

Poet's Corner.

WE ARE GROWING OLD.

BY FRANCES BROWNE.

We are growing old—how the thought will rise,
When a glance is backward cast
On some long-remembered spot that lies
In the silence of the past;
It may be the shrine of our early vows,
Or the tomb of early tears;
But it seems like a far off isle to us,
In the stormy sea of years.

Oh, wide and wild are the waves that part
Our steps from its greenness now,
And we miss the joy of many a heart,
And the light of many a brow;
For deep o'er many a stately bark
Have the whelming billows rolled,
That steered with us from that early mark—
Oh friends, we are growing old!

Old in the dimness and the dust
Of our daily toils and cares,—
Old in the wrecks of love and trust
Which our burdened memory bears.
Each form may wear to the passing gaze
The bloom of life's freshness yet,
And beams may brighten our latter days
Which the morning never met.

But, oh, the changes we have seen
In the far and winding way!
The graves in our path that have grown green,
And the locks that have grown gray.
The winters still on our own may spare
The sable or the gold;
But we saw their snows upon brighter hair,
And, friends, we are growing old!

We have gained the world's cold wisdom now,
We have learned to pause and fear;
But where are the living fountains whose flow
Was a joy of heart to hear?
We have won the wealth of many a clime,
And the lore of many a page;
But where is the hope that saw in time
But its boundless heritage?

Will it come again when the violet wakes,
And the woods their youth renew?
We have stood in the light of sunny brakes,
Where the bloom was deep and blue;
And our souls might joy in the spring time then
But the joy was faint and cold;
For it ne'er could give us youth again
Of hearts that are growing old.

Select Story.

REGINALD SHIRLEY.

AN ATTORNEY'S STORY.

[CONCLUDED.]

After Winnifred's testimony, came the last and most important, the evidence of a game-keeper, who testified to passing Sir Piers and Mr. Shirley in the home park about sundown. The angry tones of both their voices caused him to pass them slowly and linger on his way; for knowing the ill-blood that always existed between the families, and these members in particular, he was fearful that some mischief might ensue, especially as Mr. Shirley had his gun, and Sir Piers his usual stick. "I could not be mistaken," he said in answer to a question from the judge, "for they stood on a plain bit of the Park, a good way off from the trees, and there was nothing to shade them. The path I was on went close up to where they were and as I touched my hat, first to my master, and then to Mr. Shirley, I looked hard at them both and noticed that Mr. Shirley had on his shooting dress. I have known the prisoner all his life. I used to be underkeeper to his father."

This closed the case for the prosecution; and then the prisoner—in those days prisoners were not allowed counsel—commenced his defence. It was short, but manly and candid. With a burst of eloquent indignation, he repudiated the charge brought against him, solemnly declaring that from the hour of parting from Sir Piers in his own house, to the present, he had never seen him.—That the last interview was stormy and painful, he frankly acknowledged; since, not content with refusing his proposal to re-purchase his paternal land at any price, in the most insulting terms, Sir Piers suffered himself, in the heat of his passion, to make certain assertions relative to a deceased member of the Shirley family, which exasperated his visitor almost to madness. It was to obtain a contradiction to these assertions that he had sought his old nurse, the depository of family secrets at the unusual hour he had done. And it was then on his way to her, while plunging on recklessly through the wood nearest the house, so absorbed in anxiety, wrath and indignation, as to be unconscious where he was going, that he met with this

accident that had deluged him in his own blood.

The parting words of which so much had been made were spoken in answer to Sir Piers's reiterated and taunting refusal to sell to Shirley, and were uttered in the rage of the moment, without any deeper meaning than to assure the baronet of his visitor's unalterable determination to succeed in his aim.

How the gun which he had left with both barrels loaded in a keeper's hut in the Home Park, came where it was found, he could not tell—and that the man who had sworn to having seen him in the Park with Sir Piers, was mistaken in his identity, he solemnly asserted, repeating once more in the most positive and impressive language, his asseveration of never seeing the deceased after the time he left the house.

All this was said temperately, but firmly and frankly—more as if it was a duty to himself, than with any expectation of its being either effectual for an acquittal, or generally believed by the court.

After the conclusion of the defence, a jurymen begged that the keeper who had deposed to having seen the prisoner and deceased together, should be recalled, and asked again if he were perfectly convinced of the identity of the former.

"Perfectly," he said, with a sorrowful voice, which left no doubt upon the minds of any who heard him of the truth of his statement; "if they were the last words I had to speak on earth, and God was here to judge me, I could safely swear that Mr. Shirley was the man I saw with my master that night."

After such evidence as this, the conviction of the prisoner was certain; and in a few minutes he left the bar, condemned to die for the murder of Sir Piers Linwood.

It was Friday night when the long trial closed; and when it was over, I and every one else left the court. The prisoner was to be hanged on Monday.

As might be expected, little else beside the trial of Reginald Shirley was talked of in the town; at assize hall it was the only subject of conversation, and, with a few exceptions everybody applauded the verdict, and looked upon the condemned man as a cold-blooded, infamous assassin who thoroughly merited the fate which had overtaken him.

Not a few ridiculed the idea of his having the means to re-purchase Shirley Court; and in their overflowing displeasure, I do believe they were rather disappointed that theft had not been added to the crime, and that they could not call him robber, as well as murderer.

His conduct, too, during his time of confinement in jail, previous to the trial, had given people great offence—it had been so proud, stern, and reserved; and now that he was condemned, his manner remained the same.

Well, Saturday and part of Sunday passed—and on Sunday afternoon I went to spend two or three days with my brother, the rector of a seacoast village about five and twenty miles from the assize town.

It was a stormy evening, and towards midnight the wind blew a hurricane dead upon the shore. My brother and I had not met for many months, and were sitting up talking over family affairs, when the sound of guns out at sea, caused us to rush from the house, and hurry to the beach. It was an awful night—and through the dim haze we could see a great ship beating with the waves, evidently dismasted and in distress. To send her help was impossible; no boat could have lived in such a sea; and although we offered large sums of money to volunteers, and the brave men around us were as anxious to render assistance as ourselves, none dared rush upon the certain death which must have befallen any one who ventured out. Still, although too well convinced of this, it was maddening to hear the solemn appeal of the guns, and know that those who fired them were praying in agony for our help; to know that within so short a distance hundreds of human beings were perishing, and that there we stood, strong, powerful, willing men, with ample means at hand to succor, and yet unable to exert a single muscle. It was horrible; but at length a great cry was raised that the vessel had gone down, and in a few minutes tossed on the boiling waves, we dimly saw small objects, which we knew to be human bodies coming towards us.

One, thrown by the sea high upon the shore beside us, was seized upon by my brother and myself, and carried to his house. Those we had left there, expecting such guests, had got all ready to receive them; and we found a huge fire and hot blankets, with all needful aids to recovery, prepared for immediate use.

Quickly, then, we laid the apparently dead body before the fire, and never shall I forget the sensation of astonishment, almost of terror, with which my eyes fell upon the lifeless face. It was Reginald Shirley, the condemned murderer, whom all the world then believed to be lying in—shire jail, waiting for execution next morning.

In a few words I communicated the fact to my brother, who although infinitely shocked, yet did not relax the exertions to restore life; and after a little time, forgetting the man's guilt in his present extremity, and unwilling that he should die thus unprepared, I too joined earnestly in my good brother's efforts, which sooner than might have been expected, were successful; and then, anxious to assist the villagers in recovering any other bodies that might be thrown on shore, I went back again to the beach.

I had been there about two hours, when a servant from the rectory, almost exhausted with running, came up to me and bade me hurry back there instantly, "and Mr. Warden, too," he said breathlessly, "must go as well. Where is he?—Where shall I find him?"

"Here," I said, as the gentleman named, one of the most active magistrates of the district came up; "here he is. But what is the matter?"

"I don't know, but master's in a terrible way; so go, sir—go directly!"

Thus urged, and remembering in whose company I had left my brother, I ran on quickly, accompanied by Mr. Warden, who, undoubtedly wondered, knowing nothing, whether I had taken leave of my senses.

As we reached the house, a post-chaise dashed past us, and standing at the rectory door, watching eagerly for our coming, was my brother.

"Thank God you are here!" he said, seizing Mr. Warden's arm. "Come with me—do not lose a moment!"

And turning back into the house, he led us quickly to the room where I had left him with Reginald Shirley.

What I expected to see I do not know; but what I did see was Mr. Shirley, lying upon the very spot which I helped to place him, and the village surgeon kneeling by his side.

His eyes were open, and he was evidently sensible, and aware of what was passing; but over his countenance was the fearful gray shade which never lingers long upon the face of the living, and which warned us that death was at hand. Upon our entrance an expression of intense relief and satisfaction crossed his features, and in a faint voice he said—

"I am glad you are come; but make haste, I am going fast. Raise me up."

"Yes, but take this draught first," said the surgeon—you require it. Now, Mr. Heydon, you may proceed."

"Very well. Then, Mr. Warden, the object of my sending for you thus unceremoniously is that you might receive the confession, and take the deposition of this person. He is perfectly aware of his state, Mr. Grant," he continued, addressing the surgeon.

"Perfectly. I dare hold out no hope."

"No, I feel that I am dying; therefore lose no time. I have a terrible tale to tell, and would not go before it was finished."

"I am ready."

"Then listen. My name is Piers Shirley, son of the late Sir Piers Linwood, and Isabel Shirley.—Ah! sir, you may start," said the man, observing the movement of astonishment which I could not repress. "Mine is a fearful story, but concealment would be useless, and you shall hear all the truth now. My mother died at my birth, and by a favorite servant whom she trusted, I was conveyed immediately to Sir Piers, who, as had been previously arranged, sent me under the care of a faithful person to France, where I was brought up, until the age of fifteen, when I came to England, and was placed at school in London. There I remained three years, and then, still believing myself an orphan, and that Sir Piers Linwood, whom I never saw, was simply my guardian, I was articled to a lawyer. Neither the profession nor the restraint, however, suited me. I formed idle and bad connections, got into debt, and at last at the age of twenty-one, owed so much that my creditors shortly afterwards arrested and threw me into prison.

Sir Piers was sent for by my master, and coming up to town, paid the money and set me free. Upon this occasion, I saw him for the first time; and from his manner, and the singular language he used, suspected the truth, and that instead of being only his ward, I was his son. The suspicion enraged me, and in violent and most unbecoming terms, I demanded from him whether my fears were justified.

In equally passionate words, upbraiding me for

my extravagance, idleness, and excesses, Sir Piers acknowledged the relationship; but concluded by threatening to cast me off at once and forever, unless I relinquished my evil courses and applied myself more steadily to my profession.

This I refused to do, and, after a shameful scene we parted; Sir Piers forbidding me ever again to apply to him for assistance; or even attempt to see him—and I, resolute and boastful, taunting him with his sins towards me, and exulting in my freedom.

A fearful time of riot followed this rupture; from bad I grew to worse, until at thirty years of age—and I am little more—I had not one reputable friend, a profession, or a shilling left. Well, about twelve months since I fell in love with a girl, who if ever angels visit this miserable world, was one to me; and she promised to marry me, reprobate as I was; if I would do as my father had urged me ten years before—break off my guilty ways, and going abroad strive to establish a new character and honorable name.

Gladly I pledged myself to obey her wishes, for in her society I learned to be ashamed of the life I had led, and longed to retrace it; but to go abroad reputably, required money, and I had none; therefore after long deliberating with myself, I resolved to apply to Sir Piers—with whom I had had no communication since the interview which had ended so disastrously—to tell him my hopes and projects, and to implore his aid to accomplish them.

Whether my letter was less humble and contrite than it should have been, I do not know—perhaps it was, for I am an ill hand at suing for favors—but Sir Piers answered it in so cold and insulting a strain, that I cast his epistle into the fire which burned beside me, and set to work to try to raise means to marry Jessie, and to go to Canada. But, as I might have foreseen, every effort failed; and then Jessie entreated me to give her up, and go abroad alone. This, of course, I would not do; and in despair, I wrote again to my father, humbling myself to the very dust for my sweet Jessie's sake; informing him that I would be at a certain spot in Shirley Park at six o'clock on the following evening, where I entreated him by the memory of my mother, to see me.

I went; but learning that the laws against poaching and trespass were strictly enforced upon the Shirley estates, and fearing that my dress might attract attention I was seen by the keepers, I changed my clothes in a deer hovel in the park, for a suit of keepers garments which I found there; and shouldering a gun which was there also, I went out, satisfied if I was observed I should be mistaken for a keeper, and suffered to pass unchallenged.

When I reached the appointed place no one was there, but at length I descried Sir Piers coming towards me through the wood. I went to meet him, and certainly none but a man that was mad himself, or wished to make me so, would have said what he did, or treated me so severely.

For a while I bore all patiently, but at last human nature would endure no more, and I replied. I forgot all duty, all prudence; and in my rage, gave back for every shameful word and taunt, another as bitter and evil.

At length he raised his stick to strike me—and in a moment, never heeding what I did, or what it was I lifted, I interposed the gun I held, to ward off the impending blow, which fell upon the trigger, struck it back and in an instant, to my unspeakable horror, I saw my father dead at my feet. To fly was the impulse of the moment, and after ascertaining that life was indeed extinct and that nothing could be done, I cast down the fatal weapon, turned back to the hovel where I had left my own clothes, changed those I wore for them, and, crossing the country in all haste, reached—where I got on a London coach.

Immediately upon arriving in town I wrote a farewell letter to Jessie; blood-stained as I was I could not endure to meet her; and therefore simply telling her that circumstances had occurred which must part us forever, I bade her forget me and be happy.

What would happen at Shirley when the body was discovered I dared not think; but what did happen never entered my thoughts. I never dreamed that any one would suffer for my silence, and therefore maintained it. What I should have done had I known the truth, I dare not say, for life is dear to all; and as I could not prove that my father brought on his own death, and I should have feared to die for it, I might not, perhaps, have come forward and exonerated Mr. Shirley as I ought.—However, I was spared the trial of principle, for the day after I reached London, I was seized with typhus fever, and for weeks I lay insensible to everything; between life and death.

When I recovered I resolved to go abroad; and