



LITERATURE.

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THE WITHERING LEAVES.

BY T. BUCHANAN READ.

The Summer is gone and Autumn is here,
And the flowers are strewing their earthly bier,
A dreary mist o'er the woodland swims,
While rattle the nuts from the windy limbs;
From bough to bough the squirrels run
At the noise of the hunters' echoing gun,
And the partridge flies where my footsteps heaves
The rustling drifts of the withering leaves.

The flocks pursue their southern flight—
Some all the day and some all night;
And up from the wooded marshes come
The sounds of the pheasant's leathery drum.
On the highest bough the mourner crows
Sits in his funeral suit of woe—
All nature mourns—and my spirit grieves
At the noise of my feet in the withering leaves.

Oh! I sigh for the days that have passed away
When my life like that year had its season of May;
When the world was all sunshine and beauty and truth,
And the dew bathed my feet in the valley of youth!
Then my heart felt its wings, and no bird of the sky,
Sang over the flowers more joyous than I.
But youth is a fable—and beauty deceives,
For my footsteps are loud in the withering leaves.

And I sigh for the time when the reapers at morn,
Came down from the hill at the sound of the horn—
Or, when dragging the rake, I followed them out,
While they toss'd their light sheaves with laughter about;
Through the field, with boy-daring, barefooted I ran;
But the stubbles foreshadowed the path of the man!
Now the uplands of life lie all barren of sheaves—
While my footsteps are loud in the withering leaves!

MARY OF ELTHAM.

(CONTINUED FROM OUR LAST.)

The moon just then emerged from a cloud which had darkened it, and the Abbe gained a full view of the features of his assailant. He trembled like an aspen leaf; but, endeavoring to recover his firmness, he again spoke.

"Who are you, and what would you?"

"Who I am, I think you hardly need ask. My name you will not fail to remember while you infest this world; and I cannot but surmise that you will be reminded of it to your cost in the world to come. But you demand my purpose. This it is—I would see Mary Brown under her father's roof. Have you aught else to demand? Speak, knave."

His menacing tone awed the Abbe into silence.

"Take my arm, damsel," said Rossiter. "I will protect you." He added, in a lower tone, "You know me Mary, but this catfif does not. Keep the secret."

They walked towards Eltham in silence. The Abbe, embarrassed and dismayed, offered no new interruption. Arrived at the farm-house, her protector said,—
"You are safe, and I withdraw."

He instantly quitted his charge, and in a moment was out of sight.

Mary passed to her home. Her parents were there.—They made some slight remark on the lateness of the hour. The Abbe threw off his confusion, and resumed his wonted cheerfulness.

"The scene," said he, "was most inviting. We paused in holy admiration, while the magnificent source of light seemed to sink into the western main. Nor was the gloom which succeeded less interesting. When Nature drops her sable mantle over creation's ample face, how finely does it intimate to man the fast approach of his end; of that night in which no man worketh. No heart, properly attuned to virtue, and awake to the promptings of religion, can regard these changes, unceasing as they are, without feeling its ideas lifted towards Him—the great I AM, from whom they proceed, and to whom all who breathe owe their origin."

Mary looked reprovingly at the Abbe. The elaborate falsehood involved in the description of his pretended reflections, which he had imposed upon her father, disgusted and shocked her. She briefly despatched the few household affairs which demanded her attention, and retired for the night.

For several days she carefully avoided the divine, and rarely encountered him but in the presence of her father. He saw her object, and resolved to defeat it, by watching her steps when it might be necessary for her to go any distance from home, which not unfrequently happened, as her mother was often an invalid, and always lame.

She had been to Woolwich one day, and was on her return, when, in a lane leading to the Dover-road, she found the Abbe, apparently waiting for her coming. He greeted her with a smiling countenance, and, joining company, enquired why she had been so distant of late.

Mary said it was surely unnecessary, after what had occurred when they last walked out together, to answer the question.

"What chanced then," said he, "of a truth is not soon to be forgotten. Know you the hardened ruffian who scrupled not to lay a sacrilegious hand on me a true son of the church?"

"Whoever he might be, it is possible that he did not know your quality, nor could it be divined from your language or actions at that moment."

"I spake but the language of nature."

"But from you, that of religion might be not unreasonably expected."

"You have been told, I guess, that this grave schooling air becomes your blooming face. Never believe those who so report."

"It has not been reported, for I have no occasion to school any one save you."

"My pretty pupil has made rare advances since I was here three years ago. Fitting it is that she should do so, but not such is the progress a female of your years should make. I speak to you with frankness. This is the season of pleasure and should not be lost."

"I do not comprehend your meaning."

"To your heart's content I am ready to explain. The bloom of a female, fair and fragrant as that of the rose, is hardly less evanescent. Ought it then to be coldly allowed to wither on its stem, or gather before its brightness can fade."

"I can give no answer to this. Even yet I do not comprehend the object of your speech."

"In a word it is love."

"Your vows," said Mary, "so I have understood, which bind you to the church, require you to abjure love with the ether vanities of life."

"We are forbidden to marry, and truth to say, priests most dutifully submit to that interdict, but to be denied love altogether were quite another thing. The holiest fathers have had fair handmaids in their houses. Do not affect childish surprise. To love, you must know, is to conform to nature, and to obey the first commandment of its eternal author."

"Such matters have not occupied my thoughts, and methinks you had better have applied yourself to exercise me in the French language which you wished me to learn, than indulge in descants which I can ill appreciate. But whither are we going? You have quitted the right path, and the tangled brush-wood and brambles forbid our advance. We must turn back."

"This is a shorter way than the more beaten track into which however we shall soon come. For that same knave who so coarsely interfered when we were last alone, I know not scarcely whether to deem him fiend or man.—To my startled senses he seemed the former. Shall I confess it? When the pale moon-beam fell on his visage, I saw lineaments which I could well believe were only to be seen in the infernal regions. He looked a devil in human form, and but for the horror this ghastly thought inspired, he had found me another man to deal with, and probably not succeeded in gaining an advantage over me."

"I will not go further," said Mary. "We are getting into the thickest part of the wood."

"Nay, we must through it now."

"I will go back, the gloom is to me frightful."

"Of what are you afraid?" "I scarcely know, but I feel this is not the place to which you ought to have brought me. I will instantly return." "Why so startled? Pause and gaze on the majestic scenery around."

"Let us gain the open road and the brow of the hill first." "That we can do hereafter, but for the present here rest with me upon the verdant turf, and let us enjoy all the peculiarities of our situation. I am not fatigued and will take no rest. You are free to do so, and as I left my home alone, alone I can return."

She impatiently bounded from him and began to retreat with rapid steps. He called to her to stay, but she attended not to his bidding, he then ran after her with his utmost speed and seized her dress.

"This foolish trepidation," said he, "is more than I can bear." "Then bear it not and leave me to myself."

"No, I will not allow my little pupil to have it all her own way. I will remain and she must stay by my side."

Thus speaking he drew her towards him, and would fain have made her sit down. She again indignantly started from him. "It is all in vain," he exclaimed, "swift of foot as you are, you cannot outrun me. Come pretty pointer no more of this."

He held her by the hands and offered to clasp her waist. Mary again strove but in vain to escape from his grasp.

"Help, help," she involuntarily cried, though without the slightest hope that her voice could be heard by any one but her companion. "It is useless to call out," he remarked, "and what in the name of the Virgin do you want help for?" "I would fain some one came to relieve me from a situation which I like not."

A rustling was heard in the bushes near them. Both started and looked in the same direction. The noise ceased, and with it his apprehensions.

"There is nothing to disturb us, nothing which we can fear. You perhaps thought the coarse intruder who formerly dogged us, was at hand. Not he, indeed, and if he were, seeing it is no longer dark, his fiendish scowl would avail him but little. Were he impudently to thrust himself in my way, come fairly within the reach of this good arm of mine—" "What then?" said Rossiter, advancing from the bushes which had been previously agitated.

"Why then, I—I," said the Abbe, overwhelmed with shame and confusion, "think it were better that you were attending to your own affairs." "It may be that I have no affairs which require attention, but you unquestionably might be better engaged than in thus seeking to beguile an innocent maiden who almost regarded you as a parent."

"You are taking much upon yourself."

"I did not wish to do so. You compel me to watch your doings." "We have met before, I think."

"Mention not that, said Rossiter, or my boiling blood will spurn all control, and your death struggle may commence." Mary looked on with fearful interest. There

was a calm determination in Rossiter's look which plainly evinced that the threat which had been uttered, his hand was prepared to carry into instant execution."

But the Abbe manifested no disposition to push things to extremities. He said no more on that subject which Rossiter had cautioned him to avoid. This submission was expected. The brute who can act the tyrant by a woman, is ever ready to quail before a man.

"Mary," said Rossiter, "pursue your way. Your persecutor must tarry."

Mary immediately acted on this advice, and Gamaches, breathless from shame and rage, obedient to a sign from Rossiter fell back some paces. They left the wood. Mary directed her steps towards Eltham. Rossiter followed but did not enter the village, and left the Abbe without deigning to bestow on him another word.

Mary was at first resolved to make her parents acquainted with all that had passed, but on reflection she deemed this unnecessary, and the task would be irksome. To describe the conduct of Gamaches might give her father-pain, but could answer no good purpose, and she considered that it would be her own fault if she again afforded him an opportunity of annoying her.

He was sorely disappointed. During the remainder of his stay he was courteous in the extreme to Mary, yet more than once he could not help venting a portion of the rage which rankled in his heart on the outrage, as he termed it, which in his person the church had sustained, while he darkly hinted that a day would come, when brute force might not suffice to settle any differences between them, and when vengeance, a full ample measure of vengeance might be securely his.

But as has been stated, on Mary he hazarded no new attack. He attempted to resume his former kindly air,—It sat but awkwardly on him, but except by Mary this passed unnoticed. He was most cautious not to offend. Had Rossiter always been present to threaten and restrain, he could not have been more discreetly reserved.

This state of things probably rendered Eltham less agreeable to him than he expected it would prove, and he took his leave. The day following that of his departure, Rossiter appeared. Mary expressed her gratitude for the signal services which he had rendered, but he made very light of them. When she expressed surprise that he should have been close at hand on both occasions, when his interference was wanted; he explained by saying that as he knew the character of the man, had no pleasure to pursue and no calling to attend, he could not more agreeably occupy his time than in watching the party suspected. The hope that he might render a service to his friend, was the nearest approach to enjoyment that he could make.

"But you and our visitor had met before—so I collected from your speech in the wood," said Mary.

"Yes—yes," he replied, nervously catching his breath, while he spoke, "and when I first saw him, he seemed to my eyes a fiend, prepared to mock human woe. Let me not think of it."

His emotion was great. To relieve it Mary changed the subject of conversation, and secretly resolved to mention the name of Gamaches no more.

Many days of tranquillity followed. The seasons succeeded each other, presenting the wonted varieties, but the lives of the inmates of the farm-house knew no change worth noting. The vernal season gave the signal for crowning the graves of the parents of Rossiter with blooming flowers, the summer brought its sports which Rossiter beheld with complacency, though he could not participate in them, and in witnessing harvest-home, he could endure the joyous shout of the assembled rustics, without repining that he alone of all the crowd then assembled was unhappy. It may be supposed that friendship like that of Mary and Rossiter, founded on esteem—esteem which long subsequent acquaintance served but to confirm and heighten, would have at length begun to assume a warmer character. Such was not the case. In Mary the great springs which move the human heart to passion had never been brought into action, in Rossiter they had been crushed by the hand of overwhelming calamity. They believed that they had little in common with the rest of the world, and the well understood condition of their friendship, was that it should never expand into love.

The keen blasts of October came pouring over the neighbouring hills, and the startled foliage shrinking from their irresistible attacks, fluttered on the withering boughs or was sinking to the ground, when Mary accosted Rossiter with more than common earnestness, and told that she had a new kindness to claim at his hands. A smile of ready assent played round his mouth while she proceeded to explain herself.

"I want you, said she, to go a longer journey with me than we have ever yet made together. Will you be content to accompany me to a foreign land? only for a brief period." "To any foreign land, Mary, and for any period, however extended. To me it matters little where I go or how long I stay. Whither would you go?"

"To France." "How! to France! No Mary I, I cannot accompany you there." "I thought you said to any foreign country, you would willingly journey?"

"So I did, but you have named France. That is no foreign country to me: it is my native land."

"I only desire to visit Calais, and you will not be sorry to learn that my father's good fortune makes it necessary for me to go. Lady Denberly who in early life when in humble circumstances was my mother's intimate friend, dying lately in Paris, left her a bequest of five hundred pounds. Knowing Gamaches who was here as you must still remember last year, to be well acquainted with us, the executors have placed the money in his hands, and he has written over to say, as it would be inconvenient for my father or mother to travel so far, it will be paid to me."

"And to you alone?" "So he writes. Now bearing in mind what his deportment was, and further reflecting what it might have been, but for your timely appearance, I am anxious that you should be my companion in the expedition." "Mary I am ready to do whatever may tend to save you from danger, but in this case you know not what you ask—shall I tell you all?"