

Literature, &c.

From Random Recollections of a Soldier of Fortune, by Lieutenant Col. A. H. Maxwell, K. H.

THE UNKNOWN.

I know no greater luxury on earth, than a temporary retreat from the noise and hurry of the town. The mind, harassed by the cares of trade, or the difficulties of an arduous profession—the eye, wearied by the sameness of a crowded street—the ear dulled with ceaseless turmoil—all predispose the man who ‘steals from the world,’ to enjoy with exquisite sensations his brief season of relaxation.

To me, the denizen of an Inn of Court—the occupant of gloomy chambers—the ‘doomed one’ to a profession for which I have no fancy, this occasional retirement is delicious. To refresh the eye with field and forest—to rest the ear with rustic quietude—to lose care and thought for a season however short, have proved the sunniest periods of a life, fevered as mine has been, by the difficulties attendant on a profession so embarrassing and exhausting as the law.

Among the scenes I loved to visit, the little inn at Everton, has been a favorite retreat. The picturesque appearance of this secluded hamlet—its green hedge-rows and sparkling rivulet, all seemed to invite a wearied spirit like mine to seek and find there the repose that it panted for.

But there were charms other than those of rural solitude, which attracted me more warmly to The Woodman. Annette's smile welcomed me when I left the city—Annette's voice fell like music on my ear—her hand, I fancied, smoothed my pillow—her form fitted around me as I dreamed—and I, cold and reckless of adventitious charms as I was, thrilled with sensations hitherto unmet, was gazing on the unconscious beauty of this gentle and unsophisticated girl.

It was late in spring when after a long absence, I revisited The Woodman. The delighted smile and gentle reproach that welcomed me, proved that Annette was gratified at my return. I regretted that my sojourn was limited to a night—and when evening came, and I set out for my favourite haunt, I entered the village churchyard with feelings that required its soothing influence to compose. But what was the beauty of the inn to me? I had no time to waste on woman, for years of anxious and sustained exertion must elapse before I should be enabled to retire from the drudgery of my profession. 'Twere worse than madness to encourage dreams which never could be realized—and I determined to conquer my latent love, and fly from Annette and The Woodman.

The sun touched the verge of the horizon, and the yew trees flung their shadows over graves whose simple memorials told of the humblest of the villagers. At some distance from the rest, I observed one little mound, and no stone recorded who the being was whose ashes rested underneath. Doubtless it was the grave of a stranger, and I fell into the train of thought, which the approach of an old man and interesting child disturbed.

‘And why did they bury her there?’ said the youthful querist.

The old man's reply was inaudible. ‘And are people who die for love, placed thus apart from others?’ she continued.

The old man smiled. ‘The disease, my child, is infrequent; and few have been so unfortunate as the lovely being who sleeps under yon green turf.’

My curiosity was excited—and while the child turned aside to pull the wild flowers with which the graves were thickly sprinkled, I learned the melancholy story of her who occupied this solitary resting place.

She was young, beautiful, gifted, and born to fortune, but accident robbed her of that wealth, to which from infancy, she had believed herself the heiress. She bore the visitation patiently, and sought the humble occupation of a governess—and talents and accomplishments which had been cultivated for amusement, were exercised to obtain an honourable independence.

Unfortunately, a young officer was a relative of the family where Emily resided, and consequently a frequent visitor at the house. He saw the beautiful girl—he loved her—and he was beloved. Favoured by the circumstances of his intimacy, he pressed his suit with ardor, and when the regiment was unexpectedly ordered to the Con-

inent, that incident produced a full disclosure of Emily's attachment. Their vows were solemnly interchanged—and on the last agonizing evening before he sailed, Emily, yielding to his passionate request, granted him a midnight interview. Alas! that meeting proved to her a fatal one.

He went—four months passed rapidly away—Waterloo was fought and won, and amongst those who fell was Emily's lover.

Many a heart was agonized when the fatal death list reached England—but she, the lost one, had a double grief to mourn. The consequences of her hour of indiscretion would shortly become apparent, and shame and sorrow were too much to bear together. Madened by blighted love and inevitable exposure, in her frenzy the means of self destruction were procured, and Emily, the young and beautiful, the gifted being, perished miserably by her own hand.

‘They placed her here,’ said the old man, ‘and while yonder costly marble is raised above a mass of age and deformity, the green turf alone covers the mortal remains of that lovely and ill-starred girl.’

He wiped away a tear, took the child's hand, and bade me a courteous adieu. I staid for a short time beside the grave, and left the scene of death filled with pity for the beautiful victim of imprudent love.

Months passed, summer succeeded spring, and I began to feel my resolution and wished to see Annette once more. Annette was not to be easily forgotten. Hers was not the florid comeliness that distinguishes the vulgar beauty—every look and movement were feminine, and elegant, and nature had moulded her a gentle woman, although the sphere she occupied was humble. The witching smile that played about her mouth, the soft expression of eyes of darkest hazel, the silver voice, that excellent thing in woman, all haunted my imagination; and while prudence whispered me to avoid her, resolution failed, and on a fine June evening, I drove once more to The Woodman of Everton.

When Annette heard my voice, she came forward to welcome me.

‘Ah! Mr Mowbray—how did I offend you? You stole away without bidding me good bye.’

I held her hand in mine—I saw her eyes sparkle, the color flash upon her cheek, and muttered a confused apology.

‘Well, I am so happy to see you,’ she continued; ‘and it was but this morning, that I spoke of you to the captain.’

I started—a thrill of jealousy shot through my breast.

‘The Captain!—who is the Captain, Annette?’

‘Oh! you will so like him,’ said the blushing girl; ‘that is when you know him—for he appears cold and haughty at first, but he will not be so to you.’

‘To me, Annette! I have no ambition to obtain the acquaintance of a stranger; and believe me, I shall not unnecessarily expose myself to the *haukeur* of any man.’

‘Well, well—invalids are always irritable, and he is very, very ill. You must know him. There is something about him so noble and interesting when he chooses to be so, that none can be near him without liking him.’

The animated expression of her face while she spoke of the Unknown, made me miserable. I cursed ‘the captain’ in my heart, and determined that in coldness and repulsion I should be at least his equal.

The day passed, over my rival did not appear; and when I left The Woodman for my evening walk, he had not left his chamber. The church yard of course was visited—I stood beside the grave of the unhappy lady, and her melancholy story afforded me a theme for sad reflection.

It was evening when I reached ‘mine inn,’ and as I passed the parlor window a sight met my eye that brought the color to my cheek. Upon a sofa, a tall and noble looking man was extended, while Annette leaned over him, and with marked assiduity placed cushions for his head, and arranged his military cloak. I could not see his features, and his face was turned from me, but he held her hand in his, she seemed in no hurry to withdraw it.

I was tortured with rage and jealousy. Should I fly at once and leave Annette to my rival? No. She was but a woman, and why should she have power to make me wretched? I must—I would subdue my feelings—and absence should teach me to forget her. Pride urged me to be resolute—but still I felt a weak-

ness of the heart that told me it were better to avoid her, and I waited till she had left the room before I entered it.

The opening of the door caused the stranger to look up; he scarcely, however, noticed my entrance, and his eyes fell quickly on a paper he had been perusing. I sat down at the window—a quarter of an hour elapsed—and we did not exchange a word.

While this unsocial state of things continued, a third personage joined us; a forward, self sufficient, over dressed young man, who seemed to stand on excellent terms with himself. He stopped beside the stranger, and asked, in a drawing and affected voice, after ‘the last night's debate.’ The invalid slowly raised his eyes, bestowed a look of supercilious indifference on the inquirer, and without deigning to reply, resumed his investigation of the newspaper.

Again we were left together. Presently, Annette came in to ask what the captain would have for supper.

‘This is the gentleman I spoke of,’ she said in a whisper, directing her expressive eyes towards me.

Instantly, the stranger threw aside the paper—

‘Mr Mowbray,’ he said, ‘must pardon my inattention—I was not aware my pretty Annette's friend was in the room. That forward puppy chafed me. We, invalids are somewhat testy, and to be pestered by a popinjay would flurry a philosopher. Will you permit me to share your supper?’

I was astonished. The cold and withering look with which he repelled the advances of the citizen, had given place to an expression of singular urbanity. His voice was soft as woman's; his manner, bland and winning; I felt irresistibly impelled to meet his advances, and encourage an intimacy with a man, whom but five minutes since I had looked on with aversion.

Our *tete a tete* confirmed the feelings his first overtures had given rise to. The stranger's conversation was brilliant and intellectual. He had been much about the world, and in his wanderings he had found no barrenness. I looked upon his countenance—once it must have been strikingly handsome, but the face was faded and careworn, and its varied lines betrayed the workings of a bosom, where pride, and grief, and many a stronger passion, had for years careered. At times, however, the brow unbent, the eye flashed with intelligence a smile of exquisite sweetness played around the mouth, while the perfect intonation of the sweetest voice I ever listened to, rendered his conversation fascinating.

One thing struck me as being unaccountable. The Unknown was professedly an invalid, and yet he drank freely as if his health was perfect. As night advanced, a hectic flush overspread his cheeks hitherto so wan and colorless; and when I took his hand at parting, I found it burning in my grasp.

I staid two days longer at The Woodman. The stranger expressed his pleasure at my sojourn—and although he never rose till evening, we passed many hours together. With me he seemed to throw aside his coldness, as he supported on my arm we walked slowly through some of the rustic avenues which issued from the village.—These excursions were necessarily short. Notwithstanding his erect and easy carriage—probably a result of military habitude—his limbs could scarcely bear him through; and it was too evident that an unbroken spirit contended vainly with an exhausted constitution.

I had scarcely been a week in town before a note with the Everton post mark reached me. It was from the stranger—and contained a pressing request that I should dine with him on an early day. The billet bore no name, and was scribed with an initial. I required little inducement to visit The Woodman; and accordingly, the invitation was accepted.

Annette received me with her customary kindness, but when I named the stranger her eyes filled.

‘Ah! Mr Mowbray, the captain's dying.—Since you left Everton he has declined rapidly. I have often pressed him to call in a physician, but in vain! Hush! I hear his step upon the stairs, and you will no doubt perceive an alteration for the worse.’

While she was still speaking the door unclosed, and the stranger entered. Oh God!—how changed. The ravages of disease in one short week were frightful.

Dinner was served, but the stranger scarcely tasted it. The bottle passed rapidly, the desert was placed upon the table, and we were left to ourselves.

Filling a claret glass to the brim, ‘Come Mowbray,’ he said, ‘know'st thou this day?’

I replied ‘that I had no particular recollection of it.’

‘Dull slave of law!’ ‘has Waterloo faded from the calendar already!’ he exclaimed.

It was the anniversary of that battle, we drank to the memory of the brave, and warmed with the wine, the stranger's spirits became excited. He had been there, had been wounded, left upon the field, and returned in the list of the slain. He spoke with enthusiasm of that glorious fight, his description became more vivid, his anecdotes became more racy and interesting. The pale cheek flushed, the dim eye brightened, but the exertion was too great to be sustained; he soon became exhausted, and at last, obliged to own his feebleness, accepted my assistance to reach his chamber.

Business imperatively required my presence in London, and early next morning I left The Woodman. Four days passed, and from Annette I learned that the Unknown grew worse, and that the fatal crisis was approaching.

I had already determined to visit the Woodman on the following day, when a note from the stranger caused me to set off immediately. Like the former, this note was without subscription, and the few lines it contained were almost illegible. I compared the notes, and the altered state of the hand writing sufficiently attested the awful change which a few days had brought about.

I found him sitting in the parlour, where, as Annette told me, he had been occupied in burning papers. I stood beside him, and one look told me he had not many days to live.

My arrival however, seemed to give him unfeigned pleasure, and pressing my hand within his feverish grasp, he thanked me for attending so promptly to his letter. ‘Is the evening warm, Mowbray?’

I replied in the affirmative. ‘Then,’ said the stranger, with perfect calmness, ‘you and I will take our last walk together. I have been destroying papers of some moment, and I shall finish my task while dinner is preparing.’

He took a small package from his writing desk and unbound the blue ribbon which encased a number of letters, whose beautiful and delicate penmanship at once discovered them to be a female's. One by one he passed over their contents, and with an effort which seemed to require some determination, he flung them into the fire. ‘Tis the last relic but one,’ he murmured, ‘and that lies here,’ and he laid his hand upon his bosom. Just then dinner was served; he ate little, drank a glass or two of wine, and then rising from the table, requested me to accompany him.

There was one shaded avenue that had been his favorite walk—we passed it, however, and turned our steps towards the church yard. Entering through the wicket, we stopped beneath the huge yew tree which overspreads the gate.

‘I have been fortunate, my dear Mowbray,’ said the invalid, ‘in meeting with one so kind as you, to cheer the parting hours of my earthly pilgrimage. I am grateful—and as hitherto you have never asked a question touching my name or history, I would entreat it, as a last request, that you will never demand an explanation of my evening visit to this place. I will briefly state my wishes—and I feel confident that you will see them effected when I am at rest.’

He led me along the walk until we reached the extremity of the burying ground, and to my surprise stopped beside the grave of the beautiful suicide, whose face had so often excited my warmest sympathy.

‘Mowbray,’ he said, in a voice which betrayed the workings of an agonized spirit ‘will you recollect this spot? Lay me here—here—close to that solitary grave. Mark the place well, and promise that my last request shall be attended to.’ I gave him a solemn assurance that his wishes should be obeyed. He was fearfully agitated; his strength failed, and with considerable difficulty he was enabled to leave the church yard, and reach The Woodman.

He threw himself upon a sofa, and whether fatigue, or the place we had visited, affected him I know not, but his once fine face was clouded with an expression of the deepest sadness.—Once I observed a tear glisten on his cheek.

‘I must give in, Mowbray,’ he murmured feebly; ‘the machinery of this