LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Hogg's Instructor.

THE LOST CHILDREN.

BY MRS. L. H. SIGOURNEY.

There was sickness in the little dwelling of the emigrant. Stretched upon his humble bed, he depended on that nursing care which a wife, scarcely less enfeebled than himself, was able to bestow. A child in its third summer had been recently laid to its last rest beneath a turf mound under their window. Its image was in the heart of the mother as she tenderly ministered to her husband.

'Wife, I am afraid I think too much about poor little Thomas. He was so well and rosy when we left our old home scarcely a year ago. Sometimes I feel, if we had but continued there, our darling would not have died.'

The tear which had trembled, and been repressed by the varieties of conjugal solicitude, burst forth at these words. It freely overflowed the brimming eyes, and relieved the suffocating emotions which had striven for the mastery.

'Do not reproach yourself, dear husband. His time had come. He is happier there than here. Let us be thankful for those that are spared.'

'It seems to me that the little girls are growing pale. I am afraid you confine them too closely to this narrow house, and to the sight of sickness. The weather is growing settled. You had better send them out to change the air, and run about at their will. Mary, let the baby on the bed by me, and ask mother to let little sister and you go out for a ramble.'

The mother assented, and the children, who were four and six years old, departed full of delight. A clearing had been made in front of their habitation, and, by ascending a knoll in its vicinity, another dwelling might be seen, environed with the dark spruce and hemlock. In the rear of these houses was a wide expanse of ground, interspersed with thickets, rocky acclivities and patches of forest trees, while far away, one or two lakelets peered up, with their blue eyes deeply fringed. The spirits of the children, as they entered this unenclosed region, were like those of the birds that surrounded them. They playfully pursued each other with merry laughter, and such a joyous sense of liberty, as makes the blood course lightsome through the veins.

'Little Jane, let us go further than ever we have before. We will see what lies beyond those high hills, for it is but just past noon, and we can get back long before supper time.'

'Oh yes! let us follow that bright bluebird, and see what he is flying after. But don't go among those briars that tear the clothes so, for mother has no time to mend them.'

'Sister, sweet sister, here are snowdrops in this green hollow, exactly like those in my old, dear garden so far away. How pure they are, and cool, just like the baby's face, when the wind blows on it. Father and mother will like us to bring them some.'

Filling their little aprons with the spoil, and still searching for something new or beautiful, they prolonged their ramble, unconscious of the flight of time, or the extent of space they were traversing. At length, admonished by the chillness, which often marks the declining hours of the early days of spring, they turned their course homewards. But the returning clew was lost, and they walked rapidly, only to plunge more inextricably into the mazes of the wilderness.

'Sister Mary, are these pretty snowdrops good to eat? I am so hungry, and my feet ache, and will not go.'

'Let me lift you over this brook, little Jane; and hold me tighter by my hand, and walk as brave as you can, that we may get home, and help mother to set the table.'

'We won't go so far the next time, will we? What is the reason that I cannot see any better?'

'Is not that the roof of our house, dear Jane, and the thin smoke curling up among the trees? Many times before have I thought so, and found it only a rock or a mist.'

As evening drew its veil, the hapless wanderers, bewildered, hurried to and fro, calling for their parents, or shouting for help, until their strength was exhausted. Torn by brambles, and their poor feet bleeding from the rocks which strewed their path, they sank down, moaning bitterly. The fears that overpower the heart of a timid child, who for the first time finds night approaching, without shelter or protection, wrought on the younger to insupportable anguish. The elder, filled with the sacred warmth of sisterly affection, after the first paroxysms of grief seemed to forget herself, and sitting upon the damp ground, and folding the little one in her arms, rocked her with a gentle movement, soothing and hushing her like a nursling.

'Don't cry! oh don't cry so, dearest sister. Say your prayers and fear will fly away from you.'

'How can I kneel down here in the dark woods, or say my prayers when mother is not by to hear me? I think I see a large wolf, with sharp ears, and a mouth wide open, and hear noises as of many fierce lions growling.'

'Dear little Jane do say, 'Our Father who art in Heaven.' Be a good girl, and when we have rested here a while, perhaps He may be pleased to send some one to find us, and to fetch us home.'

Harrowing was the anxiety in the lowly hut of the emigrant when day drew towards its close and the children came not. A boy, their sole assistant in the toils of agriculture, at his return from labor, was sent in search of them, but in vain. As evening drew on, the inmates of a neighboring house, and those of a small hamlet at considerable distance, were alarmed, and associated in the pursuit. The agony of the invalid parents through that night was uncontrollable; starting at every footstep, shaping out of every breeze the accents of the lost ones returning, or their cries of misery. While the morning was yet grey, the father, no longer to be restrained, and armed with supernatural strength, went forth, amid the ravings of his fever, to take part in the pursuit. With fiery cheeks, his throbbing head bound with a handkerchief, he was seen in the most dangerous and inaccessible spots—caverns—ravines—beetling cliffs—leading the way to every point of peril, in the phrenzy of grief and disease.

The second night drew on, with one of those sudden storms of sleet and snow, which sometimes chill the hopes of the young spring. Then was a sadder sight—a woman with attenuated form, flying she did not know whither, and continually exclaiming, 'My children! my children!' It was fearful to see a creature so deadly pale, with the darkness of midnight about her. She heeded no advice to take care of herself, nor persuasion to return to her home.

'They call me! Let me go! I will lay them in their bed myself. How cold their feet are. What! Is Jane singing her nightly hymn without me? No! no! she cries some evil serpent has stung her;' and shrieking wildly, the poor mother disappeared, like a haunted deer, in the depths of the forest.

Oh! might she but have wrapped them in her arms, as they shivered in their dismal recess, under the roots of a tree uptorn by some wintry tempest! Yet, how could she imagine the spot where they lay, or believe that those little wearied limbs had borne them, through bog and bramble, more than six miles from the paternal door? In the niche which we have mentioned, a faint moaning sound might still be heard.

'Sister, do not tell me that we shall never see the baby any more. I see it now! and Thomas, too! dear Thomas! Why do they say he died and was buried? He is close by me, just above my head. There are many more babies with him—a host. They glide by me as if they had wings. They look warm and happy. I should be glad to be with them, and join their beautiful plays. But, oh! how cold I am, cover me close, Mary. Take my head into your bosom.'

'Pray do not go to sleep, quite yet, dear Jane. I want to hear your voice and talk with you. It is so very sad to be waking here alone. If I could but see your face when you are asleep it would be a comfort. But it is so dark, *so dark!*'

Rousing herself with difficulty, she unties her apron, and spreads it over the head of the child, to protect it from the driving snow; she pillows the cold cheek on her breast, and grasps more firmly the benumbed hand by which she had so faithfully led her, through all their terrible pilgrimage. There they are! One moves not. The other keeps vigil, feebly giving utterance at intervals, to a low, suffocating spasm from a throat dried with hunger. Once more she leans upon her elbow, to look on the face of the little one, for whom, as a mother, she has cared. With love as strong as death, she comforts herself that her sister slumbers calmly, because the strokes of the destroyer has silenced her sobbings.

Ah! why came ye not hither, torches that gleam through the wilderness, and men who shout to each other? why came ye not this way? See! they plunge into morasses, they cut their way through tangled thickets, they ford waters, they ascend mountains, they explore forests—but the lost are not found!

The third and fourth nights come and depart. Still the woods are filled with eager searchers. Sympathy has gathered them from remote settlements. Every log-cabin sends forth what it can spare for this work of pity and of sorrow. They cross each other's track. Incessantly they interrogate and reply, but in vain. The lost are not found!

In her mournful dwelling the mother sat motionless. Her infant was upon her lap. The strong duty to succour its helplessness, grappled with the might of grief and prevailed. Her eyes were rivetted upon its brow. No sound passed her white lips. Pitying women from distant habitations, gathered around and wept for her. They even essayed some words of consolation. But she answered nothing. She looked not towards them. She had no ear for human voices. In her soul was the perpetuated cry of the lost. Nothing overpowered it but the wail of her living babe. She ministered to its necessities, and that Heaven-inspired impulse saved her. She had no longer any hope for those who had wandered away. Horrid images were in her fancy—the ravening beasts—black pits of stagnant water—birds of fierce beak—venomous, coiling snakes. She bowed herself down to them, and travailed as in the birth-hour, fearfully, and in silence. But the helpless babe on her bosom, touched an electric cord and saved her from despair. Maternal love, with its pillar of cloud and flame, guided her through the desert, that she perished not.

Sunday came, and the search was unabated. It seemed only marked by a deeper tinge of melancholy. The most serious felt it fitting to go forth at that sacred season to seek the lost, though not, like their Master, girded with the power to save. Parents remembered that it might have been their own little ones who had thus strayed from the fold, and their gratitude took a portion of the mourners' spirit into their hearts. Even the sad hope of gathering the dead for the sepulchre, the sole hope that now sustained their toil, began to fade into doubt. As they climbed over huge trees, which the winds of winter had prostrated, or forced their way among rending brambles, sharp rocks and close-woven branches, they marvelled how such fragile forms could have endured hardships by which the vigor of manhood was impeded and perplexed.

The echo of a gun rang suddenly through the forest. It was repeated. Hill to hill bore the thrilling message. It was the concerted signal that their anxieties were ended. The hurrying seekers followed its sound. From a commanding cliff a white flag was seen to float. It was the herald that the lost were found.

There they were, near the base of a wooded hillock, half cradled among the roots of an uptorn chestnut. There they lay cheek to cheek, hand clasped in hand. The blasts had mingled in one mesh their dishevelled locks, for they had left home with their poor heads uncovered. The youngest had passed away in sleep. There was no contortion on her brow, though her features were sunk and sharpened by famine.

The elder had borne a deeper and longer anguish. Her eyes were open as though she had watched till death came; watched over that little one, for whom, through those days and nights of terror, she had cared and sorrowed like a mother. Strong and rugged men shed tears when they saw she had rapped her in her own scanty apron, and striven with embracing arms to preserve the warmth of vitality, even after the cherished spirit had fled away. The glazed eyeballs were strained as if, to the last, they had beeen gazing for her father's roof, or the wreath of smoke that should guide her there.

Sweet sisterly love! so patient in all adversity, so faithful unto the end, found it not a father's house where it might enter with the little one, and be sundered no more? Found it not a fold whence no lamb can enter and be lost? a mansion where there is no death, neither sorrow nor crying? Forgot it not all its sufferings for joy at that dear Redeemer's welcome, which, in its cradle, it had been taught to lisp—'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

NELSON AND HUMAN NATURE.

Human nature is very frail. No man had ever a stronger sense of it under the influence of a sense of justice, than Lord Nelson. He was loth to inflict punishment, and when he was obliged, as he called it, 'to endure the torture of seeing men flogged,' he came out of his cabin with a hurried step, ran into the gangway, made his bow to the general, and reading the articles of war the culprit had infringed, said, 'Boatswain do your duty.' The lash was instantly applied, and, consequently, the sufferer exclaimed, 'Forgive me, Admiral, forgive me!' On such an occasion Lord Nelson would look around with wild anxiety, and, as all his officers kept silence, he would say, 'What, none of you speak for him! avast! cast him off!' and then add to the suffering culprit, 'Jack! in the day of battle remember me!' and he became a good fellow in future.

A poor man was about to be flogged, a landsman, and few pitied him. His offence was drunkenness. He was being tied up; a lovely girl, contrary to all rules, rushed through the officers, and falling on her knees, clasped Nelson's, in which were the articles of war, exclaiming, 'Pray forgive him, your honor, he shall never offend again.'

'Your face,' said the admiral, 'is a security for his good behavior. Let him go; the fellow cannot be bad who has such a lovely creature in his care.'

The man rose to be a lieutenant.

GRATITUDE.

About a century ago, an actor celebrated for mimicry, was to have been employed by a comic author, to take off the person, the manner, and the singularly awkward delivery of the celebrated Doctor Woodward, who was intended to be introduced on the stage in a laughable character. The mimic dressed himself as a countryman, and waited on the doctor with a long catologue of ailments, which he said afflicted his wife. The physician heard with amazement, diseases and pains of the most opposite nature, repeated and redoubled on the wretched patient. At length, being become completely master of his errand, the actor drew from his purse a guinea, and with a scrape, made an uncouth offer of it. 'Put up thy money, poor fellow,' cried the doctor, 'put up thy money. Thou hast need of all thy cash and all thy patience too, with such a bundle of diseases tied to thy back.'—The actor returned to his employer, and recounted the whole conversation, with such true feeling of the physicians's character, that the author screamed with approbation. His raptures were soon checked, for the mimic told him, with the emphasis of sensibility, 'that he would sooner die than prostitute his talent to the rendering such genuine humanity a public laughing-stock.'

FALLING STARS.

What we commonly call a 'falling star,' is believed by the Arab to be a dart, launched by the Almighty at an evil genius; and, on beholding one, they exclaim, 'May God transfix the enemy of the faith!'

From Hogg's Instructor.

PARLIAMENTARY SKETCHES.

THE MINISTERIAL BENCH.

Continued.

There are few subjects of curiosity more interesting, as well as more rational, than the desire so generally manifested to know something about our legislators—to gain some idea of the personal habits and the mental idiosyncrasies of the more prominent among them, as well as to be able to form some notion of the circumstances under which their eloquence is employed. To gratify this curiosity will be the object of this and the succeeding papers.

The House of Commons, which, though the third estate in the realm, is at the present day first in importance of the two legislative assemblies, meets in a hall which, though convenient enough for their deliberations, is not distinguished by much that is striking to the eye of the spectator, nor is it hallowed by the recollection of old historical associations. It is not the house that witnessed the eloquence or the courage of the older heroes of our Commonwealth. It was not here that Pym harangued the resolute Puritans, or Falkland cheered the courage of the outnumbered Cavaliers—not here that the elder Pitt thundered, or Burke wearied his tasteless auditors with those speeches that have since become immortal. This was not the arena where those mighty athletæ, Pitt and Fox, engaged together in those intellectual wrestlings, the fame of which yet rings through England. Everybody knows that the old houses of Parliament were burned down after the passing of the Reform Bill—a fate which seemed as if there was a providence in it, that the old house should not survive the old constitution; and though new houses of Parliament were commenced soon after, yet even now, at the distance of twelve or fourteen years, the work is still in hands. The House of Lords, indeed, have taken possession of their chamber in the new building, all radiant with paint and tinsel; but the Commons are still accommodated in a chamber formed out of the wreck of the old building. It is, however, fitted up in a commodious manner, without any attempt at splendour or show, but with that attention to comfort which is the special characteristic of Englishmen. In the centre of the floor, at one end of the hall, stands the speaker's chair, overshadowed by a large canopy, giving it somewhat the appearance of a throne, and immediately in front of him is the table at which sit the clerks of the house, and on which lies that magic symbol of the dignity of the house, the mace. On either hand of the speaker, tiers of benches, rising one above the other, run down the length of the hall. These tiers are four in number on each side, and they are divided in the centre by a passage, for convenience of access to those in the back tier. The front bench, immediately on the speaker's right hand, is occupied by those members of the government who have seats in the house, their friends range themselves, of course, behind them, and hence the benches on the right of the chair are usually denominated the ministerial benches. Such is their general designation; but it is to be observed that there is a division even here, which, in these times when the old political landmarks are broken up, may become of more importance than it has yet assumed. The division or gap in the benches has already been noticed. It is technically called the 'gangway;' and the fact that a member takes his seat below this division, rather than above it, is generally understood to mean that he is not in all respects a warm supporter of the ministerial party. Nay, more. When a member of the government differs from his colleagues, and finds himself compelled to secede from the ministry, if the difference is not so marked and irreconcileable as to drive him into opposition at once, he generally takes his seat below the 'gangway.' In this respect the House of Commons is inferior in arrangement to the House of Lords, who have provided 'cross-benches' for the convenience of those noble lords who do not wish to commit themselves either to the party in power or to that in opposition; for though there are cross-benches in the House of Commons—that is to say, certain seats arranged across the breadth of the house at the end of the hall, opposite the speaker—yet these are so distant that they are never occupied except when the house is full, which seldom happens, or when two honorable members wish to enjoy a quiet chat with each other, undisturbed by the interruptions they are constantly exposed to in the seats usually occupied. It may be, after all, that the want of cross-benches in the Commons is owing to the more decided tone of politics that each member must profess. It may be all very well for a hereditary legislator to affect or to feel an indifference towards party politics; but a member of the Commons, who owes his seat to the people, must feel with the people; and whether he incline to the one party or the other, his voice must give no uncertain sound.

On the speaker's left hand are ranged, in the same order as on the right, what are called the opposition benches. Here, too, we have the central division; but in this case it is merely for personal convenience. It serves no purpose of political demarcation, as on the opposite side. Not that there are not similar subdivisions of principle or of feeling in the opposition as in the ministerial side—indeed, the contrary is notoriously the case; but then opposition presents many advantages for moulding a variety of discordant opinions into a compact mass, and so to act with united effect. Men's minds are various; a practical measure can in all cases only be one; and it therefore stands forth as a fair mark for assault for all who choose to display their criticism, and hundreds can find fault with the measure proposed who