

Literature, &c.

The Annuals for 1845.

From the Forget-me-Not.

CHANGED, BUT THE SAME.

GILBERT RAMSAY WAS BROUGHT UP ON THE easy bounty of a relative. He was the son of a younger son, who, having made an imprudent marriage, had been pushed into an ensigncy, merely to get him out of the way of disgracing his connections by his presence, and had been much more effectually got out of the way by being got out of the world—India being prescribed for him, of which receipt he died; whilst his widow, woman-like, finding in this world, nothing to supply his loss, followed him to another, leaving her boy to as much grief as his little heart could manage to hold. Now, albeit those who know this world the best love it the least, yet are there a few tolerable people in it, who do kind things without an idea of making a merit of them, just because of a way they have. In this way, a country cousin, who belonged to the squirearchy, who happened to have about a dozen chubby, flaxen-headed, red and white pica-ninnias, and who happened not to have any nerves, thinking that a few more or less were of very little consequence, and that another would make good count to his dozen, just threw little Gilbert into his riotous nursery, and then quite forgot that he did not belong to him. And thus he had grown up as happily as possible, quite unaware of the fact that he ought to be miserable, until his nineteenth birthday, the latter portion of his life having been very agreeably enlivened by love-making and Susannah Abercrombie.

Now came the wedding. A chaise and four dashed up one day to the hall door, and its occupant asked for the Squire. Ceremony was out of fashion in that particular dwelling, if it had ever been in; and, though there might be grooms of the stables, there were no grooms of the chambers. The squire stepped out, and the stranger stepped in.

The Squire led the way into an old, oak-panelled chamber, hung round with insignia of the chase. He was a burly, bluff, broad-shouldered, bronze-coloured man; and, as he confronted the stranger, he looked like a colossal impersonation of strength, a native specimen of our island whom it might not be safe to trifle with, a combination of bone, sinew, and muscle, that showed him a true son of John Bull. He looked, too, as if there might be a danger of his putting out his foot, and crushing the stranger under it, or of extending his hand and squeezing him to death between his finger and thumb. And yet, slight and fragile as the stranger was, there was something in his eye and aspect that might well even a giant from taking liberties with him. He had a cold, glittering eye, and a lip that curled half in scorn and half in sadness. Truly, as they thus stood surveying each other, the one seemed all mind, the other all matter.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said the stranger.

The Squire nodded; he was never very prodigal of words.

"My name is Ramsay."

A thunder-cloud hung over the Squire's brow.

"You have a young relative of mine under your protection?"

The thunder-cloud grew blacker.

"You have extended to him your hospitality and kindness for many years?"

"Nobody else did," said the Squire gruffly.

"It is time they should," said the stranger;

"I am come to claim him, and relieve you of the trouble."

"Shan't have him!" said the Squire, ferociously.

"I presume, from that expression, that you have some regard for the boy?"

"I hate professions."

"Well then, I must infer it from your liberal conduct?"

"'Twasn't liberal. He had a right to be here; was not I his mother's cousin, only once removed?"

"And I am his father's brother." "More shame for you!"

The more fierce grew the Squire's tones, the more bland became the stranger's accents.

"You have performed yours, may not my turn of duty have arrived? Besides, if you love the boy, you will consider his advantage."

"Don't understand circumnavigation."

"I will explain to you. If I have an object near my heart, it is for the worthy preservation of the honorable name of our family—a name old, unsullied, and untarnished. A few years ago I was the father of five brave boys—now, I am childless."

Though there was something, unnaturally calm and cold in the stranger's manner, yet did a little twitching spasm pass over the Squire's face.

"If you have ever lost a child you can enter into my feelings."

"I never did," said the Squire. He entered into them without.

"And the number of your family?"

"Thirteen, with Gilbert."

"You will spare Cecil to me—to his father's family—and the more readily if you love him, since it will be so greatly for his own advantage. It is my purpose to give the highest finish to his education, and to make him my heir."

The heart and the head of the worthy Squire appeared to be strangely puzzled; he had an idea of treachery in them—and something like going over to the enemy.

"He shall choose for himself. Halloo, you there! send Gilbert Ramsay hither!"

Gilbert Ramsay came with a flushed brow, but whether it was from riding his favorite horse, or making love to Susannah Abercrombie, we wist not.

The stranger's eye glittered, and his lips quivered, as he gazed upon the youth.

"A boy to be proud of!" said the stranger.

"A boy to love," said the Squire.

"You are a Ramsay," said the stranger to Gilbert. "You are a Ramsay, and I am another. I am the present representative of your father's house; you are its future one. I have come to restore you to your just position. Boy, it is an enviable one."

Gilbert looked first towards one and then towards the other for an explanation.

"He will tell thee all," said the Squire, "and hearken, Gilbert; I have said that thou should'st be left to thine own free choice. And thou wilt go, well; an thou wilt say, better. This is thy home, and we shall all grieve to lose thee."

The Squire spoke with a husky voice, and left the room with the air of a man who is obliged to submit to be cheated.

And then the stranger and Gilbert sat down side by side in that old, oak-panelled chamber, and the uncle talked to the nephew in such a strain all unlike anything that he had ever heard before. The polished accents and refined sentiments fell on Gilbert's ear like strains of music. His uncle's attenuated frame seemed but the lamp through which his mind shone out. He spoke to him of the ancestral honor of their ancient house, and told him that he would soon be called upon to take his place as its representative. He bade him make good speed to supply the deficiencies of his education; and then he talked of travel, and Gilbert's heart bounded. He spoke of foreign courts, and Gilbert grew enthusiastic. Yes, they would go together; they would see fascinating Paris and classic Rome; they would breathe the air of Athens, and it might be, look on the glittering minarets of Constantinople. New scenes might wipe away the remembrance of the old, and soothe his own sorrows, while with Gilbert it would not only prove a new page in his life, but inspire him with a loftier mind, and act as the regenerator of his obscure faculties.

Gilbert clapped his hands in ecstasy. "Paris, Rome, Athens, Constantinople! Shall I see them all, all?"

"Aye, all, and more my boy," replied the uncle.

Gilbert's dark eye flashed, and his sunny cheek glowed with delight. But suddenly "a change came o'er the spirit of his dream;" a not unmusical though somewhat boisterous laugh was heard without, and at the sound the youth lost all his animation.

"Susannah! I cannot leave Susannah!"

"And who is Susannah?"

"The most beautiful, the dearest, best—oh, I could not leave Susannah to be made a king!"

"What boyish folly is this?"

"You have not seen her—you do not know her!"

"No; but I suppose her to be as silly a girl as you are a boy?"

"I love her, and will never leave her!"

This was said with an air of determination. Mr Ramsay knew something of the world, and something of the human heart. He knew that opposition frequently nurtures and cherishes a purpose which, without it, might die a natural death. He dropped the subject.

Mr Ramsay remained a couple of days at the old Hall. He spent the time in experimenting on his nephew's character, in stimulating his desires, in exciting his ambition. The sort of cool contempt with which Mr Ramsay seemed to regard his passion for Susannah was infinitely provoking. Had he opposed it with violence, young Gilbert felt that there might be manliness and dignity in supporting it, while now he knew himself to be treated like a mere silly boy.

"Gilbert, I go to-morrow," said Mr Ramsay.

"Alone, sir?" asked Gilbert, with an air of disappointment.

"As you will. I shall be happy to have you with me, if you can arrange"—and Mr Ramsay yawned—"your love affair."

"Am I a child?" exclaimed Gilbert, indignantly.

"I don't know, indeed," replied Mr Ramsay, languidly; "you know best whether you behave like one. I have no wish even to offer an opinion; but, if you were to consult even yourself or any one else, I should suppose that it would not be long before you arrived at a solution of the question. You are offered the tour of Europe, introduction into all the first classes of society, the means of improving your exceedingly defective education, a certain position in life, and the future prospect of being made the head of your father's family; but you think it better to stay in a stagnant country village, enveloped in the fogs of ignorance, picking cowslips and primroses, to heap in a girl's apron. There, don't look so cross, Gilbert. I am not going to fatigue myself with contesting the point. You have nothing to do but please yourself."

"Cowslips in a girl's apron!"

"Yes; I fancied that I met you and Susannah together this morning, and she certainly had a bundle of weeds in her apron; possibly I poetised them when I called them primroses and cowslips."

"And you speak thus unworthily of my Susannah!"

"Oh, not at all unworthily. I would not utter an injurious word. On the contrary, I think her a very comely, buxom, good tempered country girl. To be sure she does laugh rather too loud, and eat too immoderate a quantity of bread and butter; but these things

are the consequence of rude health and vulgar education."

Confusion and indignation choked Gilbert's utterance.

A mingling of triumph, contempt, and pity, passed across the heart of Mr Ramsay.

"May I go with you, and return to keep my engagement with Susannah?"

There was another pause between them.

"That is not what I had intended," said Mr Ramsay, gently. "Nevertheless, I wish to win your affections, Gilbert. On these conditions you go with me, to return when you are one and twenty, and to marry Susannah Abercrombie, if you then continue to wish it."

"A thousand thanks, dear uncle! If I continue to wish it! Nothing in this world can change my heart. I am satisfied."

"And so am I," said Mr Ramsay to himself; "six months will not have passed away before you will be weaned from every thought of her. Cultivation and refinement will expunge the image of this clumsy country girl, and leave nothing but shamefaced wonder at the boyish infatuation. Yes, I too am satisfied."

Mr Ramsay's taste was somewhat shocked at the exhibition of Susannah's violent grief at parting. He did not admire boisterous sobbing, a blotched face, nor noisy exclamations. The want of refinement in the poor girl's agony rendered him very unsympathising; and there was a sort of latent contempt in the style of his cold farewell. His freezing unfeelingness, was, however, amply compensated by Gilbert's glowing red hot love. His words gushed out like a fiery torrent. All things else might change; but he, never! never! No other human being in the world had felt such a passion ever, ever! the sun, and the moon, and the stars, might all be put out; but he should remain the same, the same! not only would it be impossible to forget her, but he should never have a thought that did not belong to her! He knew that, wherever he might go, and wherever he might wander, he should never behold another one-hundredth part so beautiful, or one thousandth part so good; and he would return and marry her at the stipulated time though all the uncles and emperors in the world were leagued together to prevent him, and though all the combined armies of Europe were drawn up in battle array against him—aye, that he would!

Howbeit, in spite of all his protestations, the sorrow was present, and the compensation future, which indeed is the defectiveness of all consolation. Susannah sobbed till she was hoarse, and cried till she was blind; but at length the last convulsive grasp was loosened, the last word was spoken, and Gilbert had gone.

It was evening, an evening in June, when Mr Ramsay's travelling carriage rolled up the avenue of old trees which led up to the old Hall. Mr Ramsay was sitting silent and meditative, with half-closed eyes, leaning in one corner. Gilbert, on the contrary, looked out with orbs dilated and a face flushed with expectation. How was it that each familiar thing appeared at once changed and the same? the trees seemed stunted in their growth, the road more narrow, and that old Hall, which he had once thought so spacious a palace, how could it have become so dwarfed and shrunken! No matter! Susannah would be still the same as beautiful as when adored by his boyish fancy. What though he had gazed upon paintings in Italy and statues in Athens, Susannah's living loveliness outshone them all! He should soon see her, and she would be his.

And Susannah? we say everything when we say she really was still the same.

Now, there was a certain rough old room in that certain old Hall, with whitewashed walls, and a deeply smoken fire-place, adorned with Dutch tiles, and an enormous pickle jar of flowers, that had been known from time immemorial as the school room of the rising generation. Full well did Gilbert remember the spot where he had alternately riotously romped and wearily thumbed his spelling book, and he knew that, if ancient habits still prevailed, it was here he should find his beautiful Susannah.

According to his divination, in that very room sat his divinity, not according to all established rules for heroines, stringing pearls, or weaving garlands, or thrilling her lute strings; but taking her tea with the squire's round dozen of chubby, ruddy, wool-headed, buxom bairns, and eating a most unpoetical thick slice of bread and butter. We often hear tell of graceful plegiance, and widely flowing locks, and, if that sort of style ever becomes anybody, it certainly did not suit Susannah. Truth to tell, she looked very blowsy, with a face in which the red had not respectfully confined itself to lips and cheeks, and hair dishevelled, and very far from classically arranged. She had grown too stout for her youthfulness; her dress was clumsy and did not fit; the disfigurement of a variety of opposing colours gave her the coarse stamp of bad taste; her shoes were too large; and, alas!—must we write it?—her hands were dirty.

The noise, the clamour, the vulgar confusion, were at the height when Gilbert stood in the midst; Susannah was screaming for quiet at the top of her voice, all unconscious of the pale, silent, elegant heart stricken young man. Alas! the illusion of his life was broken—the sleeper had awakened from his dream.

Susannah's shriek of recognition roused him; in a moment she had precipitated herself upon him, laughing, crying, and exclaiming in her own broad, provincial tongue.

"Alas! the tones were no longer musical to his ear nor precious to his heart. 'How happy we shall be!' exclaimed Susannah.

"How miserable, rather!" thought Gilbert to himself.

Mr Ramsay waited anxiously for his nephew.—The first glance told all. A touch of mingled triumph and satisfaction passed quickly across his face.

"I have seen her!" exclaimed Gilbert, "am—"

"Happy?" asked Mr Ramsay.

"Miserable!" ejaculated the youth.

"My poor boy, blame not yourself," said Mr Ramsay. "It could not be otherwise that you should meet with disappointment. The intellect that cannot stand still must leave the heart behind."

"She is changed beyond expression!" said Gilbert.

"It is you who are changed; she remains the same."

"And so is this idol-image dethroned from the altar of my heart. Oh, uncle, if you knew how I have doted, and longed and loved, two entire years! How I raised her in my thoughts higher and higher—"

"Her image was buoyed up upon your thoughts, and these were becoming daily elevated."

"And now to find her coarse, gross, provincial, vulgar—"

"She was ever so."

"Her personal beauty abased by her want of all intellect—"

"I knew that mere corporeal could have value in your eyes, when those eyes were opened on the world of intellect."

"She has been my angel thought of and loveliness; and now I find her but a den of robust clumsiness!"

"And her heart?"

"Ah! I fear is unchanged also. If Susannah had only proved faithless—if I had found her favouring another—but, no! she loves me with all the hoydenish fervour of her imaginative nature."

"I had a little hope myself of finding entangled with some country clown. But must give that up. Now that you are returned, Gilbert, your fine person, your high poise, and your really distinguished air, cannot be by the utmost good fortune, fail to find an instantaneous preference. It would have been more agreeable had the defection been on her side; as it is, you must leave me to the brunt of the matter—I will take it on myself."

"My dear uncle do you forget that my name is pledged—I could not be so base as to forfeit my engagement. Have I not sworn oaths to love Susannah? and never to forsake her? The one half of these solemn promises I cannot keep; it does not depend upon me, the other I can, and must."

"Would you sacrifice the man to the weakness of the boy?"

"I sacrifice myself to my own honour," Gilbert, mournfully, but positively.

The bells rang merrily. The Squire's Hall was a very Babel of hospitality. Cooks down to the fifteenth degree, were there dozens. A sheep was roasted whole for villagers, and home brewed was as plentiful as water. Lone and loud were the peals of laughter, which ran through the rough rooms, longest and loudest were Susannah's. Squire shook hands with everybody, but frequently than all with Gilbert; clapping on the shoulder, and declaring that as he the best fellow in the world, so should be the happiest. Susannah was dressed as usual, as money and the village temptress could get her. So were her bridesmaids, and a young girls in white, strewed flowers in path to the church door; and the rubicund person looked as good tempered and well as health and plenty could make him, and Susannah and Gilbert were married, and body tittered, even in the church; but, they got into the vestry, they laughed out—parson and all, even with his surplice. And now they had got back to the old Hall, and now corks had been drawn, and champagne demolished, and hams made to look for now Susannah had changed her bridal attire for a travelling dress, scarcely less, and now a hundred adieus had been said, the same repeated, and ditto again; and hands had been shaken till shoulders' wrists were almost dislocated; and now Susannah and Gilbert were gone, leaving company behind, to eat, and to drink, and laugh, and to dance, and to sing, and to the bridegroom, as an example of faith and stancy, whom even foreign parts could not but who had come home to his own true to marry her, in spite of all the French and the heardhearted ladies in the world—so, over and over again, as long as they preserve the ability, they drank to the health of the new married pair, vowing and declaring that they were, and should be, the very best couple in the world.

The honeymoon! Ah, that almost Gilbert mad. He missed his uncle's companionship, and his bride's coarse and vulgar habits continually outraged his bid feelings. At the end of that month Gilbert felt that suicide was preferable to such a life, and that, if he could not be released from the last, he should almost be driven to commit the first.

Yet had Susannah no dream that the ardent love, so ratified, and so solemnly had undergone one shade of diminution, was happy in her ignorance, and boisterous her happiness.

Susannah had eaten a dinner which Gilbert sigh, so out of all keeping was it his ideas of womanly refinement. Susannah threw herself on the sofa and slept. A season of oblivious repose, she was roused by consciousness by Gilbert's voice.—"He is speaking to his uncle—that odious uncle!—had he come with his fanciful ways, to their happiness? Suddenly, the meaning