



LITERATURE.

[From the Edinburgh Christian Magazine.]

LABOUR.

Pause not to dream of the future before us;
Pause not to weep the wild cares that come o'er us;
Mark how creation's deep, musical chorus,
Unintermitting goes up into heaven!
Never the ocean wave falters in flowing;
Never the little seed stops in its growing;
More and more richly the rose-heart keeps glowing,
Till from its nourishing stem it is riven.

Labour is life!—'Tis the still water faileth;
Idleness ever despoileth, bewaileth;
Keep the watch wound, for the dark night assaileth;
Flowers droop and die in the stillness of noon.
Labour is glory;—the flying cloud lightens;
Only the waving wing changes and brightens;
Idle hearts only the dark future frightens;
Play the sweet keys, wouldst thou keep them in tune!

Labour is rest—from the sorrows that greet us;
Rest from all petty vexations that meet us,
Rest from sin promptings, that ever entreat us,
Rest from world-sirens that lure us to ill.
Work—and pure slumbers shall wait on thy pillow;
Work—thou shalt ride over care's coming billow!
Lie not down wearied 'neath woe's weeping willow!
Work with a stout heart and resolute will!

Droop not though shame, sin and anguish, are round thee,
Bravely fling off the cold chain that hath bound thee!
Look to you pure heaven smiling beyond thee!
Rest not content in thy darkness a clod!
Work for some good,—be it ever so slowly!
Cherish some flower,—be it ever so lowly!
Labour! True labour is noble and holy;
Let labour follow thy prayers to thy God!

[From the Dublin University Magazine.]

A NIGHT IN THE BELL INN.
A GHOST STORY.

About four and thirty years ago I was travelling through Denbighshire upon a mission which needed despatch. I had in fact, in my charge, some papers which were required for the legal preliminaries to a marriage which was about to take place in a family of consideration, upon the borders of that country.

The season was winter, but the weather delightful—that is to say, clear and frosty; and even without foliage the country through which I posted was beautiful. The subject of my journey was a pleasant one. I anticipated an agreeable visit and a cordial welcome; and the weather and scenery were precisely of the sort to second the cheerful associations with which my excursion had been undertaken. Let no one, therefore, suggest that I was predisposed for the reception of gloomy or horrible impressions. When the sun set we had a splendid moon, at once soft and brilliant; and I pleased myself with watching the altered, and if possible, more beautiful effects of the scenery through which we were smoothly rolling. I was to put up for the night at the little town of —; and on reaching the hill, over which the approach to it is conducted, about a short mile from its quaint little street, I dismounted, and directing the postilion to walk his jade and horses leisurely up the winding road, I trod on before him in the pleasant moonlight and the sharp bracing air. A little by path led directly up the steep acclivity, while the carriage road more gradually ascended by a wide sweep; the little path, leading through fields and hedgerows, I followed, intending to anticipate the arrival of my conveyance at the summit of the hill.

I had not proceeded very far when I found myself close to a pretty old church, whose ivied tower and countless window panes, were glittering in the moonbeams—a high, irregular hedge, overtopped by tall and ancient trees enclosed it—and rows of funeral yews showed black and mournful among the wan array of headstones that kept watch over the village of the dead. I was so struck with the glimpse I had caught of the old church yard, that I could not forbear mounting the little stile that commanded it; no scene could be imagined more still and solitary. Not a human habitation was near—every sign and sound of life was reverently remote;—and this old church, with its silent congregation of the dead marshalled under its walls, seemed to have spread round it a circle of stillness and desolation that pleased, while it thrilled me.

No sound was here audible but the softened rush of waters, and that sweet note of home and safety, the distant laying of the watch dog, now and then broken by the sharper rattle of carriage wheels upon the dry road. But while I looked upon the sad solemn scene before me, these sounds were interrupted by one which startled, and indeed, for a moment, froze me with horror. The sound was a cry, or rather a howl of despairing terror, such as I have never heard before or since uttered by human voice. It broke from the stillness of the churchyard; but I saw no figure from which it proceeded—though this circumstance, indeed, was scarcely wonderful, as the broken ground, the trees, tall weeds, and tombstones afforded abundant cover for any person who might have sought concealment. The cry of unspeakable agony was succeeded by a silence, and

I confess my heart throbbed strangely when the same voice articulated, in the same tone of agony.

"Why will you trouble the dead? Who can torment us before the time? I will come to you in my flesh, though after my skin worms destroy this body, and you shall speak to me face to face."

This strange address was followed by another cry of despair, which died as suddenly as it was raised.

I never could tell why it was I was not more horror-stricken than I really was by this mysterious, and, all things considered, awful interpellation. It was not until the silence had again returned, and the frosty breeze among the crisp weeds crept towards me like the stealthy approach of some unearthly influence, that I felt a superstitious terror gradually inspire me, which hurried me at an accelerated pace from the place. A few minutes, and I heard the friendly voice of my charioteer hallooing to me from the summit of the hill.

Reassured as I approached, I abated my speed.

"I saw you standing on the stile, sir, by the church yard," he said as he drew near, "and I ask your pardon for not giving you the hint, before, but they say, it is not lucky; and I called to you loud and to come away, but I see you're nothing the worse for it."

"Why, what is there to be afraid of, there, my good fellow?" I asked, affecting as much indifference as I was able.

"Why, sir," said the man, throwing an uneasy look in the direction, "they do say there's a bad spirit haunts it, and nobody in these parts would go near it after dark for love or money."

"Haunted?" I repeated, "and how does the spirit show himself?"

"Oh, lawk, sir, in all sorts of shapes—sometimes like an old woman almost doubled in two with years; sometimes like a little child going along a full foot high above the grass of the graves; and sometimes like a big black ram, strutting on his hind legs, and with a pair of eyes like live coals; some have seen him in the shape of a man with his arm raised up toward the sky, and his head hanging down as if his neck was broke. I can't think of half the shapes he's took at different times; but they are bad; the very child has the face of Satan, they say, when he comes in that shape—God bless us! and nobody's ever the same that sees him once."

By this time I was seated in my vehicle, and some six or eight minutes quick driving whirled us into the old fashioned street, and brought the chaise to a full stop before the open door and well-lighted hall of the Bell Inn. To me there has always been an air of indescribable cheer and comfort about a substantial country hostelry, especially when one arrives as I did, upon a keen winter's night with an appetite as sharp, and something of that sense of adventure and excitement which, before the day of down trains and tickets, always in a greater or less degree, gave a zest to travelling. Greeted with that warmest of welcomes for which Inns, alas! are celebrated, I had soon satisfied the importunities of a keen appetite; and having for some hours taken my ease in a comfortable parlor, and before a comfortable fire, I began to feel sleepy and betook myself to my no less comfortable bedchamber.

It is not to be supposed that the adventures of the churchyard had been obliterated from my recollection by the suppressed bustle and good cheer of the "Bell." On the contrary, it had occupied me almost incessantly during my solitary ruminations; and as night advanced, and the stillness of repose and desertion stole over the old mansion, the sensations with which the train of remembrance and speculation was accompanied, became anything but pleasant.

I felt, I confess, fidgety and queer—I searched the corners and recesses of the oddly shaped and roomy old apartment—I turned the face of the looking glass to the wall—I poked the fire into a roaring blaze—I looked behind the window curtain with a vague anxiety to assure myself that nothing could be lurking there. The shutter was a little open, and the vivid tower of the little church and the tufted tops of the trees that surrounded it, were visible over the slope of the intervening hill. Hastily shut out the unwelcome object, and in a mood of mind, I must confess, favorable enough for any freak my nerves might please to play me, I hurried through my dispositions for the night, humming a gay air all the time to reassure myself, and plunged into bed, extinguishing the candle, and—shall I acknowledge the weakness? nearly burying my head under the blanket.

I lay awake some time, as men will do under such circumstances, but at length fatigue overcame me, and I fell into a profound sleep. From this repose I was, however, aroused in the manner I am about to describe:

A very considerable interval must have intervened.—There was a cold air in the room very unlike the comfortable atmosphere in which I had composed myself to sleep. The fire, though much lower than when I had gone to bed, was still emitting flame enough to throw a flickering light over the chamber. My curtains were, however, closely drawn, and I could not see beyond the narrow tent in which I lay.

There had been, as I awakened, a clanking among the fire irons, as if a palsied hand was striving to arrange the fire, and this rather unaccountable noise continued for some seconds after I had become completely awake.

Under the impression that I was subjected to an accidental intrusion, I called out in a gentle, and afterwards in a sharper tone, "Who's there?"

At the second summons the sound ceased, and I heard instead, the sound of naked feet as it seemed to me, upon the floor, pacing to and fro, between the hearth and the bed in which I lay. A superstitious terror which I could not combat, stole over me; with an effort I repeated my question, and drawing myself upright in the bed, expected the answer with a strange sort of trepidation. It came in terms and accompanied with the same accessories which I shall not soon forget.

The very same tones which had so startled me in the churchyard the evening before, the very sounds which I had heard then and there, were now filling my ears, and spoken in the chamber where I lay.

"Why will you trouble the dead? Who can torment us before the time? I will come to you in my flesh, though after my skin worms destroy this body, and you shall speak with me face to face."

With feelings which I shall not attempt to describe I heard the speaker approach the bed—a hand parted the bed curtain and threw them open, revealing a form more horrible than my fancy had ever seen—an almost gigantic figure; naked except what might well have been the rotted remnant of a shroud—stood close beside my bed; livid and cadaverous; grimmed as it seemed with the dust of the grave, and staring on me with a gaze of despair, fury, and malignity, too intense for human endurance.

I cannot say whether I spoke or not, but this infernal spectre answered as if I had.

"I am dead and yet alive; the child of perdition—in the grave I am murderer, but here I am Apollyon. Fall down and worship me."

Having thus spoken, it stood for a moment at the bed side, and then turned away with a shuddering moan, and I lost sight of it, but after a few seconds it came again to the bedside, as before.

"When I died they put me under Mervyn's tombstone, and they did not bury me. My feet lie toward the west: may be I will rest—I will rest—rest—rest."

Again the figure was gone, and again it returned and said:

"I am your master—I am your resurrection and your life, and therefore fall down and worship me."

I made a motion to mount upon the bed but what further passed, I know not, for I fainted.

I must have lain in this state for a long time, for when I became conscious, the fire was almost extinct. For hours that seemed interminable, I lay, scarcely daring to breathe, and afraid to get up, lest I should encounter the hideous apparition, for aught I knew, lurking close beside me. I lay in an agony of expectation awaiting the appearance of day-light.

Gradually it came, and with it the cheerful and reassuring sounds of life and occupation. At length I mustered courage to reach the bell-rope, and having rung lustily, I plunged again into bed.

"Draw the window curtains—open the shutters," I exclaimed, as the man entered, and these orders executed, "look about the room," I added, "and see if some cat or other animal has not got in."

There was nothing of the sort; and satisfied that my visitant was no longer in the chamber, I dismissed the man, and hurried through my toilet with precipitation.

I escaped to the parlor, whither I instantly summoned the proprietor of the "Bell."

"Shut the door," said I.

It was done.

"I have had an uneasy night in the room you assigned me, sir; I may say indeed a miserable night," I said.

"Pray," resumed I, interrupting his apologetic expressions of surprise, "has any person but myself ever complained of being disturbed in that room?"

"Never."

I had expected the ghostly old practical joke so often played off by landlords in story books, and fancied I might have been deliberately exposed to the chance of a haunted chamber. But there was no acting in the frank look and honest denial of mine host.

"It is a very strange thing," said I, hesitating—"and I do not see why I should not tell you what has occurred. And as I could swear, if necessary, to the perfect reality of the entire scene, it behooves you, I think, to sift the matter carefully. For myself, I cannot entertain a doubt as to the nature of the truly terrible visitation to which I have been subjected; and were I in your position, I should transfer my establishment at once, to some other house, as well suited to the purpose, and free from the dreadful liabilities of this."

I proceeded to detail the particulars of the occurrence of the past night, to which he listened with nearly as much horror as I recited them to him.

"Mervyn's tomb?" he repeated after me; "why that's down there in L—; the churchyard you can see from the window of the room you slept in."

"Let us go there instantly," I exclaimed, with an almost feverish anxiety, to ascertain whether we should discover in the place indicated, anything corroborative of the authenticity of my vision.

"Well, I shan't say no," said he, obviously bracing himself for an effort of courage; "but we will take Faukes and James, the helper, with us; and please, sir, you'll not mention the circumstances as has occurred, to either of 'em."

I gave him the assurance he asked for, and in a few minutes, our little party were in full march upon the point of interest.

A few minutes brought us to the low gray walls and bleak hedgerows that surrounded the pretty old church, and its melancholy and picturesque memorials.

"Mervyn's tomb lies there, I think sir," he said, pointing to a corner of the churchyard, in which piles of rubbish, with withered weeds and brambles, were thickly accumulated under the solemn, though imperfect shelter of the wintry trees.

He exchanged some sentences with our attendants in Welsh.

"Yes, sir, that's the place," he added, turning to me.

And as we approached it, I bethought me that the direction in which, as I stood upon the stile, I had heard the voice on the night preceding, corresponded accurately with that indicated by my guides. The tomb in question was a huge slab of black marble, supported as was usual, upon six pillars, little more than two feet high, each.—There was ample room for a human body to lie inside this funeral pent house; and on stopping to look beneath, I was unspeakably shocked to see that something like a human figure was actually extended there.

It was, indeed, a corpse, and what is more corroborated in every trait, with the infernal phantom, which on the preceding night, had visited and appalled me.

The body, though miserably emaciated, was that of a