



LITERATURE.

From Tail's Magazine.

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST.

Oh! joy to the spring-tide sun,
For it opens the buds to leaves,
And it makes the sweet climbers run
With fragrance o'er the eaves;
And calls glad birds about,
To sing new songs of praise—
Oh, joy to the spring, but it cannot bring
The joy of by-gone days.

I think on the Past with a thought
That paineth the bosom sore—
A face, a form, to my mind is brought,
Which my eyes can never see more!
I hear a kind word said
By a tongue that is mute and cold;
I feel the clasp of a hand, now dead
And withered in the mould.

But the thought, of a friendship changed
Is worse than a dream of the dead;
And I think of the dear estranged
Till reason, with peace seems fled.
There are hearts that loved me once,
There are hands that once caressed,
That are colder now than the frost on the bough,
That killeth the bird in his nest!

A YOUNG STUDENT'S STORY.

In the summer of 1842, I was travelling in the Perseverance Stage coach from Banff to Aberdeen, with four companions, three gentlemen and a lady, the last of whom amused the company by descending very fluently upon the beauty and accomplishments of her only daughter, who, it appeared, was in the metropolis finishing her education at a fashionable seminary. Though I looked upon her panegyric as an ebullition of female vanity, and disregarded it accordingly, the individuals to whom she was addressing herself, an old gentleman of venerable appearance, and peculiarly interesting manners, and with much the air of a traveller, listened to her with the most profound and respectful attention. After talking us almost asleep, she changed the conversation, and began putting some questions respecting a brother, who, it appeared, was in the army and abroad. The old gentleman satisfied all her inquiries with the most polite attention, and turning to us observed, that as there were some remarkable circumstances in the history of his brother's rise from the humblest situation in the army to the rank he then occupied, he would, if we offered no objection, beguile the tediousness of our journey by relating some of them. The lady having assured him of her readiness to hear whatever he was pleased to communicate, the old gentleman threw himself back in his seat, cleared his throat, and, in a tone and manner singularly pleasing, narrated the following story:—

My parents, though poor, were of respectable lineage, and possessed of an unblemished reputation. My brother James was at an early age sent to a school at A——, in Dumbartonshire, his native village. He was a boy of quick parts, and great powers of application, and in a short time outstripped all his competitors; and so pleased were his parents and instructors with his progress, that they determined to breed him up to one of the learned professions, reflecting that to devote one of his promising abilities to a mere mechanical pursuit would be to throw away the gifts of Providence. But unfortunately for James' prospects, his parents died, within a month of each other, before he had attained his fifteenth year; and he was reluctantly compelled to relinquish his intention of studying the ensuing winter in the Glasgow University. I was myself poor, and unable to assist him; but I offered him an asylum under my roof, which he gladly accepted. But after committing the remains of our beloved and venerable parents to the silent tomb, seeing him melancholy and desponding, I was induced to signify to him a desire that he should visit an uncle, a brother of his mother, who resided in a distant part of the country, and who I thought might forward his views. I knew him to be cold-hearted and penurious; but as he was rich, and a bachelor to boot, I fancied he might be induced to befriend the darling son of an only and beloved sister. The poor boy, to whom inaction appeared to be real suffering, caught eagerly at my suggestion, though offering such slender prospects of being realized, and early next morning set out on foot, with only a few shillings in his pocket, and his scanty wardrobe under his arm. I accompanied him about half a mile on his way; the tear stood in my eye as I embraced him and recommended him to the care and guidance of the Almighty, who will never forsake those who trust themselves to His protection. He, too, I saw was affected; and wringing my hand affectionately, we parted in breathless silence. I waited but to see him hasten down the steep declivity, with rapid and irregular steps, then turning away with a breaking heart, slowly retraced my way

homewards, sadly reflecting on the bitter and isolated existence to which at an age so early full of the restlessness and buoyancy of youth he was doomed, should his anxious expectations be not realized.

It was late in the night of the fourth day when James, warm and nearly exhausted with travel, arrived at his uncle's residence, a wasted and dilapidated mansion which might once have boasted of some splendour, but which was now merely the semblance of a human habitation.—Altho' he had availed himself of every conveyance within his reach, he was so weary as scarcely to be able to drag one limb after the other. Tired as he was, however, he felt that his stay must be short. He knocked long and loudly before he was admitted; nor was the reception he met with from his mercenary relative at all calculated to revive his drooping spirits. The fretful old man actually got into a downright passion, and abused his unfortunate nephew in no measured terms for disturbing him at such an hour. The only other inmates of the establishment were Barf the dog, and a sulky, half-famished looking old woman, who enjoyed all the privileges and underwent all the drudgery of a domestic, without the remuneration.—Neither received any thing in the shape of reward for their services save their scanty meals. Both were discontented, and revenged themselves for the tyranny of their master by snarling at every person whom chance or their evil fortune threw in their way. The dog barked furiously as James made his entrance; the old hag, who admitted him, unaccustomed to receive visitors, grumbled at the trouble he gave her; and the master of the house, casting an apprehensive glance at the closet that contained his treasure, and another at the intruder, asked him in a surly tone, what he wanted. The poor boy, little encouraged by such a reception, answered by giving him in a brief and hesitating manner the history of his parents' death—of his own consequent destitution, mentioned his wishes relative to the future, and entreated him in his mother's name to do something in his behalf. The old man was evidently affected by the pathos and simplicity of the appeal; but, wedded to his gold, determined not to yield to the impressions of pity, which began to overcome his selfish spirit, and fearful lest the simple yet winning manners of the youth might undermine his resolution, if permitted to remain, he decided to cut the matter short. Shrugging up his shoulders, he muttered something in a snarling tone about the necessity of curbing the inconsiderate ambition of youth. James was about to reply, when the cruel wretch, determined at once to get rid of him, summoned up a harsh countenance, and told him briefly he could do nothing for him, "that if he actually wished to stay a few days he must just sleep in the barn, where there was plenty of good straw, as there were but two beds in the house; but," he added, "you had better return home immediately, and endeavour to find some employment befitting your condition; idleness is dangerous to lads of your age." James answered meekly, that he would certainly follow his advice, and was only sorry that he was so fatigued as to be unable to set out without a few hours' repose.

He felt little disposed to partake of the frugal supper of potatoes and milk set before him; and, after swallowing a few mouthfuls, he betook himself to the barn, and to repose. Recommending himself to the protection of Heaven, he laid himself down to slumber, with a heavy heart, and a mind burdened with bitter griefs; but peace never forsakes the innocent breast; and he at length sunk to rest, though his sleep was broken and unrefreshing; and he awoke in the morning cold and unhappy, the piercing wind penetrating through every crevice of the old barn, informing him that the storm of the previous night had not abated—that he must again encounter its severity.—His heart sunk; his courage failed him when he considered the forlornness of his situation; and burying his face in the straw, he gave way to a torrent of tears. The bitterness of his grief having in some measure subsided he regained tranquillity. At length he was summoned to his breakfast by the old crone, who observed his wretchedness with total indifference. Leaving his miserable lodgings, he entered the house, and found his uncle seated at his solitary meal. A surly "good morning" was all the invitation extended to him: a feeling of antipathy on the one side and injustice on the other kept them mutually silent. James, however, found words to inform his host of his intention to return home without any further delay. This intention was received with evident satisfaction;—and no remark was made, nor any attempt offered to dissuade him from setting out while the tempest was still raging. Accordingly, having partaken of a hasty breakfast of porridge and milk, he took leave of his churlish uncle, little gratified by the result of his visit. On the evening of the same day he reached the village of G——, and put up for the night at the little Ale house that stands at its entrance, the only house of entertainment for man or beast for many miles around. He found the kitchen occupied by a party of soldiers, in the recruiting service, who, in company with several of the villagers, were regaling themselves with the best the house afforded. Entering into conversation with them, James was easily induced to join their party, and even to share in their carousal. He listened to the lofty encomiums bestowed by the wily soldiers upon their profession—its glory, its nobility and usefulness, contrasted with the petty pleasures of inglorious ease, till his romantic imagination was excited by the tale of narrow escapes, of dangers bravely met and defied. His ardour was aroused; the spirit of military glory took possession of his mind; young and ignorant, he was unconscious of the danger he was exposing himself to; and under the combined influence of wine and excitement, he was hurried in an unwary moment into the fatal step of accepting the bounty, and enlisting in the — regiment. Colonel P——, their commander, compassionate his youth, and unwilling to subject so delicate a frame to the hardships of military service, engaged him as his own body servant.

Two years had passed away, during which he had given the fullest satisfaction to his master; he was treated rather as his confident and friend than as a menial. Meanwhile the regiment was ordered to Spain to support the Duke

of Wellington in his Peninsular campaign. The voyage was a pleasant one; and the gaiety and excitement by which he was surrounded soon dispelled the sad and regretful feelings he experienced on losing sight of the hills of his native country. During the interval of leisure, the soldiers "fought their battles o'er again." The young, who were yet "to face the foe," fired at their recitals of conquest and of victory with enthusiasm; preferments were before them—expectation sat on every face—joy beamed from every eye; and even those who a few days before lamented the destiny that tore them from home and its endearments, became infected with the general hilarity. They were all landed in safety, and soon afterwards joined the Duke at L——, without anything of interest taking place. Colonel P——, while there, formed a close intimacy with Colonel R——, who commanded a fine corps in the same service. They were both men of taste and experience—both equally noble and generous in disposition; and most of their leisure hours were spent together. They were in the habit sometimes of making excursions into the country; and as there was no danger to be apprehended from these rambles, and as the practice was a delightful one, it was very often repeated; but an accident proved, as the sequel will show, with what great danger it was attended.

One day they had extended their ride to visit the splendid ruins of B——, but unfortunately lost their way and were benighted in returning. At length they found themselves, after long travelling, at the door of an elegant inn. They alighted and partook of a slight refreshment. They found they were but three miles from their camp; but being rather fatigued, and finding the wines good, and the accommodation comfortable, they made up their minds to pass the night there. Elated by the day's amusement, and the good cheer before them, they sat late, chatting and laughing merrily. After they had retired for the night, and all was apparently quiet, their two servants proceeded up stairs to the room they were conjointly to occupy. The other servant, John S——, who was a year or two older than my brother, was a youth of tall figure and full of daring, yet withal very prudent. One fault he was addicted to—he had a strong propensity for gambling, and late as it was, and sleepy as my brother found himself, he insisted upon producing a pack of cards, which he always carried in his pocket, except when in actual service. Finding remonstrance useless, they sat down to the game; by degrees, however, the lamp began to grow dim, and they were upon the point of relinquishing the cards, when our inveterate gambler remembered that he had a small viol of oil about his person; it was immediately drawn out, the lamp replenished, and they set to it again. They had not sat many minutes when they were disturbed by the sound of footsteps upon the stair. They listened; but the person having evidently observed the light, gently retired. This appeared rather suspicious, and a sickly fear crept over them; but this lasted but for a moment. They were both brave by nature, and had too long served such dauntless masters to be easily intimidated. Their resolution was soon taken. Each of them had a brace of large holster pistols, which were speedily loaded, and concealing the light in a corner of the room, they took their posts by the door and awaited the result in silent expectation. Half an hour had not elapsed when the same footsteps were again heard, and the person advanced and gently opened the door. John sprung forward with the lamp in one hand and a pistol cocked in the other. Though this was but the work of a moment, not an object was visible; one minute they stood in astonished suspense; they had heard no person descend the stairs, and where could the intruder have vanished to?—They explored every corner, and at last found a door which opened into a room adjoining. They tried to force it open, but it was as firm as a rock. As they had neither heard it open nor shut they returned into their own room determined to make a strict search, to see whether they could find any thing to confirm their suspicions. They searched every nook, but could discover nothing. At length they raised the curtains of the bed, and to their astonishment discovered a powerful man stretched under the bed upon his back with a large clasp knife in his hand. Without further ceremony they dragged him from his hiding place and demanded an explanation. He shook his head, pretending ignorance of the English language. They demanded what he knew of their masters. In broken French he declared his utter ignorance of what they demanded. They threatened him to no purpose. At length they ordered him to march before them and show them every room in the house; they searched them all but in vain. The beds in which their masters had slept were still warm; but they could nowhere be seen. Not a living being was to be seen in the house except their guide. Often the latter when he came to a room would point to them to enter before him, but they were not thus to be duped. Seeing all search was in vain they returned to their own room, and having stretched their gloomy companion on the floor, and tied him hand and foot, they sat down to consult. They resolved to search again, and by themselves; but again they were unsuccessful, and were about to retire, when they heard the noise of a man. They softly followed in its direction. Entering a narrow passage they came to a door ajar which led to a small apartment seven feet by five, in which sat two ruffian-looking fellows, sitting on opposite sides of a rude table, in close conversation over a bottle of brandy. They rushed into the room, and each presented his pistol at the ruffians' breasts. The astonished desperadoes sprung to their feet, but were sternly commanded to reseal themselves and instantly declare what had become of the two officers. One of them answered in English that they were strangers and knew nothing of them. They were without scruple called liars. John pulled out his watch and swore that he would only grant him two minutes' grace, at the end of which time, if they would not declare all they knew, he would blow their brains out.

The time was almost expired, when the fellows called upon them to spare their lives and if no injury should befall them they would show them their masters. This being promised, they led them out of the house across the