

Poetry.

BRITAIN.

BY WILLIAM LETT.

Hurrah! hurrah! for England!
The goddess of the sea—
The empire island of the brave,
The birth-place of the free;
The land of honor, wealth, and fame,
Of lore and commerce too—
The land of many a noble name,
From Nile to Waterloo.

Hurrah! hurrah! for Scotland!
The soil of ancient worth,
Where learning her fair ensign waves,
And science had its birth;
The land of Bruce and Bannockburn,
And many a hero more—
The land of bright tradition, and
Of tartan'd clans of yore.

Hurrah! hurrah! for Ireland!
The land of love and song,
Where Genius with a lavish hand
Flings light among the throng;
The land where minstrel warriors
First struck the deathless strain,
That made the shamrock valleys ring
With music's pristine reign.

Hurrah! hurrah! for Canada!
The fairest, brightest gem
That graces—happy, proud, and free—
Victoria's diadem!
Prosperity expand her flag,
By enterprise unfurled;
And British Union long remain
The envy of the world!

Literary Selections.

THE COUNTER-STROKE.

Just after breakfast one fine spring morning in 1837, an advertisement in the *Times* for a curate caught and fixed my attention. The salary was sufficiently remunerative for a bachelor, and the Parish, as I personally knew, one of the most pleasantly situated in all Somersetshire. Having said that, the reader will readily understand that it could not have been a hundred miles from Taunton. I instantly wrote, enclosing testimonials, with which the Rev. Mr. Townley, the rector, was so entirely satisfied, that the return-post brought me a positive engagement, unlogged with the slightest objection to one or two subsidiary items I had stipulated for, and accompanied by an invitation to make the rectory my home till I could conveniently suit myself elsewhere. This was both kind and handsome; and the next day but one I took coach, with a light heart, for my new destination. It thus happened that I became acquainted, and in some degree mixed up, with the train of events it is my present purpose to relate.

The rector I found to be a stout, portly gentleman, whose years already reached to between sixty and seventy. So many winters, although they had plentifully besprinkled his hair with gray, shone out with ruddy brightness in his still handsome face, and keen, kind, bright-hazel eyes; and his voice, hearty and ringing, had not as yet one quaver of age in it. I met him at breakfast on the morning after my arrival, and his reception of me was most friendly. We had spoken together but for a few minutes, when one of the French windows, that led from the breakfast-room into a shubbery and flower-garden, gently opened and admitted a lady, just then, as I afterwards learned, in her nineteenth spring. I use this term almost unconsciously, for I cannot even now, in the glowing summer of her life, disassociate her image from that season of youth and joyousness. She was introduced to me, with old-fashioned simplicity, as "My grand-daughter, Agnes Townley." It is difficult to look at beauty through other men's eyes, and, in the present instance, I feel that I should fail miserably in the endeavor to stamp upon this blank, dead paper, any adequate idea of the fresh loveliness, the rose-bud beauty of that young girl. I will merely say, that her perfectly Grecian head, wreathed with wavy *boucles* of bright hair, undulating with golden light, vividly brought to my mind Raphael's halo-tinted portraits of the Virgin—with this difference, that in place of the holy calm and resignation of the painting, there was in Agnes Townley a sparkling youth and life,

that even amidst the heat and glare of a crowded ball-room or of a theatre, irresistibly suggested and recalled the freshness and perfume of the morning—of a cloudless, rosy morning of May. And, far higher charm than feature-beauty, however exquisite, a sweetness of disposition, a kind gentleness of mind and temper, was evidenced in every line of her face, in every accent of the low-pitched silver voice, that breathed through lips only made to smile.

Let me own, that I was greatly struck by so remarkable a combination of rare endowments; and this, I think, the sharp-eyed rector must have perceived, or he might not perhaps have been so immediately communicative with respect to the near prospects of his idolized grandchild, as he was the moment the young lady, after presiding at the breakfast-table, had withdrawn.

"We shall have gay doings, Mr. Tyrrel, at the rectory shortly," he said. "Next Monday three weeks will, with the blessing of God, be Agnes Townley's wedding-day."

"Wedding-day?"

"Yes," rejoined the rector, turning towards and examining some flowers which Miss Townley had brought in and placed on the table.—

"Yes, it has been for some time settled that Agnes shall be on that day united in holy wedlock to Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Mr. Arbuthnot of Elm Park?"

"A great match, is it not, in a worldly point of view?" replied Mr. Townley, with a pleasant smile at the tone of my exclamation. And much better than that; Robert Arbuthnot is a young man of a high and noble nature, as well as devotedly attached to Agnes. He will, I doubt not, prove in every respect a husband deserving and worthy of her; and that from the lips of a doting old grandpapa, must be esteemed high praise. You will see him presently."

I did see him often, and quite agreed in the rector's estimate of his future grandson-in-law. I have not frequently seen a finer looking young man, his age was twenty-six; and certainly one of a more honorable and kindly spirit, of a more genial temper than he, has never come within my observation. He had drawn a great prize in the matrimonial lottery, and, I felt, deserved his high fortune.

They were married at the time agreed upon, and the day was kept not only at Elm Park, and in its neighborhood, but throughout "our" Parish, as a general holiday. And, strangely enough—at least I have never met with another instance of the kind—it was held by our entire female community, high as well as low, that the match was a perfectly equal one, notwithstanding that wealth and high worldly position were entirely on the bridegroom's side. In fact, that nobody less in the social scale than the representative of an old territorial family ought, in the nature of things, to have aspired to the hand of Agnes Townley, appeared to have been a foregone conclusion with everybody.—This will give the reader a truer and more vivid impression of the bride, than any words or colors I might use.

The days, weeks, months of wedded life flew over Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot without a cloud, save a few dark but transitory ones which I saw now and then flit over the husband's countenance as the time when he should become a father drew near, and came to be more and more spoken of. "I should not survive her," said Mr. Arbuthnot, one day in reply to a chance observation of the rector's, "nor indeed desire to do so." The gray-headed man seized and warmly pressed the husband's hand, and tears of sympathy filled his eyes; yet did he, nevertheless, as in duty bound, utter grave words on the sinfulness of despair under any circumstances, and the duty, in all trials, however heavy, of patient submission to the will of God. But the venerable gentleman spoke in a hoarse and broken voice, and it was easy to see that he felt with Mr. Arbuthnot, that the reality of an event, the bare possibility of which shook them so terribly, were a cross to heavy for human strength to bear and live.

It was of course decided that the expected heir or heiress should be intrusted to a wet-nurse, and a Mrs. Danby, the wife of a miller, living not very far from the rectory, was engaged for that purpose. I had frequently seen the woman; and her name, as the rector and I were

one evening gossiping over our tea, on some subject or other came up.

"A likely person," I remarked; "healthy, very good-looking, and one might make oath, a true-hearted creature. But there is withal a timidity, a frightenedness in her manner at times which, if I may hazard a perhaps uncharitable conjecture, speaks ill for that smart husband of hers."

"You have hit the mark precisely, my dear sir. Danby is a sorry fellow, and a domestic tyrant to boot. His wife who is really a good, but meek-hearted person, lived with us once.—How old do you suppose her to be?"

"Five-and-twenty perhaps."

"Six years more than that. She has a son of the name of Harper by a former marriage, who is in his tenth year. Anne wasn't a widow long. Danby was caught by her good looks, and she by the bait of a well-provided home. Unless, however, her husband gives up his corn speculations, she will not, I think, have that much longer."

"Corn speculations! Surely Danby has no means adequate to indulgence in such a game as that?"

"Not he. But about two years ago he bought on credit, I believe, a considerable quantity of wheat, and prices happening to fly up suddenly just then, he made a large profit. This has quite turned his head, which, by the way, as Cockneys say 'was never rightly screwed on.' The announcement of a visitor interrupted anything further the rector might have had to say, and I soon afterwards went home.

A sad accident occurred about a month subsequent to the foregoing conversation. The rector was out riding upon a usually quiet horse which all at once took it into his head to shy at a scare-crow, it must have seen scores of times, and thereby threw its rider. Help was fortunately at hand, and the reverend gentleman was instantly conveyed home, when it was found that his left thigh was broken.—Thanks, however, to his temperate habits, it was before long authoritatively pronounced that, although it would be a considerable time before he was released from confinement, it was not probable that the lusty winter of his life would be shortened by what had happened.—Unfortunately, the accident threatened to have evil consequences in another quarter. Immediately after it occurred, one Mathews, a busy, thick-headed lout of a butcher, rode furiously off to Elm Park with the news. Mrs. Arbuthnot, who daily expected to be confined, was walking with her husband upon the lawn in front of the house, when the great burly block-head rode up, and blurted out that the rector had been thrown from his horse, and it was feared killed!

The shock of such an announcement was of course overwhelming. A few hours afterwards, Mrs. Arbuthnot gave birth to a healthy male-child; but the young mother's life, assailed by fever, was for many days utterly despaired of—for weeks held to tremble so evenly in the balance, that the slightest adverse circumstance might in a moment turn the scale downward. At length the black horizon that seemed to encompass us so hopelessly, lightened, and afforded the lover-husband a glimpse and hope of his vanished and well-nigh despaired of Eden. The promise was fulfilled. I was in the library with Mr. Arbuthnot awaiting the physician's morning report, very anxiously expected at the rectory, when Doctor Lindley entered the apartment in evidently a cheerful mood.

"You have been causelessly alarmed," he said. "There is no fear whatever of a relapse. Weakness only remains, but that we shall slowly, perhaps, but certainly remove."

A gleam of lightning seemed to flash over Mr. Arbuthnot's expressive countenance—"Blessed be God!" he exclaimed. "And how," he added, "shall we manage respecting the child? She asks for it incessantly."

Mr. Arbuthnot's infant son, I should state, had been consigned immediately after its birth to the care of Mrs. Danby, who had herself been confined, also with a boy, about a fortnight previously. Scarlatina being prevalent in the neighborhood, Mrs. Danby was hurried away with the two children to a place near Bath, almost before she was able to bear the

journey. Mr. Arbuthnot had not left his wife for an hour, and consequently had only seen his child for a few minutes just after it was born.

"With respect to the child," replied Doctor Lindley, "I am of opinion that Mrs. Arbuthnot may see it in a day or two. Say the third day from this, if all goes well. I think we may venture so far; but I will be present, for any untoward agitation might be perhaps instantly fatal."

This point provisionally settled, we all three went our several ways: I to cheer the still suffering rector with the good news.

The next day but one, Mr. Arbuthnot was in exuberant spirits. "Dr. Lindley's report is even more favorable than we had anticipated," he said; "and I start to-morrow morning to bring Mrs. Danby and the child!"—The postman's subdued but unmistakable knock interrupted him. "The nurse," he added, "is very attentive and punctual. She writes almost every day." A servant entered with a salver heaped with letters. Mr. Arbuthnot tossed them over eagerly, and seizing one, after glancing at the post-mark tore it eagerly open, muttering as he did so: "It is not the usual handwriting; but from her no doubt."

"Merciful God!" I impulsively exclaimed, as I suddenly lifted my eyes to his. "What is the matter?" A mortal palor had spread over Mr. Arbuthnot's before animated features, and he was glaring at the letter in his hand as if a basilisk had suddenly confronted him. Another moment, and the muscles of his frame appeared to give way suddenly, and he dropped into the easy-chair from which he had risen to take the letters. I was terribly alarmed, and first loosening his neckerchief, for he seemed choking, I said: "Let me call some one," and I turned to reach the bell, when he instantly seized my arms, and held me with a grip of iron. "No—no—no!" he hoarsely gasped; "water—water!" There was fortunately some on a side-table. I handed it to him, and he drank eagerly. It appeared to revive him a little. He thrust the crumpled letter into his pocket, and said in a low, quick whisper: "There is some one coming! Not a word remember—not a word!" At the same time he wheeled his chair half round, so that his back should be towards the servant we heard approaching.

"I am sent, sir," said Mr. Arbuthnot's maid, "to ask if the post has arrived."

"Yes," replied Mr. Arbuthnot, with wonderful mastery of his voice. "Tell your mistress I shall be with her almost immediately, and that her son is quite well."

"Mr. Tyrrel," he continued, as soon as the servant was out of hearing, "there is, I think, a liqueur-stand on the sideboard in the large dining-room. Would you have the kindness to bring it me, unobserved—mind that—unobserved by any one?"

I did as he requested; and the instant I placed the liqueur-frame before him, he seized the brandy *carafe*, and drank with fierce eagerness. "For goodness sake," I exclaimed, "consider what you are about Mr. Arbuthnot, you will make yourself ill."

"No, no," he answered, after finishing his draught. "It seems scarcely stronger than water. But I—I am better now. It was a sudden spasm of the heart; that's all. The letter," he added, after a long and painful pause, during which he eyed me, I thought with a kind of suspicion—"the letter you saw me open just now, comes from a relative, an aunt, who is ill, very ill, and wishes to see me instantly. You understand?"

I did understand, or at least I feared that I did too well. I, however, bowed acquiescence, and he presently rose from his chair, and strode about the apartment in great agitation, until his wife's bedroom bell rang. He then stopped short, shook himself, and looked anxiously at the reflection of his flushed and varying countenance in the magnificent chimney-glass.

"I do not look, I think—or, at least shall not in a darkened room—odder, more out of the way—that is, more agitated—than one might, than one must appear, after hearing of the dangerous illness of—of—an aunt?"

"You look better, sir, than you did a while since."