

## Literature, &amp;c.

## TAKE ME HOME.

BY DR. REYNOLD COATES.

I was wandering in the streets of a populous city—thousands crowded the thronged thoroughfares—jarring and jostling along,—each intent on his own petty schemes. Here, a merchant rushed onward with a rapid step, for it wanted but five minutes of three o'clock! If clouds had overspread his countenance an hour before, they had given place to a determined expression, that seemed to say, 'safe till to-morrow, anyhow.' There a belle flaunted in costly attire, with a curl on her lip, and pride in her tread that spoke, more plainly than words 'conquest is my right! for my beauty and wealth are alike undisputed, I have but to smile and win.'

At one moment my eye was attracted by a young couple in the spring-tide of their promise, associated by that magic feeling which comes over us but once in a lifetime. At the next, it rested on a pair of unfortunates with locked arms but gloomy brows and half-averted faces, convinced by twenty years of bitter experience, that it is wise to preserve appearances, even when doing penance for that most common, but most fatal indiscretion of youth—an ill-assorted marriage!

A little girl, upon the door-step of an elegant mansion, stood gazing upon the passing crowd and the unbroken line of splendid equipages hurrying by, glancing her eye occasionally upward at the tall trees that shielded her from the sunshine, or the bright blue sky and fleecy vapor which seemed to rest upon their summits. The breezes of May waved the translucent ringlets athwart her snowy shoulders, while the leaves rustled and danced mirthfully in the wind, and a little bird on a neighboring bough, poured out its joyous song. The child threw back its head and laughed long and merrily: yet there was nothing in view to awaken laughter.

Guarded, and clad,—and nourished, and incognisant of care,—the bounding pulse of youth felt keenly in every fibre,—existence itself, with her, became delight, and she laughed in the fulness of irrepressible joy—that the skies were bright and the leaves were green.—On the pavement beside her, a barefoot and ragged boy leaned for support against a post. Famine and fatigue were legibly stamped upon his sunken cheek and attenuated limbs. The sound of merriment awakened him, and he turned his dull eye in wonder upon the beautiful object before him.—But he comprehended it not.—joy was to him a stranger.

These, and a hundred other episodes in the selfish history common life claimed, in turn, my attention:—and each might have furnished subject matter for a month of thought or a volume of moral deduction. But there was one group so peculiarly striking that it still dwells upon my memory with more than usual vividness of coloring.

In the most luxurious portion of the city, where palaces of marble and granite rose on every hand, and the very redolent of the insence of exotic flowers, a coach, dusty with travel, suddenly drew up before one of the most conspicuous residences. The liveried footman instantly threw open the door, and a delicate young girl, with a highly intellectual, but care worn and sorrowful expression of countenance, began to descend the steps. But, before she could reach the pavement a masculine arm was projected from the vehicle to arrest her progress, and a voice, tremulous with age and grief, exclaimed, 'No! no! not here! not here!—Why will you not take me home!—I must go home!—I am old and sick!—do take me home at once!'

The attempt to draw the young lady back within the coach endangered her foothold, and courtesy obliged me to spring to her assistance, lest she should fall beneath the wheels. Adroitly lifting her from the carriage while the footman hastened to ring the bell, I obtained a view of all the parties interested in this little incident.

The half-fainting girl, still leaning upon my arm, might have numbered about fourteen summers, and within the coach were two other individuals, in both of whom the same family traits were visible. One of these, a woman about thirty-five years of age, was evidently the mother. She was still beautiful, though strong traces of habitual thought and mental suffering were perceptible upon her brow. The other was a man of noble figure, probably

advanced to seventy years, with locks of snowy whiteness, but dressed with a degree of richness and precision, not usually observed among the old. It was evident that he had been familiar with the world—that wealth and luxury were no novelties to him. The forms of society had been his study, if not the business of his life. Yet, what a satire upon the vulgar misconceptions of the means of happiness was the aspect of that face! The broad brow was furrowed with deep lines of mental distress. The boldly chiselled nose was thinned, rather by muscular contraction than by age. The model of the lip presented the curve of pride and habitual authority, contrasting most painfully with the tremor of helpless suspicion and childish anxiety.

'Why will you not take me home?' he exclaimed again,—and his eye wandered restlessly from side to side, peering through the door and windows of the coach, as if in search of some object once familiar,—with an expression of hopeless distress that it was difficult even to witness with fortitude.

To one familiar with large hospitals, the scene was clearly intelligible. Insanity from disappointed hope was mingled with the fatuity of premature old age.

Propriety would have dictated my immediate retreat, after the necessary care of the ladies in alighting; but perceiving that the united persuasions of mother and daughter were likely to fail in inducing the grandfather to quit the coach without too strongly inviting public attention towards a private misfortune, I felt bound to inquire, 'May I not save you, madam! from some embarrassment by begging you to enter the house? I will engage myself to place your father under the protection of your roof, in a very few minutes, and without annoyance.' Nothing insures such instantaneous confidence with the gentler sex as self-dependence in a man, and grave, though courteous authority of manner. The offer was accepted with a glance of mute thankfulness, and handing the ladies to the door, I returned to the carriage.

'Come, my dear sir,' I said to the elderly gentleman, 'allow me the pleasure of assisting you to alight! your horses are a little restive.'

'No, sir!' he replied; 'you are in league with them!—You lead me from place to place, and every where you tell me I am at home!—Oh! I shall never find it!—I wish to repose in my own house, and my own garden!—my mother's house!—and you bring me here and tell me this is my house!—Do you think I have grown so weak and imbecile as not to know the chamber where I was born?—the garden where I played when a child?—No.—I will not go in.—They are kind to me here, but I am not at home.—Do, take me home.—You seem to think that I cannot tell the difference between the great palace, with its rich carpets and its marble columns, and our own little cottage, with its arbor of grape vines and wild creepers, where my mother used to nurse me to sleep in the old carved rocking chair.—Oh, take me home.'

Long habituated to the management of lunatics, I had learned to guide the tangled reins of a disordered mind, and found but little difficulty in persuading the old man to rest awhile in the parlor on the plea of examining whether his granddaughter, to whom he was much attached, had not received some injury by stumbling in her descent from the coach. Seating him upon the ottoman, it was easy, by the same innocent deception to withdraw to another apartment in company with the ladies: and there, after tendering any further services which their affliction might render desirable, I heard with deep attention, the history of their woes.

Mr. A\*\*\*, the old gentleman, was as I had inferred, the father of the elder and the grandchild of the younger lady. At an early age he came into hereditary possession of a handsome capital, and a range of ample stores near the centre of the commercial mart of—

His mother, who was esteemed rich in those early times (soon after the revolutionary war) retained the family homestead in addition to her dower; and, in this venerable mansion, distant about a mile from the borders of the then small, but flourishing city, her son continued to reside; for he preferred the society of his remaining parent, and the quietude of rural life in the intervals of business to the gayer scenes and more luxurious habits of the town. Thither, he soon conveyed a young and beautiful wife: and there his happiest years were spent in the midst of a family circle bonded together by ties of the warmest affection.

—Even their dead were gathered around them:—for the white monuments of their departed friends peered over the stone wall of the family grave yard, from the grove of funeral pines behind the garden.

But this peaceful life of domestic enjoyment was not destined to continue. Within a few years subsequent to his marriage, there occurred one of those sudden revolutions in trade which periodically sweep, with the force of a deluge, over the commercial interests of our country.—Mr A— was ruined.—He became dependent upon the resources of his parent for the support of his wife; but pride would not permit him to grant the urgent request of his mother that he would share that support himself; and he fled his native country for a time, to woo the breeze of Fortune under other stars.

After two long years of toil and danger among the furs of the north-west, the hides of California, the *biche-le-mer* and birds-nests of the Eastern Archipelagoes, he arrived at the great entrepot of the Celestial Empire with a cargo ensuring him an ample competence, just in time to receive intelligence of the death of his wife, leaving to his charge an only child.—She had been the star of his destiny.—That star was set, and darkness enshrouded his soul.

Recovering from this terrible shock, he shunned the very idea of returning to the scene of his former happiness. She for whom he had braved the deep, —had toiled—had grappled with the sun of the tropics,—the ice of the pole,—had left him desolate!—the infant, whom no parent welcomed to this world of trial was a stranger to him!—and the only remaining link which bound him to his country was his affection for an aged mother.

But who is not aware that the noon of manhood—its mid-day strife and bustle—are unfavorable to the glow of filial affection? Maternal love,—the deepest,—the purest—the least selfish of human emotions!—knows no ebb—no diminution on this side—the grave. Time, which may sap or shatter every other sympathy, adds strength to this at every revolution of its fatal glass.

Not so the attachment of the offspring. Like a delicate flower which sheds its fragrance freely on the morning or the evening air, but denies all sweetness to the bold glance of noon, this feeling flourishes only at the commencement and the close of our career. When, at length in the decline of our energies, both mind and body verge once towards the feebleness of infancy, how painfully the affections of earlier years flow back upon us. Then would we gladly repose our aching temples—aching with the memory of many an unkind word or action—upon the bosom from which we first drew sustenance! and we yearn after a mother's love with a longing that will not be repressed.

It is not surprising that Mr A—, thus suddenly cut off by death from one whose welfare had been the chief purpose of his life, should have buried his gloom in the cares of business. Such is the usual resource of those who bound their vision, as, alas! too many are prone to do, within the narrow limits of this sublunary theatre of action. For thirty years he pursued the search of wealth beneath the burning skies of India, with singleness of purpose and untiring zeal.

He remitted large sums from time to time, for the convenience of a mother to whom he was ever dutiful, and a daughter that he had never seen; but his letters were cold and formal. His child was married, he congratulated her. A grand-child was born to him, he sent her his blessing. His daughter became a widow,—he consoled with her upon her loss. But nothing could arouse him from his bootless labour for superfluous gold.

At length, as age approached, he felt wearied with his monotonous existence. With the decline of his bodily powers came the desire for rest:—with the weakening of his mental energies, the longing for sympathy grew stronger and stronger. He did not wish to die alone. Dreams of his juvenile days came over him, and he sighed for the quietude of the old family mansion, and the warm welcome of his mother on his return from the cares of business. When the sudden twilight of the tropics sunk abruptly into night, he dreamed of the lingering glories of an American evening. When he heard the cry of the brazen kite, the harsh call of the adjutant crane, and the chattering of a thousand obscene birds retiring to their roosts, gorged with their horrible repast on the corpses that pollute the Ganges, he longed for the wild notes of

the whip-poor-will, the rushing sound of the night hawk, and the melancholy hooting of the owl, that render night musical in the bright green woods of his native land.

He knew that the growing city had swept far beyond the retreat of his earlier days, that many magnificent residences had risen over the site of his boyish playgrounds, and that even the relics of his dead had been removed from their original resting place, to make room for the house of the stranger. He had permitted, he had even advised these changes, but he could not realize them. The old mansion with its broad elms, the garden, and the pine grove with the monuments beneath its shade, were ever present to his mind, and his letters were painfully charged with allusions to scenes and persons whose existence was blotted from the page of history.

With every year, those feelings became more and more intense, until incipient childishness made its appearance, and he became affected with a confirmed nostalgia. At length he closed his concerns, remitted the unappropriated balance of his earnings, and launched himself once more upon the ocean, on his homeward route.

As he drew near his native shore, memory returned more and more vividly the scenes of other days, until his failing intellect began to confuse the present with the past, and at times, he dreamed of once more meeting the little circle of the loved and cherished, in the same old wainscotted parlor, around the same wide, hospitable antique fire-place where he slept with head reclined upon his mother's knee when the presence of company obtained him the privilege of sitting up an hour beyond his usual bedtime.

The vessel neared the port. The pilot ever the first to welcome the wanderer home, ascended the deck and distributed the 'papers' of the previous day. With one of these, Mr A— hastily retired to the cabin. Not even the blue hills of his native land, now full in sight, could wean him from the fatal record. His eye glanced rapidly over the leading article, but the struggle of contending candidates had no charm for him. He furtively regarded the items of foreign news:—was shocked at the long record of crimes and casualties made piquant and racy with details and comments which the purer manners of his early years would not have tolerated; and, for the first time in his life, he turned from the price current in disgust, but why did he start, turn pale, and tremble when his eye rested upon the ominous black lines that cross the final column of the second page? The identical paper is still preserved, and I extract the notice!—

Died, suddenly, of apoplexy, on the 29th inst., in the 96th year of her age, Mrs C—A—, the venerable relict of the late Hon. W—A—, and mother of Mr. H—A—, the distinguished American merchant at—

The cup was full! There breathed not in the land of his birth one kindred being to unite him with the past!—His daughter!—she was a stranger. How should he recognise her in the crowd!—The mind, already weakened, was crushed!—The cracked vase was shivered!

The moment the anchor dropped, he leaped into a boat, and hurried on shore. Calling the nearest coach he ordered it in haste and stercorally, 'To—'s lane, half a mile from the turn pike gate of the—road!'

The astonished driver stared as he replied, 'There's no such lane now, sir! I heard of it when I was a boy, but it's all built up long ago, and I never knew even where it was.'

'Then drive me to my mother's,' cried Mr. A—, in a voice almost of fury; and holding forth the paper, which had never left his hand, he pointed to the notice. An old man, standing by, struck by the haggard and maniacal look, perused the article and simply said, 'Drive to the marble building, No. 20—Place.'

The grieving survivors of the family of Mrs. A— were sitting silently in the darkened parlor, on the morning after the funeral, when a loud appeal at the bell startled the whole household—so ill did it accord with the silence of grief brooding over all who had lived under the mild influence of the departed! A female attendant hurried to the door, and was instantly thrust to the wall by one who rushed furiously past her, crying aloud and wildly, 'Where is my wife!—my mother?' Mr. A— actually sprang into the presence