

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines
FOR FEBRUARY.From Hogg's Instructor.
THE MAN THAT KILLED HIS
NEIGHBORS.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

By Mrs. Child.

It is curious to observe how a man's spiritual state reflects itself in the people and animals around him, nay, in the very garments, trees and stones.

Reuben Black was an infestation in the neighborhood where he resided. The very sight of him produced effects similar to the Hindoo magical tune called Raug, which is said to bring on clouds, storms, and earthquakes. His wife seemed lean, sharp and uncomfortable. The heads of his boys had a bristling aspect, as if each individual hair stood on an end with perpetual fear. The cows poked out their horns horizontally as soon as he opened the barnyard gate. The dog dropped his tail between his legs and eyed him askance, to see what humour he was in. The cat looked wild and scraggy, and had been known to rush up the chimney when he roved toward her. Fanny Kemble's expressive account of the Pennsylvania stage horses, was exactly suited to Reuben's poor old nag. 'His hide resembled an old hair trunk.' Continual whipping and kicking had made him such a stoic, that no amount of blows could quicken his pace, and no chirruping could change the dejected drooping of his head. All his natural language said, as plain as a horse could say it, that he was a most unhappy beast. Even the trees on Reuben's premises had a gnarled and knotted appearance. The bark wept little sickly tears of gum, and the branches grew awry, as if they felt the continual discord, and made sorry faces at each other, behind their owner's back. His fields were red with sorrel, or run over with mullein. Everything seemed as hard and arid as his own visage. Everyday he cursed the town and the neighborhood, because they poisoned his dogs, and stoned his hens, and shot his cats. Continual lawsuits involved him in so much expense that he had neither time nor money to spend in the improvement of his farm.

Against Joe Smith, a poor laborer in the neighborhood, he had brought three suits in succession. Joe said he had returned a spade he borrowed, and Reuben swore he had not. He sued Joe and recovered damages, for which he ordered the Sheriff to seize his pig. Joe in his wrath called him an old Swindler and a curse to the neighborhood. These remarks were soon repeated to Reuben. He brought an action for libel and recovered twenty five cents. Provoked at the laugh this occasioned he watched for Joe to pass by, and set his big dog upon him screaming furiously. 'Call me an old swindler again will you?' an evil spirit is more contagious than the plague. Joe went home and scolded his wife and boxed little Joe's ears, and kicked the cat, and not one of them knew what it was all for. A fortnight after Reuben's big dog was found dead by poison. Whereupon he brought another action against Joe Smith, and not being able to prove him guilty of the charge of dog-murder, he took his revenge by poisoning a pet lamb belonging to Mrs. Smith. Thus the bad game went on with mutual worry and loss. Joe's temper grew more and more vindictive, and the love of talking over his troubles at the grog shop increased upon him. Poor Mrs. Smith cried and said it was all owing to Reuben Black; for a better hearted man never lived than her Joe when she first married him.

Such was the state of things when Simon Green purchased the farm adjoining Reuben's. The estate had been much neglected, and had caught thistles and mullein from the neighbouring fields. But Simon was a diligent man, blessed by nature with a healthy organization and a genial temperament; and a wise and kind education had aided nature in the perfection of her goodly work. His provident industry soon changed the aspect of things on the farm. River mud, autumn leaves, old shoes, and old bones, were all put in requisition to assist in the production of use and beauty. The trees, with branches pruned, and bark scraped free from moss and insects, soon looked clean and vigorous. Fields of grain waved where weeds had rioted. Persia lilacs bowed gracefully over the simple gateway. Michigan roses covered half the house with their abundant clusters. Even the rough rock, which formed the doorstep, was edged with golden moss. The steek horse, feeding in clover, tossed his main and neighed when his master came near; as much as to say, 'The world is all the pleasanter for having you in it, Simeon Green!' The old cow, fondling her calf under the great walnut tree, walked up to him with serious friendly face, asking for the slice of sugar-beet he was wont to give her. Chanticleer, strutting about with his troop of plump hens and downy little chickens, took no trouble to keep out of his way, but flapped his glossy wings, and crowded a welcome in his very face. When Simeon turned his steps homeward, the boys threw up their caps and ran out shouting, 'Father's coming!' and little Mary went toddling up to him, with a dandelion blossom to place in his button-hole. His wife was a woman of few words, but she sometimes said to her neighbours, with a qui-

et kind of satisfaction, 'Every-body loves my husband that knows him. They can't help it.'

Simeon Green's acquaintance knew that he was never engaged in a lawsuit in his life; but they predicted that he would find it impossible to avoid it now. They told him his next neighbour was determined to quarrel with people whether they would or not that he was like John Lilburne, of whom Judge Jenkins said, 'If the world was emptied of every person but himself; Lilburne would still quarrel with Joan, and Joan with Lilburne.'

'Is that his character?' said Simeon. 'If he exercises it upon me, I will soon kill him.'

In every neighbourhood there are individuals who like to foment disputes, not from any definite intention of malice or mischief, but merely because it makes a little ripple of excitement in the stream of life, like a contest between dogs or game-cocks. Such people were not slow in repeating Simeon Green's remark about his wrangling neighbour. 'Kill me! will he?' exclaimed Reuben. He said no more; but his tightly compressed mouth had such a significant expression that his dog dogged him as he would the track of a tiger. That very night Reuben turned his horse into the highway, in hopes he would commit some depredations on neighbour Green's premises. But Joe Smith, seeing the animal at large, let down the bars of Reuben's own corn-field, and the poor beast walked in and feasted as he had not done for many a year. It would have been a great satisfaction to Reuben if he could have brought a lawsuit against his horse; but as it was, he was obliged to content himself with beating him. His next exploit was to shoot Mary Green's handsome chanticleer, because he stood on the stone-wall and crowed in the ignorant joy of his heart, two inches beyond the frontier line that bounded the contiguous farms. Simeon said he was sorry for the poor bird, and sorry because his wife and children liked the pretty creature; but otherwise it was no great matter. He had been intending to build a poultry-yard, with a good high fence, that his hens might not annoy his neighbours; and now he was admonished to make haste and do it. He would build them a snug warm house to roost in; they should have plenty of gravel and oats, and room to promenade back and forth, and crow and cackle to their hearts' content; there they could enjoy themselves, and be out of harm's way.

But Reuben Black had a degree of ingenuity and perseverance which might have produced great results for mankind, had those qualities been devoted to some more noble purpose than provoking quarrels. A pear tree in his garden very improperly stretched over a friendly arm into Simeon Green's premises. Whether the sunny state of things there had a cheering effect on the tree I know not, but it happened that this overhanging bough bore more abundant fruit, and glowed with a richer hue than the other boughs. One day little George Green, as he went whistling along, picked up a pear that had fallen into his father's garden. The instant he touched it he felt something on the back of his neck like the sting of a wasp. It was Reuben Black's whip, followed by such a storm of angry words, that the poor child rushed into the house in an agony of terror. But this experiment failed also. The boy was soothed by his mother and told not to go near the pear tree again; and there the matter ended.

This imperturbable good nature vexed Reuben more than all the tricks and taunts he met with from others. Evil efforts he could understand; and repay with compound interest; but he did not know what to make of this perpetual forbearance. It seemed to him that there must be something contemptuous in it. He disliked Simeon more than all the rest of the town put together, because he made him feel so uncomfortably in the wrong, and did not afford him the slightest pretext for complaint. It was annoying to see everything in his neighbour's domain looking so happy, and presenting such a bright contrast to the forlornness of his own. When their waggons passed each other on the road, it seemed as if Simeon's horse tossed his head higher, and flung out his mane, as if he knew he was going by Reuben Black's old nag. He often said he supposed Green covered his house with roses and honeysuckles on purpose to shame his bare walls. But he did not care! not he! He was not going to be fool enough to rot his boards with such stuff. But no one resented his disparaging remarks, or sought to provoke him in any way. The roses smiled, the horses neighed, and the calf capered; but none of them had the least idea that they were insulting Reuben Black. Even the dog had no malice in his heart, though he did one night chase home his geese, and bark at them through the bars. Reuben told his master the next day; he swore he would bring an action against him if he did not keep that dog at home; and Simeon answered very quietly that he would try to take better care of him. For several days a strict watch was kept, in hopes Towser would worry the geese again; but they paced home undisturbed, and not a solitary bow-wow furnished excuse for a lawsuit.

The new neighbors not only declined quarrelling, but they occasionally made positive advances towards a friendly relation. Simeon's wife sent Mrs. Blake a large basketful of very fine cherries. Pleased with the unexpected attention, she cordially replied, 'Tell your mother it was very kind of her and I am very much obliged to her.' Reuben who sat smoking in the chimney corner, listened to this message once without any manifestation of

impatience, except whiffing the smoke through the pipe a little faster and fiercer than usual. But when the boy was going out of the door, and the friendly words were again repeated, he exclaimed 'Don't make a fool of yourself Peg. They want to give us a hint to send a basket of our pears; that's the upshot of the business. You may send them a basket when they're ripe; for I scorn to be under obligations, especially to your smooth-tongued folks.' Poor Peggy, whose arid life had been for the moment refreshed with a little dew of kindness admitted distrust in her bosom, and the halo that radiated round the ripe glowing cherries departed.

Not long after this advance toward good neighbourhood, some labourers employed by Simeon Green passing over a bit of marshy ground with a heavy team stuck fast in a bog occasioned by the long continued rain. The poor oxen were entirely unable to extricate themselves, and Simeon ventured to ask assistance from his waspish neighbour, who was working at a short distance. Reuben replied gruffly, 'I've got enough to do to attend to my own business.' The civil request that he might be allowed to use his oxen and chains for a few moments being answered in the same surly tone, Simeon walked off in search of a more obliging neighbour.

The men, who were left waiting with the patient, suffering oxen, scolded about Reuben's ill-nature, and said they hoped he would get stuck in the same bog himself. Their employer rejoined, 'If he does, we will do our duty and help him out.' 'There is such a thing as being too good-natured,' said they; 'if Reuben Black takes the notion that people are afraid of him, it makes him trample on them worse than ever.'

'Oh, wait a while,' replied Mr. Green, smiling; 'I will kill him before long. Wait and see if I don't kill him.'

It chanced, soon after, that Reuben's team did stick fast in the same bog, as the workmen had wished. Simeon observed it from a neighbouring field and gave directions that the oxen and chains should be immediately conveyed to his assistance. The men laughed, shook their heads, and said it was good enough for the old hornet. They, however, cheerfully proceeded to do as their employer had requested. 'You are in a bad situation, neighbour,' said Simeon, as he came alongside of the foundered team. 'But my men are coming with two yoke of oxen, and I think we shall soon manage to help you out.' 'You may take your oxen back again,' replied Reuben, 'I don't want any of your help.' In a very friendly tone Simeon answered, 'I cannot consent to do that; for evening is coming on, and you have very little time to lose. It is a bad job any time, but it will be still worse in the dark.' 'Light or dark, I don't ask your help,' replied Reuben, emphatically; 'I wouldn't help you out of the bog, the other day, when you asked me.' 'The trouble I had in relieving my poor oxen teaches me to sympathize with others in the same situation,' answered Simeon; 'don't let us waste words about it, neighbour. It is impossible for me to go home and leave you here in the bog, and night coming on.'

The team was soon drawn out, and Simeon and his men went away, without waiting for thanks. When Reuben went home that night, he was usually silent and thoughtful. After smoking a while, in deep contemplation, he gently knocked the ashes from his pipe, and said, with a sigh, 'Peg, Simeon Green has killed me!' 'What do you mean?' said his wife, dropping her knitting, with a look of surprise. 'You know when he first came into this neighbourhood, he said he'd kill me,' replied Reuben; 'and he has done it. The other day he asked me to help to draw his team out of the bog, and I told him I had enough to do to attend to my own business. To-day my team stuck fast in the same bog, and he came with two yoke of oxen to draw it out. I felt sort of ashamed to have him lend me a hand, so I told him I didn't want any of his help; but he answered, just as pleasant as if nothing contrary had ever happened, that night was coming on, and he was not willing to leave me there in the mud.' 'It is very good of him,' replied Peggy; 'he is a pleasant spoken man, and always has a pretty word to say to the boys. His wife seems to be a nice, neighbourly body, too.' Reuben made no answer; but after meditating a while, he remarked, 'Peg, you know that big ripe melon down at the bottom of the garden? you may as well carry it over there in the morning.' His wife said she would, without asking him to explain where 'over there' was.

But when the morning came Reuben walked back and forth, and round and round, with that sort of aimless activity, often manifested by hens, and by fashionable idlers, who feel restless, and don't know what to run after. At length the cause of his uncertain movements was explained, by his saying in the form of a question, 'I guess I may as well carry the melon myself, and thank him for his oxen? In my hurry down there in the marsh, I didn't think to say I was obliged to him.'

He marched off towards the garden, and his wife stood at the door with one hand on her side, and the other shading the sun from her eyes, to see if he would really carry the melon into Simeon Green's house. It was the most remarkable incident that had occurred since her marriage. She could hardly believe her own eyes. He walked quick, as if afraid he could not be able to carry the unusual impulse into action if he stopped to re-consider the question. When he found himself in Mr.

Green's house, he felt himself extremely awkward, and hastened to say, 'Mrs. Green here is a melon my wife has sent you, she reckons it's a ripe one.' Without manifesting any surprise at the unexpected courtesy the friendly matron thanked him, and invited him to sit down. But he stood playing with the latch of the door, and without raising his eyes, said—'Maybe Mr. Green sent this morning?'

'He is at the pump, and will be in directly,' she replied; and before her words were spoken, the honest man, walked in with a face as fresh and bright as June morning. He stepped up to Reuben, shook his hand cordially, and said, 'I am glad to see you neighbor, take a chair—take a chair.'

'Thank you, I can't stop,' replied Reuben. He pushed his hat one side, rubbed his eyes, looked out of the window, and then said suddenly, as if by a desperate effort. 'The fact is, Mr. Green, I didn't behave right about my oxen!'

'Never mind, never mind,' said Mr. Green. 'Perhaps I shall get into the bog again some of these rainy days. If I do I shall look whom to call upon.'

'Why you see' said Reuben, still very much confused, and avoiding Simeon's clear eye; 'you see the neighbors about here are very ugly. If I had always lived with such neighbors as you are, I should not be as I am.'

'Ah, well we must try to be to others what we want them to be to us,' rejoined Simeon. 'You know the good book says we have learned by experience that if we speak kind words, we hear kind echoes; if we wish to make others happy, it fills them with a wish to make others happy. Perhaps you and I can bring the neighbourhood round to time—who knows? Let us try, Mr. Black, let us try. But come and look at my orchard I want to show you a tree which I have procured with very choice apples. If you like, will procure you some scions from the same stock.'

They went into the orchard together, and friendly chat soon put Reuben at ease. When he returned home, he made remarks about his visit; for he could not yet, summon sufficient greatness of soul to his wife that he had confessed himself in the wrong. A gun stood behind the kitchen in readiness to shoot Mr. Green's dog for barking at his house. He now fired his contents into the air, and put the gun away in the barn. From that day henceforth, he never sought for any pretext to quarrel with either the dog or his master. A short time after, Joe Smith, to his utter astonishment, found him pat Towser on the head, and heard him say, 'Good fellow.'

Simeon Green was far too magnanimous to repeat to any one that his quarrelsome neighbour had confessed himself to blame. He merely smiled as he said to his wife, 'I thought we should kill him, after a while.'

Joe Smith did not believe in such doctrines. When he heard of the adventures in the matter he said 'Simeon Green is a fool. When he came here, talked very big about killing Joe if they did not mind their P's and Q's, he don't appear to have as much spirit as words; for a worm will turn when it is stepped upon.'

Poor Joe had grown more intemperate more quarrelsome, till at last nobody would employ him. About a year after a memorable incident of the watermelon, some one stole several valuable hides from Mr. Green. He did not mention the circumstance to any one but his wife, and they both had reasons for suspecting Joe was the thief. The next week the following anonymous advertisement appeared in the newspaper of the county.—'Who stole a lot of hides on Friday night, the 15th of the present month, is hereby informed that the owner has a sincere wish to be his friend. If poverty tempted him to this false step, owner will keep the whole transaction a secret, and will gladly put him in the way of obtaining money by means more likely to bring peace of mind.' This singular advertisement of course excited a good deal of remark. There was much debate whether or not the thief would avail himself of the friendly offer. Some said he would be a green horn if he did for it was manifestly a trap to catch him. But he who had committed the dishonest deed alone knew whence the benevolent offer came, and he knew that Simeon Green was not a man to set traps for his fellow-citizens.

A few nights afterward a timid knock was heard at Simeon's door, just as the family were retiring to rest. When the door was opened Joe Smith was seen on the steps with a load of hides on his shoulder. 'Without raising his eyes, he said in a low humble tone, "Will you have brought these back, Mr. Green. Will you shall I put them?"'

'Wait a moment, till I can light a lamp, and I will go to the barn with you,' he replied. 'Then you will come in, and tell me how it happened. We will see what can be done for you.'

Mrs. Green knew that Joe often went to the barn and had become accustomed to the smell of his rum. She therefore hastened to the kitchen, and brought from the closet a piece of cold meat and a pie. When they returned from the barn she said, 'I thought you would feel the better for a little warm supper, neighbor Smith.' Joe turned his back toward the door and did not speak. He leaped his head against the chimney, and after a moment's silence, said in a choked voice, 'It was