

Literature, &c.

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THE WIDOW'S CHILD.

A TALE OF THRILLING INTEREST.

IN one of the great manufacturing cities of our country, a firm does business by the name of the Westwater Spinning Company. This name is derived from a beautiful stream more than twenty miles distant, on the banks of which stands a very extensive factory. About two thousand persons depend upon this factory for their bread, and as its site has been selected with a view to water-power for machinery, it and the hamlet attached, are most picturesquely placed, and far from other towns or villages of any magnitude. The inhabitants of Westwater form a class by themselves,—disliked by the country people, and not over fond of them in return, and are divided into lesser sets, according to the nature of their labor, and the parts of the buildings in which they are employed.

The benevolent proprietors of the works have taken every measure to secure the well-being of their workpeople. Their houses are comfortable, are kept in constant repair, and have each a small garden attached; while a couple of large fields have been thrown together into a park for their recreation. On this, of a summer evening, after work is done, you may see a hundred or so of the male population merrily engaged at cricket or football, sports, for excellence of which they are famous, while among the trees, at the sides of the angles, bands of young girls lie chatting and laughing upon the grass, or run about chasing each other in frolic. Others again walk about, either in the park or on the banks of the clear Westwater, along which, winding and very beautiful foot-paths extend for miles. But while their bodily health has been thus attended to, their mental profit has not been forgotten. A church and a library, which is also a reading-room, form part of the buildings, and from the opened windows of an edifice, apart from the rest, you may hear issuing a hum of little voices, telling that the work of instruction is busily going on. The greatest man in the place is, of course, the manager, whose large white house you see just before you enter the little town. This situation was held for many years by my father,—and here I was born, and received the first rudiments of my education.

When I attended the school—decidedly the prettiest little lass in it was a small creature called Jane Granton, pronounced in the dialect of the place Jeeny, or more often Cheeny. She was a yellow haired, rosy-cheeked little thing, exceedingly healthy, good-humored and merry, and was the only child of a widow who kept a kind of small green-grocery shop in the village. This widow was a very good-looking woman,—indeed, it was a common saying to the little girl from the grown up people that, pretty as she was, she would never be like her mother. She had the reputation of being a very religious person, and was the only one in the place that, from scruples of conscience, refused to attend the services of the church. Indeed, her whole conduct appeared dashed with a strong and very remarkable tincture of superstitious fanaticism; though under what particular sect or denomination it might be classed, I have not been able to determine. This peculiarity, as well as her clean tidy habits, sobriety of demeanor, good looks, and obstinate persistence in the state of widowhood, attracted to her much respect, and to her little child, the attention and kindness of every one in the place. Among the boys at the school, again, little Cheeny was a regular toast: many bloody battles were fought and won, upon various pretences and provocations, all of which, however, were privately known to every one, to be merely in her honor and glory. For a long while I believed myself to be the prime favorite; but whether this was owing to my own particular personal attractions, or to the superior dress and equipment of the manager's boy, I am not prepared to say. But the time came round when I should leave the factory and its beautiful environs, to be transported to a large boarding school, where the place of the widow's child in my mind was speedily usurped by other charmers. From that school I was removed, four years after, and apprenticed to a medical gentleman for three years more. Upon the completion of my time, I returned, a grown and serious young man, for a month or two's residence with my father; and if I was changed

myself, I certainly found Cheeny much more so.

She was now about seventeen years of age, and just passing from the slender reedlike grace of girlhood, to the full voluptuous development of face and form, of eye and gait, of smile and attitude, characteristic of perfect and beautiful woman. I saw her walking lightly along from work, among a group of other girls, as I was riding into the town, and was struck in a moment by her exceeding beauty; and not till I saw her turn into the little shop, did the thought enter my mind that to this perfection could have sprung my former pretty schoolmate, little Cheeny Granton. I dismounted and entered just behind her, and addressing the widow, whose staid, yet comely and cheerful countenance now bore palpable traces of the lapse of time, called myself to her recollection, and we entered into conversation of all the occurrences that had taken place since I left. I may mention, to account for my long absence from Westwater, that just before I was sent to school, my father, who was a widower, had entered into a second marriage with the daughter of Mr H——, one of the proprietors, a connexion which ultimately procured for him a partnership, though it was the cause of a very great change in my habits and prospects. While I was talking with her mother, Jane stood by with a sort of quiet unconcerned look. I addressed her, and she answered me frankly, and though she spoke in kindness and good humour, I at once saw that our former liking, if it had ever existed, was not likely to be renewed. I talked with her for a little, and then leaving the place, rode on to the works. Yet, though my love for her and for many others had all finally merged into one permanent and sensible attachment, and though to endeavour to excite affection in her now would be not only folly, but crime, I could not, for many days, altogether dismiss her from my thoughts.

As I walked my horse through the village, my fancy called up her image before me.—Her stature might have been five feet and a half, or less,—for it is a difficult matter to judge of a woman's height—and the symmetry of her figure was matchless. It was one of those so rarely met with, exactly following the old Grecian models of classic female beauty. The deeply hollowed back, the swelling chest and bosom, and high round neck,—the long lower limb, with its full upper development, and short, much arched foot, all combined to make it perfect. Her waist was not slender—the word light would apply to it rather, for here no means of unnatural compression had ever been practiced, and it looked free and unconstrained as she stepped along, having a sort of indistinct undulatory motion, like a swan's neck, graceful exceedingly. Her face was very beautiful, the nose had just a trace of the Roman curve, while the small plump mouth looked redder than the richest tint linner ever selected, where-withal to touch the lip of his ideal. Her eyes were of a deep dark, almost indigo blue, large and rolling, at times most spirited in their glances, at other times softened into an expression of such melting sweetness, that you could not look upon them without feeling an involuntary sigh stealing from your bosom, just as would be called up by a strain of music familiar to your childhood. Her hair was of a bright yellow, curling naturally, and glistening with a lustre almost faintly metallic, like tarnished gold wire. Add to these a skin, not snow-white, certainly, but of a clear living white, clouded by a flush of health on either round cheek,—a high, spotless forehead, small thin ear, pierced by a slender ring of gold,—and a hand, whose beauty not the labor of a factory could deform—and if you have any thing of an active fancy, you may form in your mind a likeness of fair Cheeny Granton.

But it was not in personal excellence alone she stood out among her mates. She was a very clever girl, and her page on the library roll book, bore testimony to the extent and nature of her reading. An ardent love for the poetry of Byron, Burns, and Moore, was strangely enough its distinguishing characteristic, and the continued perusal of this description of writing, must have had no little effect in bringing about the events of this narrative. Her moral character was unexceptionable, her disposition amiable, though about her lip there lurked the trace of a haughty smile, and about her voice a slight tone of condescension which, however, those who were habituated to her, did not perceive. It was possible, too, occasionally to detect in her mind evidences of a deep, all-potent enthusiasm, similar to that of her mother, with an engrossing affection, she followed

her tenets with what seemed respectful filial acquiescence, not faith. Such a being as this could hardly exist in any place, without exciting around her the passions of admiration, love, envy and hatred, in their most violent forms. She was a marked girl about Westwater.—Some were extravagantly fond and proud of her, others hated her bitterly, taking every opportunity of evincing this feeling, both by word and deed. She thought herself a lady, they said, and would take the shortest way to become one. But all these insinuations Jane took with a quiet smile, as things that were to be expected.

Lovers she had in abundance; indeed every young man in the place, had some pretensions to this character. For some of them she appeared to entertain very friendly feelings, though when their attentions became more urgent, she could not conceal her annoyance. There was one, however, evidently more favored than the rest. This was a young man of the name of Williams, who, for two years or more had held the situation of teacher at Westwater. He was a pale, studious, anxious looking young person, of some talent.—He had been connected in an inferior way with a newspaper office, in the large city I at first alluded to, and from that situation had been transferred to the one he held. But his crowning advantage was, that he professed ardently, and I believe sincerely, the same views of religion as Mrs Granton, and they used to spend hours together of evenings, in performance of their peculiar rites of worship. With her he was all in all, and her daughter certainly had a very great regard for him.—But still I thought I could see that this regard was not what I myself would have been content with in similar circumstances. I was particularly struck with this thought a few days after my arrival. It was a beautiful evening in the summer, and I was taking a solitary walk up the bank of the stream to a place called the grove, about a mile or more above the factory, where there was a large reservoir, with an extensive system of locks and sluices. From its lonely and romantic character, this had always been my favorite walk, and here I was met by the so called lovers. They were moving along slowly side by side, he walked quite close to her, his eyes fixed upon her face, with an appearance of complete devotion, while she listened to his address with a look as if it required an effort to keep her attention to it. As I passed I remarked upon the beauty of the evening. She answered me quietly and civilly; he said nothing but blushed, and appeared much embarrassed and confused. I often met them again, and always noticed in them the same demeanor.

But a change had come over the course of events at Westwater. My father having become a partner in the firm, removed to the city, there to take charge of the counting-house business, and another manager came to reside at the factory.

His name was Edward Southern, and as he occupies a prominent place in my story I will stay to describe him. Whose child he was no one knew. He had been brought up by a person formerly a gentleman's servant, and who received from some quarter unknown a regular pay for his maintenance. By this man, who kept a cigar shop in London, he was tolerably educated, till about sixteen years of age. At this period, having been by chance present at an introductory lecture to a popular course of natural philosophy, the bent of his genius at once evinced itself, and he became devotedly fond of mechanical science. He studied this with so much success, that next season he obtained the situation of assistant to the lecturer, with a small salary, and the use of an apparatus room and workshop. Here he made striking progress; his peculiar genius rapidly unfolded itself, and in a year or two he astonished the lecturer by showing him an article he had written in one of the leading scientific journals. One step leads to another. He shortly after commenced, in an infidel publication, a series of papers, the tendency of which was to run down everything, in government or religion, usually held established or sacred, and which were remarkable for their original character. For these, the extensive sale of the pestiferous periodical afforded him a liberal remuneration.

Another short while passed and he obtained the situation of lecturer on mechanics and chemistry on the retirement of his former teacher. Another year saw issue from the press a work of his on a popular scientific subject, which speedily ran through two or three editions. His income, of which he was himself the sole creator, now amounted to several

hundred pounds a year, while his name was in the mouth of every one interested in popular science, especially as connected with manufactures. To this person Messrs H—— H—— and Co. offered the situation of overseer of their works, with the prospect of a junior partnership. He was indeed a most singular individual; tall, and eminently handsome in person, with fine features, dark curling hair, and whiskers, and eyes which, in their deep blackness, seemed to consist altogether of pupil. His manners again, were most insinuating, though at times rendered all but offensive, by an overweening pride of his own talent and success, which occasionally broke forth in his conversation, and a sneer constantly ready for every opinion differing from his own, and especially for every symptom in others of religious or moral feeling.

The propriety of placing such a person as this over a factory employing several hundred young females may be questioned: but the owners only knew him as a scientific character, the inventor of several valuable improvements in spinning and weaving. But the result of his being placed in such a situation may be guessed by the reader, when I add to the above hints of his character that he was fond of styling himself by the phrase 'a refined voluptuary,' and was utterly devoid of all principle, believing and stating man's sole happiness to consist in the gratification of appetite. In further aid and address he was possessed of a ready tongue, a talent for delicate flattery, a decidedly good taste, a ready knack of turning his hand to anything, and a consummate knowledge of the world.

Upon his arrival at his new charge, his first proceeding was to introduce an entirely new system of discipline among the people, which I must confess, proved to be considerably to the advantage of his employers. In personally setting this in operation, his eye lighted upon the widow's daughter at work in the silk weaving department of the factory. I was with him.

The moment he saw her, he stood struck, bending upon her a gaze, before which the red blush flew to her face, while she appeared at the same time unable to turn her eyes from his. A moment or two this lasted, when he abruptly passed on. He had been talking to me with great volubility a moment before, but he now walked silently on, and completed the survey.

Their next encounter was in the walk up the stream I have before mentioned. Here he met her with Williams. He immediately addressed her, while Williams knowing his place, dropped a little behind.

Poor fellow! at once he saw his fond air castle of love and hope dashed in fragments to the ground, and he walked behind them, watching his new rival, whispering and exerting upon her all his many powers of fascination—his blood boiling with jealousy, hatred and rage. For more than an hour, Southern continued to walk slowly by her side, when slowly turning round, and observing Williams, he calmly ordered him to go in some other direction. It was the manager—he had but to obey, and turning, he moved swiftly away in the direction of the grove. I was there myself at the time, enjoying the beautiful evening, when I saw him come hurriedly up. His whole frame appeared actually writhing under the influence of his passion, and he passed without observing me, muttering to himself as he went by a roundabout path homeward to the village.—He went directly to her mother's house to await her return. She came in shortly after him, but seemed absent and thoughtful, and returning indistinct replies to his questions, retired to her apartment. He communicated to her mother what had occurred, and she, though she had perfect confidence in the sense and virtue of her daughter, was immediately struck with apprehensions of evil little less than his. They sat for some hours that night in earnest conversation, and before they separated knelt together in prayer, that that Power would interpose, which alone could prevent the calamity they dreaded.—Next day Southern's attention to Jane while at work, attracted the notice of the other girls, and she had to listen to their bantering and ironical congratulations upon her good fortune.

An evening or two after, Williams, who began to hope his fears had been groundless, ventured to ask her to accompany him in a walk. She did not first appear inclined, but on hearing that it was to be up the Westwater, immediately complied. That very evening the same scene was repeated. Southern met them, and at once bidding him go about his business, walked away with