

LITERATURE, &c.

TALE OF A VICTIM.

'THERE is no such thing as standing still in human life: the wheel of fortune is continually revolving; and we must either rise with it or fall.'

'Very true,' said my friend, as he emptied his glass, and turned a little more round to me; 'I will give you a case in point, of which I happened to know myself.'

Some years ago—say fifteen or eighteen—as I was returning from London by the mail-coach, I made halt for a night at one of the York inns. The room into which I was ushered was full of bagmen and travellers of various cuts and kinds, and from the confused Babel of sound I could occasionally hear a detached sentence of politics—on the theatres—on agriculture—on the late rainy weather—the price of stocks—soft goods—and the petitions of the Roman Catholics. A knot in one corner were discussing supper; others, lounging beside the hearth, toasted their toes; while a third, and more numerous party, half concealed amid puffy exhalations, washed down the flavour of their Hayanahs with steaming savoury rum-punch. Being somewhat fatigued, and the assemblage not exactly quite to my taste, I tossed off a sneaker, and rang for Boots; that indispensable actor of all drudgery work at your public establishments for board and lodging.

In bustled a tall, thin, squalid, miserable-looking creature, his curly black hair, seemingly long unkempt, hanging about his ears 'in most admired disorder.' His dress corresponded with his looks; his jacket and waistcoat were of dark fustian, and his trousers, shabby and shrivelled, bore some traces of having been originally nankeen. Around his neck was twisted a blue cotton handkerchief, and the little of his linen seen, was not only ragged, but dirty. In one hand he carried a boot-jack, and in the other a pair of slippers, while from under his arm depended a dingy towel, perhaps as a badge of office. I could not help thinking, as he crossed the room at my summons, 'here is a most lugubrious specimen of mortality; one of those night-hawks of society, whom it would scarcely be comfortable to meet with, unarmed, on a solitary road, towards the twilight.'

With down-looking face, the fellow made a hurried approach to me, as if he had the feeling of his task being a disagreeable one, and the sooner got over the better. As he laid the slippers on the carpet, placed the boot-jack at my foot, and was stooping his shoulder as a fulcrum for assistance in my operations, I caught a distinct glimpse of his faded features. I could not be mistaken. 'Good Heavens!' said I to myself, half aloud, 'can it possibly be Harry Melville!'

After the poor creature had shuffled out of the room in an agitation which did not wholly escape the remark, and provoke the idle laugh of some of the loungers, I hastily rang the bell; and was shown to my sleeping-room by the waiter, whom I requested to bid the person come up who had brought me my slippers.

I was allowed to pace about for some time in a perplexed and downcast mood, haunted by many a recollection of departed pleasures—by many delightful associations of other years, which contrasted themselves with present dejection, when at length I heard a step timidly approaching the door, and a slight tap was given. I opened it eagerly, and there stood before me the same doleful apparition. I took hold of the poor fellow's hand, and led him to a chair; but no sooner was he seated, and the door shut upon us, than he put his hands over his face, and burst into a flood of tears. When he had become a little more tranquil, I soothed him in the best way I could, and ventured to open my mind to him.

'Oh! let me alone—let me alone,' he said, sobbing bitterly. 'I have deserved my fate. My own imprudence, more than misfortune, has reduced me to the state you see me. Be not sorry for me; I am beneath your regard. I have deserved it all.'

'Having consoled him in the best manner I could, he voluntarily gave me the particulars of his history, which, as far as memory serves me, were nearly to the following effect:—

Shortly after having been taken into the counting-house of his father—at that time a considerable West India merchant—he married, contrary to the will of his friends, in the hope that the affections of a parent could not long remain estranged to an only son, even though conscious that the son had injured him. Perhaps in this his calculations were not altogether wrong; but at this point foreknowledge failed, and unforeseen circumstances blasted his prospects. The affairs of old Mr. Melville were shortly after thrown into disorder by unsuccessful speculations; and matters at length grew so bad as to involve bankruptcy and ruin. The old man was received into the country residence of a relation; but, brought up in habits of activity and business, his mind could not withstand the dread reverse; and, after a few listless months, one shock of

palsy following another, hurried him off to a not unwelcome grave.

The penniless and imprudent Henry soon found that he had wedded not only himself, but another, to misery, as the dark night of ruin closed around them. They were both young, and capable of exertion, but, living on the faith of future prospects, and a speedy reconciliation, they had contracted debts, from which they saw no possible way of extricating themselves. Matters grew worse and worse, and at length the poor fellow was afraid to leave his home from fear of bailiffs.

At length he fell into their hands, and was dragged to jail; and, on the news being incautiously carried to his young wife, she was seized with convulsions, and perished in giving birth to a child, not unfortunately dead. The heart of the miserable man was rent asunder on learning his domestic calamities. Scorned and despised, friendless and unpitied, he beheld from the iron-bound windows of his prison the coffin that contained the remains of his wife and child, carried through the streets by strangers to the place of interment, while, yearning with the feelings of the husband and father, he was denied the mournful solace of shedding a tear into their grave.

Condemned to the social contamination of the base and vile, he endured the wretchedness and disgrace of confinement for two months. When he was set at liberty by the benefit of the act which so provides, on making oath of surrendering up every thing. Into the world, therefore, was he cast forth, branded and stigmatized, destitute, and beggared in every thing but the generous pride which withheld him from soliciting charity. Bred to no profession, he knew not whereunto to turn his hand; and misery pressed so hardly upon him, that unhallowed thoughts of suicide began to suggest themselves to his troubled mind. From town to town he wandered, soliciting the situation of clerk in any counting-house; but, alas! he had no references to make as to character, no certificates of former engagements faithfully fulfilled. For days and days together, he had not even a morsel of bread to satisfy the pangs of hunger. To add to his wretchedness, his clothes had become so shabby, from exposure to wind, and rain, and sunshine, that he was ashamed to be seen in public, or during daylight—so lay about the fields and wastes till sunset, when he ventured nearer to human dwellings.

To have offered himself for any situation in such a squalid condition, would have been certain exposure to contumely, refusal, and suspicion; and at length the lingering rays of pride, which had hitherto sustained him, sank amid the darkness of his destiny.

Necessity is a stern teacher. Even the face of man, which he had sought to shun in his misfortunes, became to him at length a sufferance necessary to be borne; so, as he was at first thrust from, so was he at length drawn back to the dominion of society. From the moorland wastes, where he could pick up a few wild berries, and from the sea-shore, which afforded some shellfish, he came, by degrees imperceptible but sure, to be a spectator at the corner of streets, and a hanger-on about stable-yards, where he casually earned a few pence by assisting the grooms to carry water, or lead gentlemen's horses. Low is the lowest situation which admits not of promotion, and through course of time, my old schoolfellow came to be promoted to the office in which I found him.

'Poor fellow! did you ever hear what became of him afterwards?'

'Yes I did, and a miserable end he had, though redeemed by the spirit of humanity which prompted it. He was killed in rescuing a child which had fallen before the wheels of a stage-coach, and the grateful parents not only gave him a decent funeral, but erected a simple tablet over him, recording his fate, and their gratitude.'

'It is dreadful to think on the abyss into which a single erring step from the paths of prudence may precipitate us,' said I.

'Yes,' answered my friend; 'and there are a thousand ways of going astray; while I defy you to go right, save by one.'

LADY HARRIET ACKLAND.

It is in the display of the domestic virtues and affections, that the loveliest attributes and qualities of woman are more especially developed.—Social life is the peculiar sphere of her exertions, and that in which her tenderest anxieties and strongest energies are educated. But, when circumstances lift her out of that homely and circumscribed field of action, when she is called upon to endure difficulties and privations, and to submit to unwonted trials and severe hardships; then it is that an astonishing, and sometimes even surpassing, heroism and courage are constantly evinced by the sex whose general weaknesses are proverbial; and when men are almost ready to yield to despair, and to succumb under accumulated misfortunes, frequently

will their tender and delicate female companions unwittingly reproach them by the display of superior fortitude, and effectually encourage them to renewed exertion, by consolatory sympathy and stimulative argument. True indeed it is, that that sex who, in undisturbed quietude depend almost solely on the protection and resources of man, in times of difficulty and danger, of privation and misery, become his example, his consoler, his instigator to activity, and display the utmost fortitude, courage and constancy; while the devoted affection which binds a woman to the partner of her life, induces her cheerfully to undergo the most distressing hardships, in order to administer comfort to him by her presence, and to lessen his sufferings by a voluntary participation of them.

While such conjugal affection as that which we have described shall be esteemed a virtue, and such unbounded attachment be deemed amiable in the female mind, the conduct of Lady Harriet Ackland must continue not only to excite emulation in the breasts of her own sex, but to demand admiration from every human being.

In the beginning of the year 1776, during the contest between England and this country, this lady accompanied her husband, Major Ackland, to Canada. She underwent a great variety of hardships and inclemencies, and, in different extremities of the season, in the course of the campaign, traversed a great extent of country, with difficulties scarcely conceivable by mere European travellers, for the sole purpose of attending upon a beloved husband. In the midst of her difficulties and dangers, Major Ackland was taken alarmingly ill: her anxiety on such an afflicting occasion can only be imagined, not described; yet, in the rigid climate of Canada, destitute of the commonest comforts, this amiable and undaunted female was his only nurse. His disorder was severe and dangerous; and he had scarcely recovered, when the forces which he commanded were ordered to attack Ticonderoga. Fearful of exposing the object of his affection to inevitable dangers, he absolutely insisted on her refraining from accompanying him in this expedition. She was, therefore, most unwillingly compelled to remain behind; but the day after the conquest of Ticonderoga, the major received a dangerous wound, which no sooner came to the knowledge of his anxious wife than, unappalled by difficulties or dangers which would have intimidated thousands, she resolved to hasten to his assistance. She accordingly crossed Lake Champlain, and joined him, and at length had the happiness of seeing him restored to health. Full of gratitude to heaven for the past, yet instigated by increased anxiety for the future, this faithful and undaunted woman determined that no persuasion should henceforth induce her to separate from her husband, and after his recovery she proceeded to follow his fortunes through the campaign.

The granadiers, commanded by Major Ackland, were exposed to uncommon hardships and fatigues; they were continually employed in harassing the enemy and scarcely ever remained in the same place twelve hours together. Being attached to general Fraser's corps, which was always the most advanced post in the army, their duties required such constant exertion and extraordinary vigilance, that the officers had to be always on the alert. Lady Ackland, however, resolutely encountered every danger and endured every fatigue. On one occasion, the tent in which she and her husband had lain down to take a brief repose accidentally took fire, and with the utmost difficulty she preserved her life. As it was, the whole furniture and contents of the tent were destroyed; which, in such a situation, was in itself a sufficiently distressing circumstance. This accident, however, produced no alteration in her resolution and cheerfulness, which were soon to be exposed to far severer trials.—Still a partaker in the fatigues of the advanced corps, she continued her progress and crossed the Hudson river with them.

On the nineteenth of September, the granadiers were ordered to march and meet the American forces; and, being liable to action at every step, the major confided his wife to the care of those who conducted the artillery stores and baggage, in which situation she would be less exposed. Her tender ears were soon assailed by the dreadful report of cannon and musketry; terror and apprehension debilitated her frame, as every sound alarmed her with the fear that it might be the knell of her husband; and in this state of anxious suspense she remained several days. At the commencement of the action she took refuge in a small, uninhabited hut, which soon after, when the engagement became general and bloody, was also taken possession of by the army surgeons, who found it convenient as an hospital. In this affecting and dreadful situation, accompanied by three other ladies, the baroness of Reidesel, and the wives of Major Harnage and Lieutenant Reynell, who accompanied the army from similar motives, Lady Harriet remained four hours, within hearing of one continual roar of artillery, to which her husband, at the head of his granadiers,