

Poet's Corner.

HARD TIMES.

BY ALF. BURNETT.

Hard Times is now on every lip,
And breathed from every tongue;
The banks are cursed by one and all,
The aged and the young.
The merchant has to close his doors,
And throw his ledger by;
Such times he vows were never seen
By any mortal eye.

The shopmen quit the counter's side,
For customers are few,
The times are now so very "tight"
It makes them all look "blue;"
The citizen in vain essays
To make more than his bread;
A pound of which he now declares
Won't weigh a pound of bread.

There's not a day but some one fails,
Some house that goes to smash;
And names that once stood high on 'Change,'
Are out for want of Cash.
Those whom we thought were millionaires,
And rich in shares and stocks,
Their "Milton heirs" now disappoint;
They fail and leave no "Rocks."

"Hard Times! hard times! Was ever seen
Such times as hard as these?"
This is the cry from morn till night,
In which each one agrees.
A remedy I think I've found,
Say, how do you think 'twill do?
'Pull off your coat, roll up your sleeves,
And work these hard times through!"

Select Story.

THE
LILY OF THE VALLEY.

"What an angel!"—Say rather a lily of the valley!

The speakers were two young sportsmen in the highlands of Scotland, who, wearied by a long day's shooting, were approaching a hill-side spring, famous in that wild district for the coldness and purity of its waters. They had just reached the brow of the elevation overlooking the rural fountain, when the sight of a young girl, in the first blush of womanly beauty, sitting by the spring, drew these ejaculations from them in succession. As they spoke they stopped, by a common impulse to gaze on the fair vision a moment before it should be dissipated, which they knew it would on their appearance.

The young girl was sitting on a low rock that rose by the side of the fountain, her dimpled elbow resting on the cliff, and her head leaning on her hand. The attitude was one of nature's own choosing, and graceful in the extreme, as all such careless postures are. The figure of the maiden was slight and sylph-like, yet exquisitely proportioned; nor could Canova have modelled a bust of more undulating outline, or a rounder or fairer arm. But after all, it was the face that fixed the young men's attention. A shade of pensiveness hung over it for a time, as if a gentle melancholy took part in the reverie of the young girl; but from the mirthful blue eye and the dimples on the chin, it was plain to see that the usual expression was one of happiness and glee. Her hair was golden in colour, and flowed in natural ringlets on her shoulders. The small, delicately closed mouth; the nose that rivalled in straightness that of a Grecian Venus; and the clear brilliant complexion, formed together a breathing picture of female loveliness, such as no ideal painting could have rivalled.

"See, was I not right?" said the last of the two speakers, in a whisper to his companion. "She has been gathering lilies; there are some still in her hand, and a bunch nestles in her bosom, but only to be outvied by the purity around it."

"Yes, Duncan, she is more than an angel—she is a peerless Scotch lass—a lily of the valley indeed. What a pity so much beauty was not noble born!"

"Tush!" replied his companion, impatiently; "Burns says—"

The rank is but the guinea stamp;
The man's the gowd for a' that;

and, to my thinking, a lovely woman is a born countess, at least if she has graces of mind equal to those of person. Let us descend."

He had been leaning carelessly on his gun as he spoke, and now preparatory to proceeding, threw it to his shoulder. Unfortunately the trigger had caught in a bramble, and the piece went off, lodging the contents in his side. He staggered and fell.

"Good Heavens!" cried his companion, springing to his assistance, and lifting the wounded man up. "Are you killed? Do you hear me, Donald? Merciful Father!" he exclaimed, "as he saw no sign of life in his friend, 'what shall we do? He is dead, or dying and no aid to be had for miles."

The young girl we have described had been buried in a profound reverie, but at the report of the gun she started like a frightened bird, looked wildly around to see whence it proceeded. In a moment she caught sight of the wounded man lying on the heather above her, while his friend, kneeling on one knee, supported the head of the sufferer. Immediately that the sportsman saw the girl was watching him, he shouted and waved his arm for help.

When was woman's ear ever deaf to the call of suffering? The timid Scottish maiden, who but a moment before was on the point of flying, now turned and began to ascend the hill-side, fleet and graceful as a young doe.

"My poor friend," said the sportsman, politely doffing his hat as she approached, "has met with an unfortunate accident, and I do not know what to do, or where to bear him."

A deep blush dyed the girl's cheek as she encountered the gaze of a stranger, but it passed off immediately, and, with a presence of mind worthy of one older, she stooped down to see if the wounded man was dead.

The face she beheld was as handsome a manly countenance as the sun ever shone upon; and perhaps she thought so, for the blush again came to her cheek. The features were cast in a lofty, almost heroic mould, and were indicative of a character at once firm and elevated, a something above the mere fine gentleman, which was evidently his social rank.

"He breathes still," she said, as she broke off a delicate leaf from one of her lilies and held it to his nostril; and looking at his companion, she continued, "do you think you could carry him to the spring?"

The sportsman answered by carefully lifting his friend up in his arms and bearing him down the hill-side, the young girl following.

"Place him here," she said, pointing to the slightly elevated bank, "and lean his head against the rock. Everything," she continued, "now depends on your getting a surgeon soon. If you will follow that path to your right which you can take, and ride to the little town of Abernethy, some five miles off, where, fortunately, a surgeon may be had. At the cabin you will find a shepherd or two—tell them to bring some bed clothes and a settee, on which to carry your friend to the house. It is an humble place, but better than the hill-side. By the time you get back with the surgeon we shall have your friend in a comfortable bed, and I hope doing better."

She spoke with so quick a perception of what was best to be done, and did it so composedly, that the sportsman, who had expected to see her frightened and embarrassed, was lost in admiration, and submitting himself entirely to her guidance, hastened to execute her commission.

When he had vanished around the hill the young girl took some water in her hands, and began to bathe the face of the wounded man. But she still lay insensible. After having persisted in her task for some time, without any signs of life being perceptible, the tears began to fall thick and fast from her lovely eyes.

"Alas," she said, "he is dead! What if he has a mother, or one dearer still! And yet but half an hour ago he was in full strength of health and manhood. It cannot be—I have heard," she continued, eagerly, as if a sudden thought had struck her, and she began to tear open his vest to get at the wound, "that my grandfather died at Culloden from the blood coagulating in the wound, when, if a surgeon had been by, he might have been saved. What if this should be the case here?"

She had by this time bared sufficient of his person to get at the orifice of the wound. The dark gore had almost stiffened about it. She gazed at it an instant, the tears falling fast in womanly sympathy, and then a sudden idea seemed to strike her. She stooped down, and tenderly approaching the wound, commenced wiping away the congealed blood. She had not been long engaged in her task of mercy when the wounded man stirred, and opening his eyes fixed them earnestly upon her.

She started from her kneeling posture covered with beautiful confusion. For a while the sense of maidenly shame even overcame her joy at his recovery, and she could not meet his gaze.

"Where am I?" he inquired, for his memory was yet vague. "What spirit from heaven are you? Ah! I remember—my gun went off. But where is Harry?"

The young girl had now in a measure recovered from her embarrassment. If you mean your friend,

she said, half timidly, and in a voice that sounded to the ears of the sufferer inexpressibly sweet, "he is gone for a surgeon. I have consented to watch by you till some shepherds come to carry you to our cabin. And here they come. Heaven be blessed!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, equally glad to conclude this embarrassing *tele-tele*, and to see the wounded man placed in a situation of more comfort.

"Heaven bless you!" said the sufferer, with emphasis, giving her a look which brought the blushes again to her countenance. "You have saved my life."

In a few moments the wounded man was placed on a settee brought by the shepherds, and the little cavalcade wended its way towards the cabin. The maiden walked last, and by her side stalked sadly the two dogs of the sufferer; and the dumb animals, with sense almost human, as if appreciating her kindness to their master, looked up affectionately into her face every few steps.

The cabin was like those existing everywhere in the Highlands—a rude but cheerful habitation, but was both larger than usual, and adorned with more taste inside. The wounded man, as he was borne into an inner chamber, of which the house had apparently at least two, noticed, with some surprise, over the fireplace, and old fashioned target and broad claymore.

In about two hours the friend of the sufferer returned bringing with him the surgeon, who was closeted with his patient for more than an hour, and when he came forth the young girl was still awake, sitting anxiously by the fire, in company with a middle aged woman, the wife of one of the shepherds.

"Oh, Miss Helen," said the old surgeon, answering the enquiry of her eyes, "you have saved the life of as brave a lad as ever shot a muir-cock or stalked a red deer. I know all about it, ye lassie;" then seeing that Helen was ready to cry with sheer vexation, he continued, "but it's in the bluid it's in the bluid; ye came of a generous and gallant race," and he patted her head as a father would that of a favorite daughter, adding, as if to himself, "it's a pity the Southren has the broad acres that were once her ancestor's; and that she coming of a chieftain's line, should have nothing but a cabin, and a few bits of hillside for a flock or two of sheep."

Helen did not hear these last remarks, for the old man spoke in a whisper, and she had risen, now that she knew the result, to retire, for she feared the other young sportsman would come out.

"Good-bye, doctor," she said, giving her hand with the dignity of a countess, softened by the kindness of an affectionate girl. "What you tell me will make me sleep better. I share good Mrs. Coffin's bed to night, having given up my own room to the sick man; but if you will rest here to-night we will yield it to you and sit by the fire."

"Nae, nae," said the old man, kindly pushing her towards the door of the other sleeping apartment; "I stay here, indeed, for I maun be wanted; but I'm an old campaigner, and hae slept mony a night under my cloak, with the bonny stars above me; and, to such as me, a settle and a chimney corner is nae great cross now and then."

The next day the wounded man was pronounced better, but still in a very critical situation; and his removal was expressly forbidden by the old surgeon.

"Ye maun keep him here awhile yet, lassie," he said, addressing Helen; "and, I'm almost persuaded ye'll hae to be his nurse. He has nae sisters or mother to send for, it seems; and men are very rough nurses, ye ken. Mrs. Colin is here, and will nae doubt help; but ye maun be his nurse, maist of the time, yoursel. Aweel, aweel, don't be frightened; 'tis what can't be helped."

And so, Helen, timid and embarrassed, was compelled, from the urgent necessity of the case, to attend on the wounded man. His friend indeed remained to assist in nursing him; but the invalid with the whim of a sick man, soon began to refuse his medicines unless administered by the hand of Helen, and sweetened by her smile. Moreover, until the danger was over, his friend watched every night at his bedside, and in consequence requiring a portion of the day for rest, Helen was necessarily left alone for hours with the wounded man. The surgeon, for the first two weeks, came every day to see his patient; but, after this visited him less frequently.

"He is getting along weel enough now," he said one day, when Helen followed him out of the room, to ask his opinion. "All he needs is careful nursing, such as ye ken weel how to gie him. Ah, lassie!" he continued, smiling archly, and shaking his grey head, "I would mysel' be a'most willing to be on a sick bed for a fortnight, if I could hae twa such een watching me."

It was not long after this, for he now mended rapidly, that the invalid began to sit up, and very soon he could totter to the window, and look out. In a day or two more he found his way to the cottage door, where sitting in a chair, he inhaled the delicious mountain air, for an hour or so at noonday. His friend, when the invalid was thus far convalescent, took to his gun again, and went out for game; and so Helen and her guest were frequently left alone together.

It was not to be supposed that this intimacy between two congenial spirits could go on without love, on one side at least.

"How shall I ever thank you sufficiently, Helen?" said Donald, one day, looking at her fondly. "I have never dared to allude to it since, though I have thought of it fifty times daily; but your presence of mind when I was dying by the spring, saved my life."

The blushing Helen looked down, and began to pick to pieces a lily of the valley, her favorite flower; but she answered softly, "Don't talk that was, Mr. Alleyne. You would not, I know, if you were aware how much it pained me."

"Call me Donald," said the convalescent; "sorely we have known each other long enough for you to drop that formal name. Or, if you will not call me Donald, then I shall address you as Miss Graeme."

"Donald then," said Helen, archly, looking up, and shaking the curls back from her face.

"Bless you for the word Helen," he said, taking her hand. "Do you know it sounds sweeter now than I ever thought it would. Nay, dear one, do not withdraw your hand—do not look away—for I love you, Helen, as I love my own life, if you will not be mine I shall ever be miserable. It is this, too, that I have been long wishing to say to you, but never dared."

And did not Helen return the love thus warmly expressed? Had she been with him so much not to know how immeasurably superior he was to other men? Why did she, in fact, shake her head and persist in withdrawing her hand?

"Mr. Alleyne," she said, though with averted face, for the tears were falling fast from her eyes—she no longer said Donald—"if you would not have me keep out of your sight forever—if, in short, you have any respect for a friendless girl—do not speak in that strain again." And she rose as if to depart.

"Helen, for Heaven's sake hear me," said her lover, detaining her: "hear me only for one word more. Since the hour that you saved my life I have loved you, and every day I have spent in your society has increased that love; but if you will say that you love another, I swear never to speak on that subject again."

She endeavoured to detach her hand, which he had caught a second time, but he held it too firmly. She still looked away, weeping, but did not answer. "You are rich; I am poor," she said, at last, brokenly; "you would some day repent of this thing. Even your friends would laugh at your folly."

"Then you love me," he said eagerly. "Is it not so?"

"Mr. Alleyne, will you let me go?" she said. "I am an unprotected girl, and you presume on my situation."

"No, by Heaven, no!" he exclaimed, but he let go her hand; "there, leave me, cruel one. You misjudge me, indeed, Miss Graeme, for your blood is as good as mine; and even if it were not, Donald Alleyne is not the man to love for rank or wealth."

Helen, whose pride rather than heart had spoken was moved by these words, and she lingered irresolutely. Her lover saw the change in her demeanour, and hastened to take advantage of it. Nor did Helen long continue to resist his pleadings. She loved him indeed only too well, as she had all along confessed to her own heart. Still even when brought to half acknowledge that he had a place in her heart, she would not promise to be his, without a condition. He argued long and earnestly, but her answer was always the same.

"We must part for a year," she said. "You think now, with the memory of your illness fresh upon you, that you love me; but I am come of too haughty a blood, though poor now, to marry even where I might love, on so sudden and questionable—excuse me, for I must speak plainly—so sudden and questionable an attachment. You are rich, fashionable, and with influence; I am the last of a line proscribed ever since Culloden. Your place is the gay world, where you will be surrounded by troops of friends; mine is in the humble cabin where a few poor dependents have been my only companions ever since my father died. If you really love me, you will return at