

WHEAT AND CLOVER.

On one side slept the clover,
On one side sprang the wheat,
And I, like a lazy lover,
Knew not which seemed more sweet,—
The red caps of the clover,
Or green gowns of the wheat.

The red caps of the clover,
They nodded in the heat,
And as the wind went over
With nimble, flying feet,
It tossed the caps of clover,
And stirred the gowns of wheat.

O rare red caps of clover;
O dainty gowns of wheat,
You teach a lazy lover
How in his lady meet
The sweetness of the clover,
The promise of the wheat.—Spectator.

KISMET.

The man in the cart, when he reached the top of the hill up which the old mare had been steadily plodding, was rejoiced to spy, against the whiteness of the road beyond the figure of a man walking. For although he was of a taciturn disposition, and loved not companionship, yet on this night he felt lonely; at times, even, he peered timorously between the trees that overshadowed the roadway, and had started in affright when the ring of the hoofs on the frozen ground had roused some bird from sleep, and the sound of its swift flight could be heard, growing gradually fainter, till hushed in the distance. Unhappy stories had flocked up from forgotten stores of memory, and, with the creeping of his flesh, haunting fancies had come that grim shapes were gathering behind him. With a shudder at the dread thought, he had pulled the collar of his heavy coat about his ears, and so had sat, fearful to breathe.

But now, as he leisurely drove down the steady decline, the sight of the lonely figure in the distance restored his forgotten courage; defiantly he hummed under his breath a song brimming over with blasphemy against all midnight loiterers other than those of flesh, to which song the mare put back her ears and hearkened in astonishment.

As he drew slowly nearer to the traveller, all sudden a great, deep voice came leaping through the cold night air, roaring out the swinging chorus of some song of the sea; the man in the cart stopped dead in his crooning, and listened in amazement to the intense happiness that rang in every note. The music in the song seemed to run in his blood—a shudder shook him from head to foot. The song ceased so suddenly as it had begun; the traveller had heard the noise of the approaching cart, and was now waiting at the side of the road till it should come up with him.

The driver pulled up near at hand, eyed the stranger with some curiosity; the mare also turned her head to gaze wonderingly at him for a moment, then shook herself till every bit of metal on her harness rang again. The stranger startled the man in the cart when he spoke, so intent was he in his stare. "How far might it be to Barrowmere?" inquired the man on foot.

"Nigh on seven mile," replied the driver, with wonder in his brain at a man possessing the bravery to walk alone at midnight through the still country lanes.

"Thanks," said the stranger shortly, in a bluff, hearty voice, then turned as if to continue his tramp.

The driver watched him a few paces. "He's a seaman," he muttered to himself, "and I don't make no doubt but he's going home," after which reflection he was about to gather up the reins to continue his interrupted journey, when his whole face lit up at the brilliant charitable idea that, as he was going on the same course, as the other, he should offer him a lift in the cart. His plump cheeks grew hot with virtuous pride as he shouted, "Hi, was it Barrowmere ye said?"

The man wheeled round sharply. "Barrowmere it was!" he sang out in answer. "I be going to Barrowmere," said the driver; "will ye climb up behind?"

The stranger with the joyous voice strode back, and swung himself into the cart with a muscular jerk.

"Praps ye will sit there," said the driver, pointing with the butt of his whip to a canvas-wrapped box at the bottom of the cart.

There the stranger sat himself down. A peculiar smile spread over the driver's face as he took the reins and drove on without another word.

By degrees he grew morose and sulky. He blamed the traveller for accepting his hospitable offer.

The stranger, who was muffled to the chin in a thick pea-jacket, made a vain attempt to converse with the driver, but, finding him unwilling and witless, he turned his attention to his more pleasant thoughts. His sun-browned face beamed at the thought of the meeting with his wife soon to come about, he chuckled audibly as he imagined her surprised delight, and he rubbed his hands for the twentieth time, when the full subtlety of his joke in not letting her know the day of return was again forced upon him.

The full moon flooded the fields with light, making them appear even colder than in reality they were; a very slight fall of snow and a sharp frost had clothed the trees and edges in a shimmering glory of sparkling ice. Not a sound was in the air save the buzz of the cart's wheels, the steady beat of hoofs, and an occasional shuddering snort from the mare. The cold was severe, at times compelling both men to beat their arms upon their bodies to restore the running of the blood.

Maybe it was the intense silence, maybe the lonely hour of the night, that oppressed spirits; but there crept over the man of the sea, who aforesaid had been so rollicking and humorous, a stern sobriety, a vague presage of impending disaster, an unreasonable mistrust of his former jollity, so that he sat dumb and perplexed on his seat in the cart, watching the sharp-drawn shadows of the

trees upon the white road flit silently by, eyeing with stealthy suspicion the burly, bowed body of the driver, and the while ardently desiring the eager arms of his wife.

The traveller got upon his feet in the cart and peered over the driver's shoulder. He could see, down in the hollow, the first outlying cottage of the village, and the blood surged up in his body, as one by one the well-remembered landmarks of home came into view.

His heart yearned for the shelter of this house, for the kiss of the loved woman; he almost sobbed when he thought of the mate to his little craft, who knew no friend in the world to give him welcome.

The driver looked back over his shoulder at the stranger, and muttered huskily, "That be Barrowmere yonder."

The stranger heeded him not, but at the instant the notion came into his head that he would get down from the cart and travel the remainder of the journey on foot; he would not that the surly man should see his glad meeting with his wife, so he tapped the driver on the shoulder. The man turned sulkily, he was bidden to pull up, and obeyed with sudden tardiness. The seaman leaped out the back, tossed a coin to the man, who pocketed it with a surly nod of thanks, and drove on again; a peculiar smile spread over his features as he muttered to something between the ears of the old mare.

"I do hope, now, he found it easy."

And the man of the sea was trudging slowly along the country lane towards his home; he was rejoiced at being free from his unfriendly companions; his good spirits began to return to him, when, on a sudden, the piteous, wailing howl of a dog struck upon his ears—terror seized upon him for a moment, so that he gasped for breath and trembled as he walked along. Bitterly he cursed the land; he vowed that he would carry his wife away to the sea and never touch the land again.

With almost unwilling footsteps, he approached the bend in the road whence his cottage would come in view; every tiny twig in the hedgerows was white-gleaming, not a cloud obscured the living heavens, only the pitiless, cold stare of the moon upon all and the silence of death. It ate into the heart of the man as he walked; he feared greatly, though he knew not why nor what manner of thing he feared. With bated breath he turned the corner; there lay his home, peaceful under the white moonlight; but his surprise was great at seeing the cart he had journeyed in at a standstill before the little rustic gate. The man, apparently, had entered the house, for the horse was standing with hanging head, its reins tied to the gate-post, waiting its driver. He walked quickly towards the house, with that strange misgiving at his heart. When he reached it, he feared to enter.

He looked into the cart, the box he had used as a seat had gone. He made a weak attempt to laugh his fears down, but failed miserably.

The windows facing the roadway were in pitchy darkness; not a sign was there that life was within. The seaman crept with muffled footsteps to the back of the house, and again sounded the chilling howl of a dog. He leant over the rough wooden rail and called softly. The dog—his dog—whined joyously, straining at its chain to welcome its master.

He leapt over the low fence; the idea crossed his mind that he was straying round his own house as a thief in the night. He paused for a moment, perplexed at the sudden beam of light which dazzled his eyes. He glanced up to discover whence it came; the curtains had been drawn across one of the windows, but had not met, thus leaving a narrow space through which the bright rays of light were streaming out upon the night from within—it was the window of his bedroom.

With fitful breath he crept over to the dog, and fondled it for a while, but still keeping his eyes fixed upon that lonely beam of light. The dog licked its master's hand in unrestrained joy at his return.

And there came into the man's mind a fervent desire to look in through that window. He struggled with himself to restrain the impulse, and to knock boldly at the door, but his wild forebodings and fears of unknown evil conquered him. He looked round for some means by which he might reach the window.

A large tree grew a few yards from the house, a bough of which jutted out towards the window; he remembered that, when he had lain awake on summer nights gone by, he had heard it tapping against the pane. With reluctant steps he crawled to the tree, clasped a projecting knot, and began to climb the weather-worn trunk. With much labor he scrambled on till at last he reached the bough that ran out towards the house. His hands were numb with the frost and cold. Slowly he crept on, trembling and panting, deadly fearful but smiling at his

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fears. One last painful effort, and he lay in the branch, with his face toward the window, the light beaming out into his blue eyes.

Gradually he grew accustomed to the glare; he saw plainly into the room.

He saw the bed shrouded in a white sheet; he saw the mother of his wife, kneeling at its head, bend over, and gently lift the sheet; he saw the still, pallid face of his dead wife; he saw the driver of the cart pass across the rift between the curtains, carrying the coffin on which he had sat in his joyous ride to his home. A great rush of blood blinded his eyes and sang in his ears; he clawed madly at the bough of the tree with his stiff fingers. As he swung in the air, his breath shook him, his teeth chattered and bit into his tongue. He heard with strange distinctness the whispering voices of the night, the stealthy movements in the little room; he saw things as he stared.

Gradually his clutching fingers relaxed; the whole firmament seemed to reel. In his struggling flight through the air, his skull struck and cracked against a bossy branch; his body turned limply, and fell with a dead thud, broken and lifeless, upon the turf beneath.

The dog crawled nearer, shivering and dismayed; it licked the bloody hand of its master, then threw up its head to give tongue to a long-drawn howl of terror.—London Sketch.

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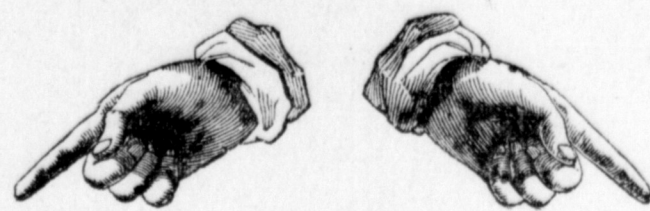
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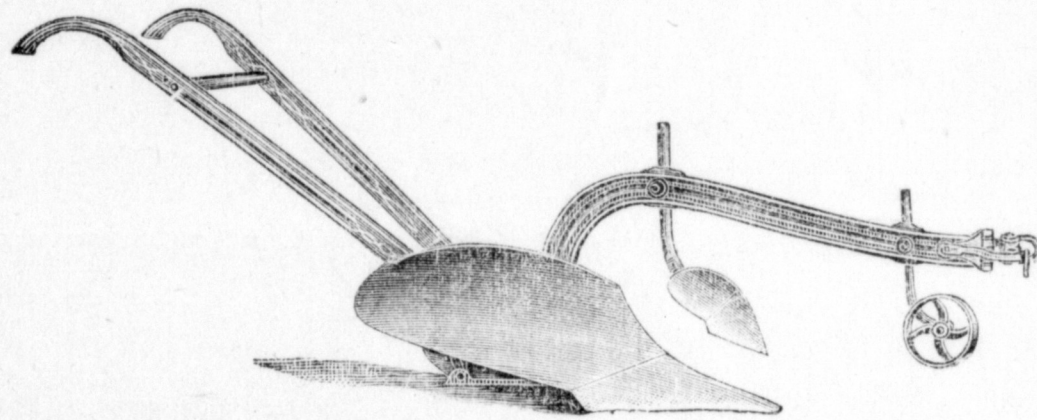
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