulled up. This Mosely Arms to my right-divining soul gave the idea that Mosely-street—which was the street I was told to ask for—could not be far off, and I found that I was correct. It was one of the streets which diverged from the infirmary. It was a long irregular street of warehouses, old and new, tall and short, blocked up one end by a 'classic' church, and I reached this church without seeing my uncle's name on any of the doors. I remembered then that I had a letter in my pocket which contained his address. Just think what my feelings were when I found the place and saw over the door a large signboard—"Death & Co.—Fustians."

Some of our family indeed have assumed the D', and it was not impossible that uncle John might have been among these, and that the apostrophe had been rubbed out; but no, the thing was too plain, in large gilt capital Roman letters—DEATH.

This may seem a small thing; but when you've been in the habit of priding yourself on your name, that your forefathers have borne for centuries, to see it brought down to the common level of death is too annoying. They'd call me Death, too, if I didn't stand out against it, and I'd always have been so particular about the way the name was spelt and pronounced. This must be seen to at once. As I stood looking up at the signboard, I found that somebody else was watching me from the steps of the warehouse; somebody who had descended from an old-fashioned four-wheeled chaise, drawn by a rat-tailed old screw—an old man, with a cold pinched-up face, who wore a short mackintosh coat, of the ancient strong-smelling sort, black-trousers rather short for him, and brown gaiters over his shoes.

"Servant, sir!" he said politely, as I made to address him.

"Is Mr. John Aæth" (pronounced Yaacht, as I said before) "here?"

"John Death? Ay, ay, John Death, at your service. What's your business?"

"Ah, unole," I said, "I'm your nephew Arthur. How d'ye do?"

The old gentleman took a yellow bandanna from his pocket, and trumpeted loudly into it.

"Ugh!" he said. "What do you want?"

"Well, I—I—understood you expected me."

"Ah," he grunted, after a while, "I did expect a lad for the warehouse, son of brother Ned. Great fool Ned, full of his fineries and fancies; what came of 'em? Why, nobbut you, I expect, and chaps like you. Ugh! Well, come in."

This wasn't promising, but I had heard that he was something of an original and must be humored, so I followed him quietly into the warehouse. He dealt in fustians, you'll remember. Fusty uns they were. The smell? Well, the smell was like—what was it like?—say the essence of skilled laborer, on a hot day after a shower.

The counting-house was a dark little place boxed off from a great long room full of these fustians. There were in it two tall stools and a cane-bottomed chair. On the desk were three or four big books with laced patterns on their backs.

"Well," he said, after a while, and after he'd looked me over once or twice, and scratched his head after each inspection—"well, where are ye lodging now?"

"O, I haven't got lodgings yet. I stopped at the Queen's last night."

The old fellow looked me over in silence once more, and then he really seemed to have got a funny idea. He chuckled, in a choky way, put his head out of the counting-house—"Joash!" he called—"Joash!"

A broad red-faced man, with tremendous brawny arms, in his shirt sleeves, wearing a bright figured satin waistcoat, appeared.

"Joash," said my uncle, "this is new lad for warehouse. He's stopping at the Queen's!"

Both Joash and he seemed to find the idea very funny. I couldn't see the joke, but I tried to humor him a bit, and joined the laugh.

My uncle turned serious all of a sudden.

"Joash," he said, "lad's no good to us."

"Eh, I dunno, maister," said Joash cheerfully. "Lad's reet enough; he's your neevew, maister, and he's loike to hold his head up high. Eh, he'd make a fine traveller, maister, if he knew aught about goods."

"Guds!" cried uncle—he meant goods, fustians, etc.—"he knows naught!"

"O, come," said I, "I do know a bit about travelling; I did travel once, on commission."

"And what sort of a job did you make of it?"

I told 'em the story, whereat Joash exploded, and retired to hide his emotions behind a heap of fustians. My uncle looked grimmer than ever, but still there was a twinkle in his eye that almost belied his gravity.

"Well," he said at last, "I mun see if Joash can make aught of thee. Here, Joash," he cried, "take the lad and set him to work. I shall put thee in the wage book for thruty shilling a week. But thou'll never earn it. And look here, lad," he said: "none of thy joaks here; we're all for business here. I've heard of thee before, my lad, and first time I catches thee at any of thy wild pranks, away thou goest back to thy friends again—dost hear?"

"If ever I so much as wink, except out of business hours, you may boil me!" I cried. And I meant it; I really meant to go into fustians with all the vigor of my intellect. I meant to master the business, and put myself into the way of taking my uncle's place.

But the worst of it was, there was nothing to do. "It were very slack," Joash said, "just now, being nearly Christmas time and no orders coming in." Uncle contrived to make himself busy, trotting about, going on 'Change and to the Portico—a place were lots of old fogies congregate to read the papers and gossip—blessed old Athenians!—but in the warehouse we had literally nothing to do from morning till night. And of course, under these circumstances, Satan crept in. I was bound to do something, and so I got into mischief. Our amusements, however, were innocent enough. Making egg-flip, heating it over the gas-jet on the top floor, was a great resource. I had a specialty for making good flip, and Joash was passionately fond of it. Then we played whist, and I initiated my companions into the latest scientific manoeuvres of that noble game; for I was then an excellent player. I was a skilful caricaturist too, and drew poor Joash so beautifully to the life, that the poor old fellow was quite cut up.

"Nay," he said, "if I'm ugly as you, it's quite time I were put under ground."

He secreted the sketch after a while, but kept it carefully, nevertheless, and I have more than once caught him looking at it in quiet corners, shaking his head, and singing the song of Simeon over it.

In the course of our experiments in the heating properties of gas, I made a remarkable discovery. I found out that by applying the mouth—somebody else's mouth is preferable—to the orifice of a gas-burner, and blowing down it vigorously, in a few seconds you extinguish all the lights that may be supplied with gas from that particular set of pipes. This was an endless source of amusement: imagine that it is Saturday morning, a heavy fog abroad, dark as pitch outside, inside the gas burning foggy. Uncle is in the counting-house, reading the *Manchester Courier* by gaslight. Joash is downstairs in the same floor, banging about fustians from one pile to another, by way of looking as if he'd something to do. Presently the lights go out one after the other, and the whole building is left in Cimmerian darkness.

"Joash! Joash!" my uncle would shout, struggling out of his office. "Joash! there's that domned gas again. Run, Joash, and turn out all the taps." Poor Joash would come puffing and blowing upstairs, turning out all the taps as he came, anathematising the gas company at every step. After that the gas-men would be sent for, and would poke about the pipes and meter for hours, but never found anything wrong.

"It's t'weter got into pipes," Joash would say. And once or twice they had up the pavement of Mosely-street, and traffic suspended for hours, but they could never find the source of the evil.

Uncle had a traveller who was generally out on his rounds, but was now at home for Christmas. He was an ill-conditioned fellow, a great swell in his way, and always wore a wonderfully shiny hat. He had a grudge against me, fearing, I suppose, lest I should cut him out of my uncle's good graces, for he had some idea of getting a partnership by and by, and was always fawning on uncle John. He would come sneaking about, joining our little diversions, and sharing our flip, without sharing the score; and then, as I heard afterwards, he'd go and tell my uncle that I was debauching the other hands, and teaching them to drink and gamble. I couldn't think at the time my uncle looked so surly, but I didn't seem to grow in his good graces.

This traveller, whose name was Slocomb, was spiteful enough in other ways too. One day I had left my hat on a pile of fustians, and my friend the traveller, who had picked up a customer in the town, and was showing him some goods, thought proper to drop a heavy piece right on the top of my unfortunate tile, crushing it quite flat. He pretended that it was an accident, but behind my back he gloated over the deed, and laughed loudly to his pals; and I determined to pay him off. It was a serious trouble to me, that smashed hat; for I couldn't afford a new one, and was fast verging to the seedy in other respects as well.

Now for revenge! Night was coming on; my uncle was out, as I thought; Slocomb was on the basement-floor writing, and Joash was sweeping out the rooms. He used a composition of sawdust and water, something like very thick oatmeal porridge, and sprinkled the floors with this before he went over them with his brush. Now there was a hoist from the basement of the warehouse to the top story, a wooden pipe, as it were, about four feet square, with openings on each floor; a rope and cage ran up and down it. This wooden pipe also was used as a means of verbal communication from one floor to another, as by shouting down it you could make anybody hear from the bottom to the top of the warehouse, and *vice versa*. I had made one of the young hands, a lad whom Slocomb tyrannised over, my accomplice, and he

commenced operations by shouting down the hoist:

"Hi! Slocomb!"

"Well," said somebody, coming and putting his head into the hoist.

"Here's a letter for you; a young woman left it; catch!"

Slocomb I knew would be eager enough; for he was always engaged in some dirty intrigue, and made this lad fetch and carry for him, and indeed he stepped at once into the inside of the pipe to catch the letter.

I was ready on the first-floor with an immense box full of the sawdust-and-water composition, which Joash had swept up from the floors, with all the dirt and mud of the day mixed up in it, and I had arranged it so as to tip over at a touch. Down it went like an avalanche. There was a sound of crashing and smashing, a cry of rage and astonishment. I ran downstairs as hard as I could go, to gloat over my victim and proclaim my deed; for I really wanted a row with the fellow. His discomfiture was complete. He lay there in a pool of sawdust and water, his hat smashed over his face, his head and shoulders covered with the composition, whilst streams of water trickled all about him. "One for me, old fellow!" I cried, and seized him by the legs to draw him out. Horror of horrors! my hands came in contact with my uncle's gaiters! He it was who having heard that Slocomb was carrying on an irregular correspondence by means of his apprentice, had been watching for proof and had stepped into the hoist to intercept the letter. This I heard afterwards, for at the time, when I saw from under the battered hat protrude the indignant outraged countenance of my uncle, I fled.

Rub-a-dub-a-dub! A great crash of drums and squeaking of the ear-piercing fies. I ran to the door. A recruiting party was passing down the street, amid a crowd of loafers. Away I went without looking back, and next morning I was attested as a recruit in the 68th Light Dragoons.

CURIOUS CUSTOMERS.

Although we are accustomed to hear complaints, in this jostling, struggling world of ours, of weaker persons who go to the wall, it is not to be denied that if they cry but pretty loudly they will receive an immediate share of public attention, and if found to be much or unduly squeezed, we are justified by precedent in assuming that sympathy and assistance will also be given them. Very many classes of society, when found to be suffering under the burden and heavy pressure of a yoke to which they once voluntarily submitted themselves, have been relieved by the charitable interference of public opinion. These are generally found to be suffering from the infliction of too much work for too little money, which we call a grievance of condition; but there are other grievances, which for distinction's sake we will call grievances of the feelings, suffered by those whose calling brings them into constant and actual contact with the public, which require for their alleviation not the active interference, but only the attention and consideration of society.

One would naturally suppose that every person who enters a shop is aware of what he requires. Our experience, however, shows that shopkeepers and shopmen are accustomed to recognize two classes of customers: those who know what they want, and those who do not. In the first is to be found that customer who is so rare and so perfect that we will call him the Ideal customer. He exists as a sort of fond dream in the mind of the shopman, sometimes, but all too seldom, realized. He knows what he wants, and he knows the price; he asks for it, pays for it, and he takes it away. Heaven prosper him on his way! He is a model to all customers.

Now if the shopkeeper did not possess the article required by the Ideal customer, he would inform him so, and the customer would leave the shop. In this respect, and in this only, he differs from the Obstinate customer, who although quite as clear on his requirements, gives far more trouble. For he is no sooner informed that the article he wishes is not kept, than he betrays a belief that it is, and that only laziness or lack of understanding prevents his obtaining it. He therefore institutes a little search on his own account throughout the shop, naturally inflicting annoyance on the feelings of the shopman.

We will suppose the Obstinate customer enters a chemist's shop, and asks for a pair of washing gloves. He is told that we "do not keep them."

"Don't keep them?" he exclaims, gazing keenly around the shop; "dear me, that's very awkward! What is that pile of things on the shelf just above your head there?"

"He is told that they are chest protectors.

"Oh, indeed! Chest protectors, eh? they wouldn't do then—they wouldn't—do." This is said slowly as the speaker's eye wanders searchingly around the shop. Presently he says again, probably pointing rudely and officiously with his umbrella:

"Isn't that pile of things there with the red borders to them washing gloves? I think they must be!"

They are accordingly taken down, and shown to be something quite different to washing gloves. A glimmer of intelligence will then perhaps shine upon him, and he will say,