

Literature, &c.

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From the London Journal.

THE AUNT-MOTHER AND NIECE-
DAUGHTER.

Forty years since, before the invention of railroads, when travelling was at once pleasant, picturesque, and exciting—alas! it is no longer so:—What do we say, not exciting? Travelling is still exciting; it at least excites apprehension, for in these days of steam engines, locomotion, and high pressure, who can tell, though he may leave Mrs. CAUDLE behind, that he may not have a BLOW UP before he gets to the end of his journey. But to return to our narrative.

Forty years since we were accustomed to take frequent journeys to the pleasant little village of Woodburn, one of the many beautiful spots that are still to be found in the immediate vicinity of our great metropolis, for Woodburn is not ten miles distant from London. Our object in journeying thither was to blow the dust off our brains, by occasionally passing a few days in the cottage of Mrs. Amerton, a widow lady of comfortable fortune, with whom we had casually become acquainted at a concert in London, and who lived there in seclusion with her only daughter, Julia, a lovely girl who could scarcely have seen sixteen summers. Mrs. Amerton was herself young; though a widow and a mother, she could hardly have been five-and-thirty. Her history, which we subsequently became acquainted with, is, we think, sufficiently remarkable to merit a detail in the pages of the London Journal.

That fact is stronger than fiction, is a trite observation that has been often repeated, but the truth of it would be more obvious if we made more use of our senses. Let the condemnors of circulating libraries say what they will, there is a novel in every hour. Talk of dull matter of fact, indeed! Why, we've romance for ever with us and about us; but we regard and notice that little that is always under our own eyes; familiarity, if it does not exactly breed contempt, too frequently breeds indifference. We walk into the streets, and we see inscribed over the doors of shops and houses, such as "Rumfit, Breeches-maker," "Cutmore, Ham and Beef," "Blood and Gore, Surgeons," &c., &c. These odd coincidences would appear singular in a tale, and its author would, perhaps, be exclaimed against; he might be called affected; they might be deemed forced and far-fetched, but no one thinks them at all remarkable when actually seen in the streets.

The dramatist of our own day, who, when concocting farces, was accustomed to walk into a churchyard, and search the tombstones for fanny names for his characters, was not so eccentric as he was held to be. The truth is, so morbid are our tastes, that in real life nothing less than, "horrid murders," "appalling accidents," "frightful shipwrecks," &c., command a moment's attention; and yet there is much touching novelty and real interest, stronger than the wildest inventions of fiction, continually springing up under our own observation, if we had but the nous to observe them; but in that case there would be an end to the concoctors of narratives; their occupation would be gone, so, perhaps, it is better as it is, at all events, it is better for us, so we'll again return to our story.

There was some degree of mystery about the two ladies we have mentioned, Mrs. Amerton and the young Julia, that caused many remarks in their immediate neighbourhood. As we have said, they lived retired, holding no sort of communication with those around, their only company consisting of a few occasional visitors from town, including ourself. Mrs. Amerton's frank hospitality, unvarying kindness, elegant accomplishments, and a thousand other good qualities, very speedily induced us to become a frequent guest at her cottage. We became her confidential friend and adviser, and endeavoured to make some slight return for the good things so plentifully bestowed on us by superintending, to the best of our little ability, the studies, and bearing a part in the adventures and amusements of the innocent Julia. As we have said, a degree of mystery manifested in a thousand different ways, attached itself to our fair hostesses; but as we are naturally the most inquisitive of authors, we never troubled ourself with prying into their private history. We heard with silent contempt and indignation the sneers and observations of the inhabitants of Woodburn. "They are no better than they should be," hinted one. "It's well for them they can give tenpence a pound for lamb, when nobody else is charged more than eightpence, and have peas before any one else," whispered another. "The lawyer and the rector can't afford to be such good customers to us as they are. No one has occasion to call twice for their bill with them, so there must be something wrong," remarked a third.

Such were the charitable and liberal observations of many that almost owed their support to them, observations too general in country towns, and consequently not at all particular to Woodburn. But for the voluntary revelation Mrs. Amerton herself, we might have remained all our life perfectly ignorant how groundless, un-called-for, and unjust were these insinuations. We were, however, ultimately favoured with her confidence, which we do not think we shall prove wholly unworthy of, in now making our readers as wise as ourself.

During one day from the turmoil and strife

of busy London, to tranquilize our feelings, and recover the tone of our mind in Mrs. Amerton's beautifully embosomed but simple retreat, even our dull vision could not help being struck with the marks of recent distress, evident on the countenance of our fair entertainer. Her eyes were swollen with weeping, her manner was troubled, and her thoughts, to all appearance, painfully pre-occupied. We were, however, too well bred to make any remark. Dinner was passed over in rather a constrained way; Julia seemed like ourself, in a state of perplexing conjecture, which cast an air of sadness over her; but we were not suffered to remain long in ignorance as to the cause of all this. Soon after the cloth was removed, Mrs. Amerton requested to speak to us in private, in her little library. Julia had walked out to make some purchases in the village. We complied with our hostess's wish. Carefully closing the door, she motioned us to be seated. We wondered what was coming, when she thus addressed us—"My dear Mr. Fortesque," said she, "I am about to throw myself on your friendship." Here she made some flattering remarks on our character, which our modesty will not permit us to repeat. "Though our acquaintance," she continued, "has not been of very long duration, there is no one in whom, I think, I can place greater reliance. You have hitherto supposed me to be a widow, and Julia my daughter; but I must now undeceive you, and call upon your friendship, in turn, to undeceive one (as ignorant in this particular as yourself) by a relation which I trust, you will consider as honourable to the parties more immediately concerned, as it is, at least, uncommon and remarkable. Julia, as I have said is not my daughter, neither am I a widow, or married: but you shall hear."

THE AUNT-MOTHER'S STORY.

I am the younger of two sisters, the only children of Mr. Waring, a wealthy merchant of London, esteemed no less for his high probity than for his extensive resources. Passionately attached to us, we had lost our mother in infancy. We were brought up in every luxury; we had the best education unbounded wealth could command; and in our father's splendid mansion in Russell's-square, we very soon attracted that notice, and engrossed that attention which is usual with city heiresses.

My sister Augusta, a rather haughty beauty, I may observe, was early destined by our father, to become the bride of Lord Spindleshin, a nobleman rather advanced in years, and of recent creation, but possessing immense estates. Who, however, can controul the heart, or divert the course of fate? A LIASON formed by Augusta, in girlhood with a young officer, amiable and attractive, and nurtured in stealth, ended by the birth of the hapless girl you have hitherto taken to be my daughter; but long ere her birth, Fitzroy Ponsonby, for that is the officer's name, wholly dependent on the favour of a stern and inflexible father, who had higher views for his son, was ordered on foreign service, and had departed for India.

As the period of Augusta's accouchement approached, circumstances occurred which rendered her projected marriage with Lord Spindleshin more than ever to be wished. The sun of our father's prosperity had begun to wane; the failure of some heavy speculations, and an unlooked-for and sudden change in the funds, had reduced him, almost in a day, to comparative poverty; only this marriage could enable him to save his tottering credit, and retrieve his ruined fortunes. A whisper of Augusta's secret amour would have soilt all—would for ever have destroyed all hopes of the consummation of that sacrifice which she now felt was so urgent—so necessary. What was now to be done—how were we to avert suspicion, and effect our purpose to save our father! Oh! Mr. Fortesque, perhaps I was wrong in lending myself to concealment—to falsehood—to deceit—but a sister's honour, a father's happiness, demanded no less a devotion from me: I determined to dare all. We found a pretext to retire to a distant part of the country, where after the birth of Julia, at the price of loss of fame, and compromise of all my life's young hopes of future love and happiness, sisterly regard, and a daughter's affection led me to consent to pass as the mother of the luckless little stranger.

We returned to town; Augusta became Lady Spindleshin; and I, under a feigned name, passing myself off as a widow, retired with her infant, my beloved Julia, to this secluded spot. My father's fortunes were renovated—my sister's honour preserved; they were happy, and I was miserable. Miserable, do I say? No, I had the consciousness of having done my duty, and in that thought, at least, there was peace and satisfaction.

But you, Mr. Fortesque, with your knowledge of the world, will easily conjecture that under such circumstances calumny soon was busy with my reputation. The report that I had propagated of a secret marriage, and my subsequent widowhood, soon came to be disbelieved. The stigma of being an unwedded mother at once effectually shut me out of the pale of society, and led the strait-laced and liberal inhabitants of this beautiful little village to look upon and shun me as infected; but happy in the love of my adopted Julia, I have borne all with patience. Reproach, contumely, persecution, and every other species of injustice have, for her dear sake, been alike disregarded. In watching over her education and maturing the ingenious graces of her mind, in her unvarying affection and deep devotion, I have found consolation for all, and have forgotten the mischiefs of mankind.

Thus sixteen years have passed away; and now, Mr. Fortesque, comes my trial. Your keen eye must have detected that circumstances have recently occurred of no common affliction

to me. I have, indeed, need of [all my] fortune—of all your friendship. Lord Spindleshin has lately died without offspring, and Augusta's early love, the father of Julia, the brave and handsome Fitzroy Ponsonby, has returned from India, high in command, and possessed of a handsome fortune; his inflexible father no longer lives to sacrifice his son's hopes to wild ambition. Still faithful to Augusta, the early love of his heart, Fitzroy is come to lay his wealth and honors at her feet. His preferred hand had been accepted by my sister; they have plighted their troth together, and yearning to embrace, and acknowledge the mutual pledge of their young affections, they are now on their way hither to claim her, enfold her in their arms, and bear her away from this humble retreat to their splendid mansion in Grosvenor-square, and make amends by future aggrandizement and solicitude for all the past injustice and neglect she has endured in a youthful life of lowliness and obscurity. And now, Mr. Fortesque, it is to break out these facts to my darling girl, preparatory to her meeting her parents this evening, that I have made this confession to you, and request your good offices. I know the service I ask of you is both a delicate and a difficult one. How will my beloved Julia bear to hear that the being she has ever regarded as the tenderest of mothers, has no claim save in her love to that holy name; that a stranger will henceforth assume that sacred character, and call on her for all her affection, her devotion. Alas! I can tell by my own heart how painful, how trying will be the revelation—but I see her entering the garden gate; she comes, let me away—the struggle will be more than I have firmness to bear; she will seek me here—will find you. You will tell her all, Mr. Fortesque. You will support her, will encourage her. You will tell the niece-daughter what she owes to the aunt-mother, and what will be expected of her by those who come to claim her: what should be her love for me, and what will be her duty to them.

Here, almost choking with emotion, Mrs. Amerton, for so we shall continue to call her, hurried out of the little library. Julia soon afterwards entered.

The mission with which we had been entrusted did indeed prove, as Mrs. Amerton had predicted, a difficult and painful one. If fact is in some cases stranger than fiction, it has this advantage: many circumstances occur in fact which mock the powers of fiction to describe; so it was in this instance. We feel ourself totally unable to paint the touching scene that ensued. Language can give no idea of the varying emotions of Julia as we proceeded to make her acquainted of the story of her birth—her surprise, her anguish, her redoubled affection for Mrs. Amerton—fain would she have remained incredulous; but when at last that fatal truth flashed too strongly upon her conviction to doubt it longer, and, at a signal previously agreed upon, the aunt-mother and niece-daughter rushed into each other's arms, the sobbing girl, as she wildly exclaimed—

"It is too late to tell me now that you are not my mother; the mother you speak of shall have my duty, but I can never love her as I do you!"—sunk with a wild shriek senseless on the floor.

He must be dull indeed who cannot picture to himself what followed. Fitzroy and Lady Ponsonby duly arrived in the evening. The introduction to Julia was affecting even to tears. All the tenderness lavished upon her, awakened only a subdued regard. Only the subsequent noble clearing of the fame of her aunt-mother could reconcile her to the change, which, under any other circumstances, would have appeared both brilliant and flattering.

Introduced into high life, Julia, in due course, became the happy consort of one of the first peers of the realm. But, though always dutiful, and even affectionate to Lady Ponsonby, never for an instant has the deep and more than daughterly love been weakened which she ever manifested for the noble conduct of her aunt-mother; a love that was returned till death, through every scene, through every change.

We pride ourself in being dabblers in a small way in poetry, though we are sometimes severely taxed for our reputation in this respect, through the various call made on our powers by the different young ladies of our acquaintance for their albums, &c. We, however, often endeavour to turn our labour this way to account, and, consequently, having thrown the circumstances we have here narrated, into the form of a ballad, for the scrap book of one of our fair friends, we will, as they have been somewhat admired, and have never yet appeared in print, avail ourself of the opportunity, and conclude our article with them.

THE NIECE-DAUGHTER.

A BALLAD.

They told her—blighting peace and mirth,
The story of her shame;
That there was a dark cloud o'er her birth
And a mystery in her name.
That she who had every care beguiled,
And a mother's love had borne,
Was a stranger by blood, and had called her
child,
But to shield her from worldly scorn.

They told her the mother she never had known,
Would soon in splendour come,
And years of past neglect atone
In a proud and lordly home.
That she must forget all these she'd lov'd
In fashion's vortex hur'd,
Nor think of her whose care she'd proved,
Who for her had braved the world.

But she said, and wept, we have lived on

Through good report and ill;
My mother no mother, my only one,
And oh! we will do so still!
It is too late to tell me now
That you are NOT my mother;
I may in formal duty bow,
But I ne'er can love another.

LIONEL FORTESCUE.

From the New Monthly.

GOSSIPING.

SOME people seem to make it their employment to go about from house to house, to find out the calamities of their neighbours, only to have the pleasure of carrying the news to the next house they go to.

Mr. S. once reproved one of these gossips. She had nearly talked herself out of breath with—"Shocking news! I hear poor Mr. — is dead, and has left a large family without a shilling to help them; and Mrs. — has fallen down stairs, and broken her leg—I saw the doctor ride by as I came along; and farmer —'s house has been burnt down; and Mrs. —'s eldest daughter has lost her place, at a minute's warning. Dear! dear! what troubles there are in the world; it really makes one's heart ache to hear of them."

"And pray," asked Mr. S. what have you done to help all these people in their distress?"

"Oh, it is not in my power to help them."

"Indeed! I think you might find some way of being useful to them—if you only spent in rendering help the very time that you squander in idle gossip about their misfortunes, which, I can't help thinking, seems to afford you a sort of pleasure. I will tell you a story: a traveller passing over a miserable road, the wheel of his carriage stuck in a deep rut. He laboured with all his might to extricate it; but in vain. Presently some one passing said to him: "you are in an awkward situation, sir: pray how did the accident happen?" Another came up: "Dear, dear! what is the matter? Well, what a good thing your neck is not broken! but this road ought to be indicted; there are continual accidents of one kind or another." A third addressed him: "I'm really sorry to see you so much heated and fatigued, sir; I fear, too, your horse and carriage are injured. I am very sorry."

"Come, then," replied the unfortunate traveller, "if you really are so sorry, be so good as to put a shoulder to the wheel; a grain of help is worth a bushel of pity."

The idle and impertinent curiosity of some people, in the time of a neighbour's distress, is ill concealed under the professions of sympathy and pity; while, like the priest and the Levite in the parable, they only come to the place and look, and then pass by on the other side of the way. If sympathy and pity are really felt, let them lead to conduct like that of the good Samaritan; for our Lord says to each of us, "Go thou and do likewise."

New Works.

From Protestant Missions in Bengal.

THE GANGES.

If you ask the Hindu how he hopes to obtain forgiveness of his sins and the salvation of his soul, he invariably points to the Ganges—here is his principal means of salvation. This deified river will heal and purify everything that is morally bad and corrupt in man. The origin of it is related in various ways. A saint called Bhagisuth, led an ascetic life for many years. Upon his prayer, the Ganges ascended from heaven; that is, the Himalaya Mountain. The gods would not agree to this descent, saying, they had mansions to wash off likewise. Brahma promised them that, although it descended to the earth, it should, at the same time, remain in heaven. Vishnu then gave Bhagisuth a shell; and whenever he blew it, the Ganges followed him at his heels. At a certain place he unfortunately carried away the brazen vessel and flowers of a saint, which he was intending to strew in honor of Shiva. This Saint, or Sunyasee, in his rage, swallowed the whole river; but at Bhagisuth's request, he had to disgorge it again. Another miraculous story, related in the Shastees, of the origin of the Ganges is the following: Shiva's wife, Parbatti, touched his right eye; as this is the sun, a general confusion was caused in the creation. To prevent mischief, Shiva caused a third eye to grow out above his nose. His wife perceiving her imprudence, removed the finger, but a tear remained on it, and as this tear fell to the ground, the Ganges sprang out of it; hence, the water is so sacred that those who bathe in it wash away every sin.

All the sects of the Hindus, and "their name is Legion," are agreed in this. Whatever may be their differences on other points, when meeting on the banks of the Ganges they cease to strive, and look on each other as friends. So sacred is the water, that the Hindu will swear by the name of any other god, rather than by Ganga. Hence, in courts of justice witnesses are generally sworn by holding a basin of Ganges water in their hands.

At certain seasons and constellations, bathing in this river is exceedingly meritorious; it act delivers the sinner, with three millions of ancestors, from the punishment of hell; and the crimes of a thousand former births are atoned for. At such festivals I have seen tens of thousands on the road, travelling to the sacred stream. The town of Burdwan was sometimes crowded with those pilgrims, and swarms of them were bivouacking at night under trees in the open air. These poor people often travel two or three hundred miles to obtain the benefits promised. On their return, they take kaisies, or large round vessels, full of water home with them, to convey some of the same blessings to their friends who have remained behind.