

## Literature, &amp;c.

From the London Metropolitan.  
THE OLD BACHELOR.

BY MRS. EDWARD THOMAS.

'Get me,' said I again, for about the hundredth time, to my still wandering footman, 'change for this five pound note, all in silver; and mind, Thomas, as many sixpences as you can with it!'

'Yes, sir.'

'What can master possibly do with so much silver? Always on a Saturday night too! I always heard him say to Matha, my pretty housemaid, twirling the note between his thumb and finger, while I was slipping on my new Indian-rubber goloshes, ready to sally forth.

'No good, depend on it!' she rejoined, 'going out, let the weather be what it will, tramping in the rain and mud. I should like to watch him, the old sinner!'

So invariably do the ignorant and narrow-minded judge of anything the least mysterious in our actions by the worst possible standard, *vice*—as if virtue never sought the veil of secrecy for its outgoing!

Matha had no idea that anything but wickedness, or 'no good,' as she emphatically called it, could take me from my comfortable fire-side and book, to brave the inclemency of the season; 'at my age too!' verging on seventy; 'old enough to know better,' thought Matha—most certainly, had my motives for these almost nocturnal rambles been any other than the purest, the most charitable. I saw by the significant shake of Thomas's head, that Matha's shrewd and ill-natured conjectures found a ready echo in his bosom.

I was undoubtedly the richest old bachelor in the old and populous market town of D—in the south of England, and am not ashamed to confess, my wealth was chiefly made in business.

I was considered rather mean by some of my acquaintances, who ostentatiously paraded their names, and a few guineas together, as annual subscribers to every public institution in the place. But while 'George Frederick Thompson, Esquire,' was blazoned forth in all the glory of 'English type,' for two guineas 'a friend,' for ten, might be seen in modest 'brevier.' In truth, my true delight was to do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.

Why I was a bachelor, with a heart so warmly alive as mine was, even at that frigid period of life, to every tender and generous sentiment, was owing, alas! to the early blight of an affection which cost me twenty years of grief and sorrow, and which I cannot think of even now without the bitterest tear of regret, shed with all the poignancy of youthful feelings.

I had for years, winter and summer, made it a point to attend our large meat market of a Saturday night, with such a supply of loose silver in my pocket as should preclude the possibility of that cold and heartless excuse—'I really would, but I have no change!' for so transient is the glow of benevolence sometimes, as actually to be extinguished at the bare idea of the trouble of changing money. Then, as I sauntered leisurely up and down before the tempting stalls, illuminated by the strong and vivid lights of the gas lamps, I could mark the countenances of the different purchasers—the wistful gaze of the poverty pinched mother, bargaining for that breast of mutton which would make her seven famished darlings such a delicious Sunday dinner—see her lips quiver with hope and fear as she enquired the price, and detect the nervousness of her grasp, as she tremblingly and hesitatingly turned over and over again the delicate morsel. She evidently, methought, belonged to that truly deserving and industrious class, called char women—out all the week working like a slave to procure a few comforts for the Sabbath, to enjoy at least one day out of the weary seven with her children and husband, a bricklayer's laborer, perhaps thoughtless and improvident, spending all his scanty wages in beer and tobacco, 'still he was her husband—the father of her children—the handsome Richard of her early love, almost as handsome now, and it was no hardship to toil for creatures so precious to her heart.'

At the moment she was convinced indeed that it was beyond her small means, and she was turning hopelessly away to seek a less dainty and cheaper bit, out came the additional shilling or sixpence, as it might be, to complete the necessary purchase; and the meat was in her basket, and the tear of gratitude in her eye. 'Go,' I whispered, slipping two more shillings into her hand, 'and buy a little nice tea and sugar—I am sure you like it.'

I waited for no thanks from the wondering woman; I had no desire to be assured 'I was an angel of goodness.' I knew I was but a frail and erring mortal, and was content to be blessed in her prayers, aiming only to exemplify the poet's description of a truly charitable man.

'I mean the man, who, when the distant poor

Need help, denies them nothing but his name.' I will candidly confess that when I first commenced these perambulations, I had no fixed purpose of benefitting my suffering fellow-creatures, I was influenced more by a wish to divert myself from the solitude and anguish of my own thoughts, blended with a vague sort of benevolence; but when, after a little time, I perceived the real good I was able to effect, at the smallest possible sacrifice of trouble and money, the numberless hearts I had gladdened, and the firesides I made cheerful and happy, it became the active principle of my life, and a rich and abundant harvest did I reap for my labors in the sweet and tranquil reflection of a self-approving conscience. The ameliorating hand of charity plucked the thorn from my midnight pillow, and soothed the bitterness of my care-worn existence!

One evening I was particularly struck with a young and rather genteel looking girl, inquiring most earnestly, 'for a nice delicate sweetbread.' She could not be more than sixteen, and in the broad glare of the flaming gas, I saw she was exquisitely fair and beautiful. The eagerness of her manner, and the evident superiority of rank over the generality of persons who frequented the stalls at that late hour, had an unfavorable effect on the young butchers to whom she applied, and many was the rude and heartless jest she had to endure from them.

Still she went from stall to stall, with a degree of undaunted perseverance which would have awakened a feeling of disgust in my own bosom, for conduct so unfeminine, had I not observed that she frequently and furtively dried a tear with the tattered remains of a once costly foreign shawl.

'She is no impostor, I mentally ejaculated, feeling my own eye become suddenly dimmed by a tear too. 'That is the tear of modest misery. The hardened in deception, would too gladly parade its grief to excite commiseration and pity.'

I followed her like a shadow, as her slight agile figure fitted almost noiselessly from place to place, with the most intense interest and curiosity. At last she came to a stall containing almost every joint of veal, and I saw her eyes sparkle with renovated hope as she exclaimed breathlessly.

'Have you the sweetbread sir?'

'How much will you give for it miss?'

'How much do you ask?'

'Five shillings. Are you willing to give that?'

'Oh, most gladly, if you will trust me for part.'

The man's brutal laugh literally rang through the wide square, as he replied—'Come, that's capital!' Then adding, with a piece of popular slang too vulgar to repeat, and which happily, she could not possibly understand, 'No miss. I can't give no trust—you looks too suspicious for me.'

'Why are you so anxious to procure a sweet bread?' said I, gently touching her on the shoulder as she yet lingered there, as if every faculty was annihilated by this last and most severe disappointment.

She started with a degree of resentment in her countenance at the liberty; but seeing only an old man she replied mildly,—

'O, sir! it is for a dying sister—my only friend! She has not tasted anything solid for the last fortnight, and today, while I sat by her as she slept, she was dreaming of a sweet-bread, and spoke in her sleep of the good she was sure it would do her. I should have been here long before, but was obliged to finish some needle-work to obtain money enough to pay for it; and now they are all gone.'

It is impossible to convey an idea to my reader of the thrilling mournfulness of tone in which she pronounced these last few words. Her very heart seemed riven in twain with anguish at her utter want of success.

'You shall have a sweet-bread,' said I tenderly, 'for your dying sister, and every other comfort that can alleviate her sufferings, for the sake of the virtuous and holy affection you have evinced for her this night.'

The astonished girl, in the first bewilderment of delight at having so unexpectedly found a friend in sore distress, seized my hand with the spontaneous

movement of pure gratitude, and held it clasped firmly between her own, which trembled with emotion, but she was unable to articulate a word of thanks.

'Come,' I continued, leading her to my house, 'you need not fear an old man—my gray hairs shall be your security.'

On the way she told me her little history, unwished and unsolicited on my part; for I was predetermined to relieve her, for there is a proneness to candor and confidence in youth, which shows that the heart is unsophisticated, and the bosom untainted by the world's vices.

She was no high born dame, reduced by adverse fate to sudden want and misery to make an interesting heroine of a fictitious story, but the daughter of a lieutenant in the navy only, who having perished for his country, left herself and sister, now dying of a consumption; to struggle as they best could in a pitiless world; their mother having died of the same fatal complaint some years before her gallant husband.

On reaching home with my fair, but certainly rather doubtful looking companion, Mr Thomas opened his eyes to their very utmost extent.

'Tell Mrs Williams,' said I, assuming a tone of unusual authority, the more effectually to repress his rising curiosity, 'to pack up that sweetbread I had ordered for my supper; some tea and sugar, a bottle of sherry, a little arrowroot, and anything else she may think useful for a sick lady—and make haste.'

Thomas vanished without uttering one word—not even his customary 'yes sir,' and soon returned, bearing a basket of goodly dimensions quite filled, followed by Mrs Williams, Matha, and the kitchenmaid, at a more humble distance, evidently all bursting with almost irrepressible curiosity to see the extraordinary being Thomas had informed them 'master had brought home with him.'

'It is no consequence how dishevelled or disarranged the hair is in youth, the face from beneath it always looks lovely.'

Clara Graham's, the name of my new acquaintance, retained only the least possible wave, owing to the extreme dampness of the atmosphere; but it was luxuriant beyond what I had ever before seen, of a rich light suburn. She sat without her bonnet, having taken it off to dry, by my desire, enjoying a biscuit and a glass of wine, perfectly unconscious of the ill-natured surmises her unexpected appearance had awakened in the bosoms of my jealous domestics, for an old bachelor are invariably so. Oh! nothing is so winning, so beautiful, as that innate conviction of innocence which never suspects or thinks itself suspected. Suspicion and illiberality are the offspring of guilt, begetting in their turn that base desire to depreciate virtue, and bring it down to a level with its own fallen and degraded state.

The decorous housekeeper looked daggers at her and myself too, while she enumerated the articles she had 'condescended to pack up for such trumpery,' and I had read the words 'good-for-nothing baggage' in Matha's bright eye as plain as eye could speak, while Thomas's expressed all too clearly 'what an old profligate!'

Seeing me on the move, he said in his most obsequious tone,

'Shall I not carry the basket for the young lady, sir? It is very heavy.' He knew that was the most effectual means of fathomning the mystery.

'No—I shall carry it myself for her.'

'You, sir!'

'Yes, I. Come, my dear!' and away we both walked, or I rather tottering under my enormous load. 'I could fancy the 'O mys!' and the 'Wells I never!' of the disconcerted group who let us out in silent astonishment.

Clara lived in an obscure street, not far from my own dwelling, and I could not help feeling a sort of reproach at such virtue and misery struggling unknown and unpitied so near me. Her sister, poor emaciated thing, was awake on our arrival. She hardly noticed the presence of a stranger, being too feeble to feel any excitement at passing events, but she said in the kindest manner to my companion; 'Dear Clara, I began to think you long; the fire grew low, and I was so cold.'

This drew my attention to the fire, which was nearly out, and which Clara began busily to endeavour to rekindle.

'Where is your domestic my love,' said I to her.

'We have not kept one a long time,' replied she, 'I do all for poor dear Gertrude, she gives no trouble, and besides, servants are expensive sir.'

'What,' I exclaimed in inexpressible astonishment, 'you work at your needle like a slave, nurse your poor, helpless, sick sister, and attend to the household affairs too?—a mere child like you.

Good heavens! it is not to be thought of.'

Late as it was, I took my hat, and hurried off to my own favourite surgeon, whom I fortunately found at home, and at leisure to attend me.—I begged him, in the first place, to recommend a nice, intelligent woman as a nurse, which he did at the moment, and in the next to return with me to the house of the poor neglected invalid.

On examining her symptoms I was delighted to find her complaint was not considered by him as consumptive, but an obstinate attack of liver, brought on by a sedentary mode of life, and low and improper diet. And it is astonishing how much they resemble each other in appearance. The same dry cough: the same wasted and emaciated frame, and the same aches and pains over the languid and enfeebled body. He soon took his departure, to order the necessary medicines for her, cautioning the weeping Clara not too noisily to express her joy at the prospect of her sister's recovery, as rest and tranquility were absolutely necessary to second his endeavors.

The nurse soon after arriving, a comfortable motherly sort of a looking woman, after suitable instructions to her to take every care of the young ladies, and to spare nothing which she thought might conduce to the comfort of her suffering charge, I took leave of the grateful Clara, and hastened home, fatigued to death, but most supremely happy.

In a few weeks, Mr Wentworth had the satisfaction of restoring his interesting patient to a state of convalescence. She was not so beautiful as Clara, but much more companionable, possessing a mind stored with the most useful and varied information, great conversational powers, and such a deep and enduring sense of religion, that it was impossible to listen to her without becoming wiser and better, feeling forcibly as I gazed on her pale young face, truly Lord, 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise.'

I visited them daily, strictly forbidding Clara, on pain of my displeasure, to set a stitch; except for the adornment of her own pretty person, which seemed to be a labor of love, for never before had I seen such frilling and flouncing.

It is astonishing how affliction had subdued the buoyancy of her spirits, which now rose above the unnatural pressure, with an elasticity and joyousness truly enchanting; she was, in fact, a complete personification of youth and gladness. Some may admire the premature thoughtfulness which sorrow begets, but that can be only from a want of due reflection, for it is no more natural to think the sweet laughing face looks best when shaded by grief, than to consider the sun appears to most advantage when overshadowed by dark and sullen clouds! No, no, youth is the season for joy and mirthfulness, and age for reflection and care.

I confess, at the end of three months of daily and uninterrupted intercourse, in which my affection and admiration hourly increased for them both, I began to feel that their society was absolutely essential to my comfort and happiness, and am convinced, from what I saw of her disposition, that had I been selfish enough to have demanded such a sacrifice, the grateful Gertrude would willingly have become my wife, to repay the deep debt she felt she owed me;—but no; I wished to be a friend, a father to them both, and not make either pay so fearfully for the little good I had done. I was determined to accomplish the object now nearest my heart in a more satisfactory manner to my own conscience and the true happiness of the dear girls; I therefore took an early opportunity of entering into a full explanation of the peculiarly delicate and unprotected state of the fair orphans, with my discreet housekeeper, Mrs Williams, expatiating largely on their amiable qualities and gentleness of manner, but was most guarded in my commendations of their personal charms, beauty, in the eyes of females of a 'certain age,' being considered almost a crime; and I concluded by expressing a wish to have them immediately under her protection—I dared not say my own. She was gratified and flattered by the well-timed compliment, and graciously consented to receive the young ladies, 'poor things,' and do her best to make them comfortable and happy.

I piously believed her, for she was a thoroughly benevolent hearted woman, although strictly of the old school, that is she had not learned to defy all morality and decency, but thought it still necessary to sacrifice something to appearances. The moment, however, you convinced her of the purity of the motive by which you were actuated, her zeal