

Poetry.

THE LITTLE BOY THAT DIED.

I am alone in my chamber now,
And the midnight hour is near;
And the faggot's crack, and the clock's dull tick—
Are the only sounds I hear.
And over my soul, in its solitude,
Sweet feelings of sadness glide;
For my head and my eyes are full when I think
Of the little boy that died.

I went one night to my father's house—
Went home to the dear ones all—
And softly I opened the garden gate,
And softly the door of the hall.
My mother came out to meet her son;
She kissed me and then she sighed,
And her head fell on my neck, and she wept
For the little boy that died.

I shall miss him when the flowers come
In the garden where he played;
I shall miss him more by the fireside,
When the flowers have all decayed.
I shall see his toys and his empty chair,
And the horse he used to ride;
And they will speak with a silent speech
Of the little boy that died.

I shall see his little sister again
With her playmates about the door;
And I'll watch the children in their sports,
As I never did before;
And if, in the group, I see a child
That's dimpled and laughing-eyed,
I'll look to see if it may not be
The little boy that died.

We shall all go home to our Father's house—
To our Father's house in the skies,
Where the hope of our souls shall have no blight,
Our love no broken ties;
We shall roam on the banks of the river of peace,
And bathe in its blissful tide;
And one of the joys of our heaven shall be—
The little boy that died.

Literary Selections.

THE COUNTER-STROKE.

(Concluded.)

He was gone three clear days only, at the end of which he returned with Mrs. Danby and—his son—in florid health, too, and one of the finest babies of its age—about nine weeks only—I had ever seen. Thus vanished the air-drawn Doubting Castle and Giant Despair which I had so hastily conjured up! The cause assigned by Mr. Arbuthnot for the agitation I had witnessed, was doubtless the true one; and yet, and the thought haunted me for months, years afterwards, he opened only one letter that morning, and had sent a message to his wife that the child was well!

Mrs. Danby remained at the Park till the little Robert was weaned, and was then dismissed very munificently rewarded. Year after year rolled away without bringing Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot any additional little ones, and no one, therefore, could feel surprised at the enthusiastic love of the delighted mother for her handsome, nobly-promising boy. But that which did astonish me, though no one else, for it seemed that no one else noticed it, was a strange defect of character which began to develop itself in Mr. Arbuthnot. He was positively jealous of his wife's affection for their own child! Many and many a time have I remarked, when he thought himself unobserved, an expression of intense pain flash from his fine, expressive eyes, at any more than usually fervent manifestation of the young mother's gushing love for her first and only born! It was altogether a mystery to me, and I as much as possible forbore to dwell upon the subject.

Nine years passed away without bringing any material change to the parties involved in this narrative, except those which time brings ordinarily in his train. Young Robert Arbuthnot was a healthy, tall, fine-looking lad of his age; and his great-grand papa, the rector, tho' not suffering under any actual physical or mental infirmity, had reached a time of life when the announcement that the golden bowl is broken, or the silver cord is loosened, may indeed be quick and sudden, but scarcely unexpected. Things had gone well, too, with the nurse, Mrs. Danby and her husband; well, at least after a fashion. The speculative miller must have made good use of the gift to his wife for her care of little Arbuthnot, for he had built a gen-

teel house near the mill, always rode a valuable horse, kept, it was said, a capital table; and all this, as it seemed, by his clever speculations in corn and flour, for the ordinary business of the mill was almost entirely neglected. He had no children of his own, but he had apparently taken, with much cordiality, to his stepson, a fine lad now about eighteen years of age. This greatly grieved the boy's mother, who dreaded above all things that her son should contract the evil, dissolute habits of his father-in-law. Latterly, she had become extremely solicitous to procure the lad a permanent situation abroad, and this Mr. Arbuthnot had promised should be effected at the earliest opportunity.

Thus stood affairs on the 16th of October, 1846. Mr. Arbuthnot was temporarily absent in Ireland, where he possessed large property, and was making personal inquiry as to the extent of the potato-rot, not long before announced. The morning's post had brought a letter to his wife, with the intelligence that he should reach home that very evening; and as the rectory was on the direct road to Elm Park, and her husband would be sure to pull up there, Mrs. Arbuthnot came with her son to pass the afternoon there, and in some slight degree anticipate her husband's arrival.

About three o'clock, a chief-clerk of one of the Taunton banks, rode up in a gig to the rectory, and asked to see the Rev. Mr. Townley, on pressing and important business. He was ushered into the library, where the rector and I were at the moment rather busily engaged. The clerk said he had been to Elm Park, but not finding either Mr. Arbuthnot or his lady there, he had thought that perhaps the Rev. Mr. Townley might be able to pronounce upon the genuineness of a cheque for £300 purporting to be drawn on the Taunton Bank by Mr. Arbuthnot, and which Danby the miller had obtained cash for at Bath. He further added that the bank had refused payment, and detained the cheque, believing it to be a forgery.

"A forgery," exclaimed the rector, after merely glancing at the document. "No question that it is, and a very clumsily executed one too. Besides Mr. Arbuthnot is not yet returned from Ireland."

This was sufficient; and the messenger, with many apologies for his intrusion, withdrew, and hastened back to Taunton. We were still talking over this sad affair, although some hours had elapsed since the clerk's departure—in fact candles had been brought in, and we were every moment expecting Arbuthnot—when the sound of a horse at a hasty gallop was heard approaching, and presently the pale and haggard face of Danby shot by the window at which the rector and myself were standing. The out-gate bell was rung almost immediately afterwards, and but a brief interval passed before "Mr. Danby" was announced to be in waiting. The servant had scarcely gained the passage with leave to show him in, when the impatient visitor rushed rudely into the room, in a state of great, and it seemed angry excitement.

"What, sir, is the meaning of this ill-mannered intrusion?" demanded the rector sternly.

"You have pronounced the cheque I paid away at Bath to be a forgery; and the officers are, I am told already at my heels. Mr. Arbuthnot, unfortunately, is not at home, and I have come, therefore, to seek shelter with you."

"Shelter with me, sir!" exclaimed the indignant rector, moving, as he spoke, towards the bell. "Out of my house you shall go this instant."

The fellow placed his hand upon the reverend gentleman's arm, and looked with his blood-shot eyes keenly into his face.

"Don't!" said Danby; "don't, for the sake of yourself and yours! Don't! I warn you; or if you like the phrase better, don't, for the sake of me and mine."

"Yours, fellow! Your wife, whom you have so long held in cruel bondage through her fears for her son, has at last shaken off that chain—James Harper sailed two days ago from Portsmouth to Bombay. I sent her the news two hours since."

"Ha! Is that indeed so?" cried Danby, with an irrepressible start of alarm. "Why, then— But no matter; here, luckily, comes

Mrs. Arbuthnot and her son. All's right! She will, I know, stand bail for me, and if need be, acknowledge the genuineness of her husband's cheque."

The fellow's insolence was becoming unbearable, and I was about to seize and thrust him forcibly from the apartment, when the sound of wheels was heard outside. "Hold! one moment," he cried with fierce vehemence; "that is probably the officers; I must be brief, then, and to the purpose. Pray, madam, do not leave the room for your own sake; as for you young sir, I command you to remain!"

"What! what does he mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot bewilderedly, and at the same time clasping her son—who gazed on Danby with kindled eyes, and angry boyish defiance—tightly to her side. Did the man's strange words give form and significance to some dark, shadowy, indistinct fear that had previously haunted her at times? I judged so. The rector appeared similarly confused and shaken, and had sunk nerveless and terrified upon a sofa.

"You guess dimly, I see, at what I have to say," resumed Danby with a malignant sneer. "Well, hear it, then, once for all, and then, if you will, give me up to the officers. Some years ago," he continued, steadily and coldly, "some years ago, a woman a nurse, was placed in charge of two infant children, both boys; one of these was her own, the other was the son of rich, proud parents. The woman's husband was a gay, jolly fellow, who much preferred spending money to earning it, and just then it happened that he was more than usually hard up. One afternoon, on visiting his wife, who had removed to a distance, he found that the rich man's child had sickened of the small-pox, and that there was no chance of its recovery. A letter containing the sad news was on a table, which he, the husband, took the liberty to open and read. After some reflection, suggested by what he had heard of the lady-mother's state of mind, he recopied the letter, for the sake of embodying in it a certain suggestion. That letter was duly posted, and the next day brought the rich man almost in a state of distraction: but his chief and mastering terror was lest the mother of the already dead infant should hear, in her then precarious state, of what had happened. The tidings, he was sure, would kill her. Seeing this, the cunning husband of the nurse suggested that, for the present, his—the cunning one's—child might be taken to the lady as her own, and that the truth could be revealed when she was strong enough to bear it. The rich man fell into the artful trap, and that which the husband of the nurse had speculated upon, came to pass even beyond his hopes. The lady grew to idolize her fancied child—she has, fortunately, had no other—and now, I think, it would really kill her to part with him. The rich man could not find in his heart to deceive his wife—every year it became more difficult, more impossible to do so; and very generously, I must say has he paid in purse for the forbearance of the nurse's husband. Well now then, to sum up: the nurse was Mrs. Danby; the rich, weak husband Mr. Arbuthnot; the substituted child, that handsome boy—my son!"

A wild scream from Mrs. Arbuthnot broke the dread silence which had accompanied this frightful revelation, echoed by an agonised cry, half tenderness, half rage from her husband, who had entered the room unobserved, and now clasped her passionately in his arms. The carriage-wheels we had heard were his. It was long before I could recall with calmness the tumult, terror, and confusion of that scene. Mr. Arbuthnot strove to bear his wife from the apartment, but she would not be forced away, but kept imploring with frenzied vehemence that Robert—that her boy should not be taken from her.

"I have no wish to do so—far from it," said Danby with gleeful exultation. "Only folk must be reasonable, and not threaten their friends with the hulk—"

"Give him anything, anything!" broke in the unhappy lady. "O Robert! Robert!" she added with a renewed burst of hysterical grief, "how could you deceive me so?"

"I have been punished, Agnes," he answered in a husky, broken voice, "for my well-in-

tending but criminal weakness; cruelly punished by the everlasting consciousness that this discovery must one day or other be surely made. What do you want?" he after a while added with recovering firmness, addressing Danby.

"The acknowledgement of the little bit of paper in dispute, of course; and say a genuine one to the same amount."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, still wildly sobbing, and holding the terrified boy strained in her embrace, as if she feared he might be wrenched from her by force. "Anything—pay him anything!"

At this moment chancing to look towards the door of the apartment, I saw that it was partially opened, and that Danby's wife was listening there. What might that mean? But what of helpful meaning in such a case could it have?

"I was thinking," resumed the rascal with swelling audacity, "that we might as well at the same time come to some permanent arrangement upon black and white. But never mind: I can always put the screw on; unless, indeed, you get tired of the young gentleman, and in that case, I doubt not, he will prove a dutiful and affectionate son—Ah, devil! What do you here? Begone or I'll murder you?—Begone, do you hear?"

His wife had entered and silently confronted him. "Your threats, evil man," replied the woman quietly, "have no terrors for me now. My son is beyond your reach. Oh, Mrs. Arbuthnot," she added turning towards and addressing that lady, "believe not—"

Her husband sprang at her with the bound of a panther. "Silence! Go home or I'll strangle—!" His own utterance was arrested by the fierce grasp of Mr. Arbuthnot, who seized him by the throat, and hurled him to the further end of the room. "Speak on, woman; and quick! quick! What have you to say?"

"That your son, dearest lady," she answered throwing herself at Mrs. Arbuthnot's feet, "is as truly your own child as ever son born of woman!"

That shout of half-fearful triumph seems, even now as I write, to ring in my ears! I felt that the woman's words were words of truth, but I could not see distinctly; the room whirled round, and the lights danced before my eyes, but I could hear through all the choking ecstasy of the mother, and the fury of the baffled felon.

"The letter," continued Mrs. Danby, "which my husband found and opened, would have informed you of the swiftly approaching death of my child, and that yours had been carefully kept beyond the reach of contagion. The letter you received was written without my knowledge or consent. True it is that, terrified by my husband's threats, and in some measure reconciled to the wicked imposition by knowing that, after all, the right child would be in his right place, I afterwards lent myself to Danby's evil purposes. But I chiefly feared for my son, whom I fully believed he would not have scrupled to make away with in revenge for my exposing his profitable fraud. I have sinned; I can scarcely hope to be forgiven, but I have now told the sacred truth."

All this was uttered by the repentant woman but, at the time, it was almost wholly unheard by those most interested in the statement. They only comprehended that they were saved—that the child was theirs in very truth. Great, abundant, but for the moment, bewildering joy! Mr. Arbuthnot—his beautiful young wife—her own true boy (how could she for a moment have doubted that he was her own true boy!—you might read that thought through all her tears, thickly as they fell)—the aged and half-stunned rector, whilst yet Mrs. Danby was speaking, were exclaiming sobbing in each other's arms, ay, and praising God too, with broken voices, and incoherent words it may be, but certainly with fervent, pious, and grateful hearts.

When we had time to look about us, it was found that the felon had disappeared—escaped. It was well, perhaps, that he had; better, that he has not been heard of since.

A builder in Philadelphia being asked for the plan of a house, said, "If you will wait a few minutes I will bring you a pomegranate of it," meaning to say a programme.