

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.]

FROM BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

## RETRIBUTION.

"And has the time indeed come that I can thus speak calmly of all that horror! The body was brought into my room, and it lay in its shroud—such as that was—all day and all night close to my bed. But false was I to all our life-long friendship—and almost with indifference I looked upon the corpse. Momentary starts of affection seized me—but I cared little or nothing for the death of him, the tender and the true, the gentle and the brave, the pious and the noble-hearted; for her, the cruel and the faithless, dead to honour, to religion dead—dead to all the sanctities of nature—for her, and for her alone, I suffered all the agonies—nor any comfort came to me in my despair, from the conviction that she was worthless—for desperately wicked as she had shown herself to be—oh! crowding came upon my heart all our hours of happiness—all her sweet smiles—all her loving looks—all her affectionate words—all her conjugal and maternal tenderness—and the loss of all that bliss—the change of it all into strange, sudden, shameful, and everlasting misery, smote me till I swooned, and was delivered up to dreams in which the cruel reality was mixed up with phantasies more horrible than man's mind can suffer out of the hell of sleep!"

"Wretched coward that I was to outlive that night! But my mind was weak from great loss of blood—and the blow so stunned me that I had not strength of resolution to die. I might have torn off the bandages—for nobody watched me—and my wounds were thought mortal. But the love of life had not welled out with all those vital streams; and as I began to recover, another passion took possession of me—and I vowed that there should be atonement and revenge. I was not obscure. My dishonour was known through the whole army. Not a tent—not a hut—in which my name was not banded about—a jest in the mouths of profligate politicians—pronounced with pity by the compassionate brave. I commanded my men with pride. No need had I ever had to be ashamed when I looked on our colours, but no wretch led out to execution for desertion or cowardice ever shrunk from the sun, and from the sight of human faces arrayed around him, with more shame and horror than did I when, on my way to a transport, I came suddenly on my own corps, marching to music as if they were taking up a position in the line of battle—as they had often done with me at their head—all sternly silent before an approaching storm of fire. What brought them there? To do me honour! Me, smeared with infamy—and ashamed to lift my eyes from the mire. Honour had been the idol I worshipped—alas! too, too passionately far—and now I lay in my litter like a slave sold to stripes—and heard—as if a legion of demons were mocking me—loud and long buzzes; and then a confused murmur of blessings on our noble commander, so they called me, despicable in my own esteem—scorned—insulted—forsaken—me, who could not bind to mine the bosom that for years had touched it—a wretch so poor in power over a woman's heart, that no sooner had I left her to her own thoughts, than she felt that she had never loved me, and opening her fair breast to a new born bliss, sacrificed me without remorse—nor could bear to think of me any more as her husband—not even for the sake of that child whom I knew she loved—for no hypocrite was she there—and oh! lost creature though she was—even now I wonder over that unaccountable desertion—and much she must have suffered from the image of that small bed side which she used to sit for hours perfectly happy from the sight of that face which I too so often blessed in her hearing, because it was so like her own! Where is my child? Have I frightened her away into the wood by my unfatherly looks? She too will come to hate me—oh! see yonder her face and her figure like a fairy's, gliding through among the broom! Sorrow has no business with her—nor she with sorrow. Yet—even her how often have I made her weep! All the unhappiness she has ever known—has all come from me; and would I but let her alone to herself in her affectionate innocence—the smile that always lies on her face when she is asleep would remain there—only brighter—all the time her eyes are awake; but I dash it away by my unhallowed harshness, and people looking on her in her trouble, wonder to think how sad can be the countenance even of a little child! O God of mercy! what if she were to die!"

"She will not die—she will live," said the pitying pastor—"and many happy years—my son—are yet in store even for you—so sorely as you have been tried—for it is not in nature that your wretchedness can endure for ever. She is in herself all-sufficient for a father's happiness. You prayed just now that the God of Mercy would spare her life—and has he not spared it? Tender flower as she seems, yet how full of life! Let not then your gratitude to Heaven be barren in your heart—but let it produce there resignation,—if need be, contrition,—and, above all, forgiveness."

"Yes! I had a hope to live for—mangled as I was in body, and racked in mind—a hope that was a faith—and bitter-sweet it was in imagined foretaste of fruition—the hope and the faith of revenge. I knew that he would not aim at my life. But what was that to me who thirsted for his blood? Was he to escape death because he dared not wound bone, or flesh, or muscle of mine, seeing that the assassin had already stabbed my soul? Satisfaction! I tell you that I was for revenge. Not that his blood could wipe out the stain with which my name was imbrued, but let it be mixed with the mould, and he who invaded my marriage-bed—and hallowed was it by every generous passion that ever breathed upon woman's breast—let him fall down in convulsions, and vomit out his heart's blood at once in expiation of his guilt, and in retribution dealt

out to him by the hand of him whom he had degraded in the eyes of the whole world beneath the condition even of a felon, and delivered over in my nursery to contempt and scorn. I found him out;—there he was before me—and in all that beauty by woman so beloved—graceful as Apollo—and with a haughty air, as if proud of an achievement that adorned his name, he saluted me—her husband—on the field,—and let the wind play with his raven tresses—his curled love-locks—and then presented himself to my aim in an attitude a statuary would have admired. I shot him through the heart."

The good old man heard the dreadful words with a shudder—yet they had come to his ears not unexpectedly, for the speaker's aspect had gradually been growing black with wrath, long before he ended in an avowal of murder. Nor, in ceasing his wild words and distracted demeanour, did it seem that his heart was touched with any remorse. His eyes retained their savage glare—his teeth were clenched—and he feasted on his crime.

"Nothing but a full faith in Divine Revelation," solemnly said his aged friend, "can subdue the evil passions of our nature, or enable conscience itself to see and repent of sin. Your wrongs were indeed great—but without a change wrought in all your spirit, alas! my son! you cannot hope to see the kingdom of heaven."

"Who dares to condemn the deed? He deserved death—and whence was doom to come but from me the Avenger? I took his life—but once I saved it. I bore him from the battlements of a fort stormed in vain—after we had all been blown up by the springing of a mine; and from bayonets that had drunk my blood as well as his—and his widowed mother blessed me as the saviour of her son. I told my wife to receive him as a brother—and for my sake to feel towards him a sister's love. Who shall speak of temptation—or frailty, or infatuation to me? Let the fools hold their peace. His wounds became dearer to her abandoned heart than mine had ever been, yet had her cheek lain many a night on the scars that seamed this breast—for I was not backward in battle, and our place was in the van. I was no coward, that she who loved heroism in him should have dishonoured her husband! True, he was younger by some years than me—and God had given him pernicious beauty—and she was young, too, oh! the brightest of all mortal creatures the day she became my bride, no less bright with that baby at her bosom—a matron in girlhood's resplendent spring! Is youth a plea of wickedness? And was I old? I, who in spite of all I have suffered, feel the vital blood yet boiling as to a furnace, but cut off for ever by her crime from fame and glory, and from a soldier in his proud career covered with honour in the eyes of all my countrymen, changed in an hour into an outlawed and nameless slave! My name has been borne by a race of heroes—the blood in my veins has flowed down a long line of illustrious ancestors, and here am I now, a hidden, disguised hypocrite, dwelling among peasants, and afraid—aye, afraid, because ashamed, to lift my eyes freely from the ground even among the solitudes of the mountains, lest some wandering stranger should recognise me, and see the brand of ignominy her hand and his, accursed both, burnt in upon my brow. She forsook this bosom, but tell me if it was in disgust with these my scars?"

And as he bared it, distractedly, that noble chest was seen indeed disfigured with many a gash, on which a wife might well have rested her head with gratitude not less devout because of a lofty pride mingling with life-deep affection. But the burst of passion was gone by—and, covering his face with his hands, he wept like a child.

"Oh! cruel—cruel was her conduct to me, yet what has mine been to her, for so many years! I could not tear her image from my memory, not an hour has it ceased to haunt me—since I came among these mountains, her ghost is for ever at my side. I have striven to drive it away with curses, but still there is the phantom. Sometimes, beautiful as on our marriage day, all in purest white; adorned with flowers, it wreaths its arms around my neck, and offers its mouth to my kisses, and then all at once is changed into a leering wretch, retaining a likeness of my bride, then into a corpse. And perhaps she is dead, dead of cold and hunger, she whom I cherished in all luxury, whose delicate frame seemed to bring round itself all the purest air and sweetest sunshine, she may have expired in the very mire, and her body been huddled into some hole called a pauper's grave. And I have suffered all this to happen her! Or have I suffered her to become one of the miserable multitude who support hated and hateful life by prostitution? Black was her crime, yet hardly did she deserve to be one of that howling crew, she whose voice was once so sweet, her eyes so pure, and her soul so innocent, for up to the hour I parted with her weeping, no evil thought had ever been hers; then why, ye eternal Heavens! why fell she from that sphere where she shone like a star? Let that mystery that shrouds my mind in darkness be lightened; let me see into its heart, and know but the meaning of her guilt, and then may I be able to forgive it; but for five years, day and night, it has troubled and confounded me—and from blind and baffled wrath, with an iniquity that remains like a pitch-black night through which I cannot grope my way, no refuge can I find—and nothing is left me but to tear my hair out by handfuls, as, like a madman, I have done, to curse her by name in the solitary glooms, and to call down upon her the curse of God. O wicked, most wicked. Yet He who judges the hearts of his creatures, knows that I have a thousand and a thousand times forgiven her, but that a chasm lay between us, from which the moment that I came to its brink, a voice drove me back, I know not whether of a good or evil spirit, and bade me leave her to her fate. But she must be dead, and needs not now my tears. O friend, judge me not too sternly, from this my confession; for all my wild words have imperfectly expressed to you but parts of my miserable being, and if I could lay it all before you, you would

pity me perhaps as much as condemn, for my worst passions only have now found utterance, all my better feelings will not return or abide for words, even I myself have forgotten them; but your pitying face seems to say, that they will be remembered at the Throne of Mercy. I forgive her." And with these words he fell down on his knees, and prayed too for pardon to his own sins. The old man encouraged him not to despair, it needed but a motion of his hand to bring the child from her couch in the cover, and Lucy was folded to her father's heart. The forgiveness was felt to be holy in that embrace.

The day had brightened up into more perfect beauty, and showers were sporting with sunshine on the blue air of Spring. The sky showed something like a rainbow, and the Lake, in some parts quite still, and in some breezy, contained at once shadowy fragments of wood, and rock, and waves that would have murmured round the prow of pleasure-boat suddenly hoisting a sail. And such a very boat appeared round a promontory that stretched no great way into the water, and formed with a crescent of low meadow-land a bay that was the first to feel the wind coming down Glencoil. The boatman was rowing heedlessly along, when a sudden squall struck the sail, and in an instant the skiff was upset and went down. No shrieks were heard, and the boatman swam ashore, but a figure was seen struggling where the sail disappeared, and starting from his knees, he who knew not fear, plunged into the Lake, and after desperate exertions brought the drowned creature to the side, a female meanly attired, seemingly a stranger, and so attenuated that it was plain she must have been in a dying state, and had she not thus perished, would have had but few days to live. The hair was gray, but the face though withered was not old, and she lay on the greensward, the features were beautiful as well as calm in the sunshine.

He stood over her awhile, as if struck motionless, and then kneeling beside the body, kissed its lips and eyes, and said only "It is Lucy!"

The old man was close by, and so was that child. They too knelt, and the passion of the mourner held him dumb, with his face close to the face of death, ghastly its glare beside the sleep that knows no waking, and is forsaken by all dreams. He opened the bosom, washed to the bone, in the idle thought that she might yet breathe, and a paper dropt out into his hand, which he read aloud to himself, unconscious that any one was near. "I am fast dying, and desire to die at your feet. Perhaps you will spurn me, it is right you should, but you will see how sorrow has killed the wicked wretch who was once your wife. I have lived in humble servitude for five years, and have suffered great hardships. I think I am a penitent, and have been told by religious persons that I may hope for pardon from Heaven. Oh, that you would forgive me too, and let me have one look at our Lucy. I will linger about the Field of Flowers, perhaps you will come there and see me lie down and die on the very spot where we passed a summer day the week of our marriage."

"Not thus could I have kissed thy lips, Lucy, had they been red with life. White are they, and white must they long have been. No pollution on them, nor on that poor bosom now. Contrue tears had long since washed out thy sin. A feeble hand traced these lines, and in them an humble heart said nothing but God's truth. Child, behold thy mother. Art thou afraid to touch the dead?"

"No, father, I am not afraid to kiss her lips, as you did now. Sometimes, when you thought me asleep, I have heard you praying for my mother." "Oh, child, cease—cease—or my heart will burst."

People began to gather about the body, but awe kept them aloof; and as for removing it to a house, none who saw it but knew such care would have been vain, for doubt there could be none that there lay death. So the groups remained for a while at a distance, even the old pastor went a good many paces apart; and under the shadow of that tree the father and child composed her limbs and closed her eyes, and continued to sit beside her, as still as if they had been watching over one asleep.

That death was seen by all to be a strange calamity to him who had lived long among them, had adopted many of their customs, and was even as one of themselves, so it seemed, in the familiar intercourse of man with man. Some dim notion that this was the dead body of his wife was entertained by many, they knew not why; and their clergyman felt that then there needed to be neither concealment nor avowal of the truth. So in solemn sympathy they approached the body and its watchers; a bier had been prepared; and walking at the head, as if it had been a funeral, the Father of little Lucy, holding her hand, silently directed the procession towards his own house, out of the FIELD OF FLOWERS.

## THE DESERTERS.

The following narrative was found among the papers of Mr. Mason, Secretary to the Duke of Cumberland.

THERE was in the—regiment two young soldiers above the common level, both from the same place, a town in Lancashire; and each had much friendship for the other. They had enlisted together from different motives: they marched together, and were inhabitant of the same tent. One, whom I shall call the lover, had enrolled his name through an uneasiness from being disappointed in what he thought all his happiness was centered; the marrying of a sweet girl of his own town, by whom he was much beloved. Her relations were inexorable, and his hopes in vain. The other a lad of spirit, believing the soldier's life as fine as the recruiting officer had described it, willing to see war,