

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

QUITE AN ACCIDENT.

—And thereby hangs a tale.

Once upon a time—in the days of long stages—when mail coaches flourished, and railroads were undreamed of, I had occasion to go from my residence in London to visit a friend in Liverpool. I, the speaker, or writer, be it known unto you, respected reader, am at the present time a somewhat stout, grey-haired old man, with sufficient of this world's goods to command the good opinion of my neighbors, and sufficient health and occupation of mind to be no burden upon my family. At the time of which I am about to speak, I was a very different sort of person. Different indeed! As the great Coleridge (the sweetest, subtlest, and most musical of modern poets) sings:—

'When I was young? Ah! woful when!
Ah, for the change twixt now and then!

This breathing house, not built by hands,
This body, that does me grievous wrong,

O'er airy cliffs and glittering sands
How lightly then it flashed along!

Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore
On winding lake and rivers wide,
That ask no aid of sail or oar,

That fear no spite of wind or tide,
Nought cared this body for wind or weather
When youth and I liv'd in't together.

It is not an easy thing to stop oneself when once set a going on this exquisitely varied stream of verse. A few lines more you must let me quote, good reader, because they indicate the feeling which has prompted me to recall a certain little accident which befel me in my youth—that period which I sometimes persuade myself has not quite gone, and never can quite go from me:—

'O, youth, for years so many and sweet,
'Tis known that thou and I wert one;
I'll think it but a fond conceit—
It cannot be that thou art gone!

The vesper-bell hath not yet tolled,
And thou wert aye a masker bold!
What strange disguise hast now put on,
To make believe that thou art gone?

I see these locks in silvery slips,
This drooping gait, this altered size;
But spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,
And tears take sunshine from thy eyes!

Life's but thought: so think I will
That youth and I are housemates still!

Yes, yes!—its all true enough, Mr. Samuel Taylor Coleridge—all that you say about the 'silvery slips,' and the 'drooping gait,' and the 'altered size.' But is a greater truth that other—'Life is but thought.'

'So think I will
That youth and I are house-mates still.'

And what thoughts so efficacious to recall youth, and youth's glorious crown, as those involved in the recollection of adventure which I am about to record, and which is engraven on my memory with the distinctness of a daguerreotype picture.

I had just begun to practise as a surgeon; I was thirty years of age; single, disengaged, in love with no woman, and I never had really loved any: I had 'no such stuff in my thoughts.' How that happened I am not curious about: suffice it to say, I could sing with truth—

'My heart's my own—my will is free!

Yet I was certainly not heartless, or insusceptible; but then I had very high and refined notions about women. Some people may consider such notions fantastic or foolish: one thing is sure—true or false, they are strong safeguards against the lower vices among men.

On the morning of the 20th of July, 18—, having secured a place in the coach on the preceding evening, I did what all physicians would say was right—I rose very early; but it was upon compulsion, I confess. Again, I did what they would all declare to be wrong—I bolted my breakfast, and then ran as fast as I could afterwards to Lead-lane. Alas, fair Swan with the double allowance of serpentine Neck, how art thou now fallen from thy glory! The railways are compelling thee to sing thy last song! At the time to which I now advert thou wert gay and lively, and proud to send out thy morning coaches. I arrived just in time; for the coachman, reins in hand, was issuing final orders in a commanding tone to half a dozen helpers, whilst the guard's bugle sent forth a warning note to belated travellers like myself.

'Just a goin to start, sir,' shouted the driver.

In I got. 'All right!' quoth the guard; and in another minute we were rattling away at a rapid pace over the stones. Yes, I got in—and much to my discomfiture, too; for I loathed riding inside a long stage. But there was no help for it on the present occasion. I was obliged to go to Liverpool on that day, all the outside places were taken when I went to the office to book mine. Having exercised the Englishman's privilege of grumbling to my heart's content on the previous evening, I had taken a fit of good sense in the morning; and, being doubtless assisted by the brightness of the weather, I was now prepared to use a proverb in my own behalf, and 'make the best of a bad matter.'

This said coach was licensed to carry six inside passengers, and when I entered the number was completed. My attention was soon turned to my fellow-prisoners, or, as they were more commonly called, fellow-passen-

gers. The first my eye rested on was my *vis-a-vis*. He was a middle aged gentleman—a merchant, I guessed, from the speculative, lofty, trading air with which he regarded me, and seemed to settle in his own mind what I was worth. There could be no doubt that he was well-to-do in the world, from the superior quality of his coat, the fineness and whiteness of his linen, and the undisturbed complacency of his countenance. I fancy he must have been a handsome fellow in his youth; moreover, he might be accounted an excellent dresser. His whiskers were in trim order, his hair was abundant, and had very little grey in it; also, if I were not deceived, it smelt of Macassar Oil. His waistcoat, though but very little seen, was of an excellent fancy; and the diamond ring on his little finger, was highly desirable. In short, he was a man who loved the world, and was beloved by it in return. He was, probably, a Conservative; for he held the John Bull in his hand, and had the last number of Blackwood upon his knee.

Having satisfied my curiosity in that quarter, I proceeded to do the same with regard to his next neighbor, a young lady whom, at the first glance, I perceived to be his daughter. The likeness between them was striking. I could have taken an oath that she had been educated in a fashionable seminary in or near London; and that she had not forgotten one thing she learned there, viz., a contempt for all things vulgar. Indeed, she showed how well she had been trained in that respect by the supercilious look which she cast round on the rest of the party, and on the fittings up of the vehicle—which last were a little faded, I remember. A slight circumstance confirmed the tale which the expression of her face told. A rather shabbily-dressed girl, who sat next her, on the other side, happened to make a slight movement which brought them closer together; upon this the young lady betrayed signs of uneasiness, and with an air of displeasure drew her silken robe closer round her, that it might be contaminated as little as possible by contact with one of meaner pretensions. Throughout the journey she took no part in the conversation, though she occasionally spoke to her father. The cities, towns and villages through which we passed seemed to have no interest for her; and her pretty head (for she was pretty) never approached the window, except when her father informed her that 'that seat belonged to Lord So-and-So,' when she would lean forward and strain her really beautiful eyes to distinguish the distant object; and then she would ask some questions about his lordship, in a soft mincing tone. Of course, to her, Birmingham was a dirty, vulgar place; and what was worse, all beautiful scenery was lost upon her. She seemed to think with Charles Matthews, professor of the *vil admirari*, who used to say, 'People make so much fuss about everything! I have been everywhere; and for my part, I don't see anything in anything!' A very different sort of person was her *vis-a-vis* and my next neighbor. He was as much too excitable as the lady was too indifferent. He was an old man—upwards of sixty—short, bony, wiry, active, and likely to live twenty years longer. He had the sharp, quick glance which a constant habit of constant employment and contact with men generally gives. There was smallness, too, about the intelligence of the man which indicated that it had been confined to the cognizance of trifles and details. I thought he looked like a London shopkeeper, and in less than ten minutes I discovered that my supposition was correct; for, as I was endeavoring to find a place for my hat under the seat, he took it from me, saying, 'Allow me, sir; here's room for your hat here.' Then he added, smiling, 'you must be a good customer to our trade, sir; if you 'andle all your 'ats in that way, sir. It does them a good deal of 'arm, pushin' and rammin' anywhere like that. I'm 'atter, sir; allow me to give you a card—' Castor, 210, Ludgate-hill.' There was no impertinence in the old man's manner: he had considered it his duty to have an eye to business all his life, and he saw no reason why he should not do so inside a mail coach. I took his card good-naturedly and put it into my waistcoat pocket; and as I did so, I caught the eye of an old gentleman who sat on the other side of my friend, the latter, and who was leaning forward to look at me. He was a singular-looking being; but there was no mistaking him for anything but a gentleman. He was tall and thin, and there was something military in his carriage. His coat was old-fashioned, and rather shabby; but the stick on which his hand rested had a gold head, curiously wrought, and his gloves were of the best make, and new. These two trifles, as well as the settled ease and content of his manner made me judge that it was not poverty that compelled him to wear a shabby coat: it looked like a whimsical attachment to an old garment that Cæsar himself might have indulged in. The bright blue eyes were fixed upon me with a half smile, as I endeavored to receive the inopportune attentions of Mr. Castor with civility; and I admired the refined, thoughtful look of the cleanly shaved healthy-looking face. He soon settled back into his corner, and I began to examine the person who sat next to him. It was the girl whose movement had given offence to the young lady. She was plainly dressed in that sort of mixture of colors—white, black, and grey—which ladies call half mourning. She was not at all pretty, I thought, during this scrutiny; for it was clear that she had no pretensions to regularity of feature or to fineness and brilliancy of complexion, and there seemed to be nothing remarkable in the expression. It was just an ordinary face—such as you might see by hundreds any day in Oxford street, I thought. She seemed to me

about three or four-and-twenty, and had the air of a well-bred woman. She held a book in her hand.

I had ceased my observations; and having taken a book out of my pocket, was reading as attentively as the motion of the coach would permit, when my attention was attracted by an observation made by the old gentleman—'You have the favorite book of my boyhood there, I see.' I looked up in astonishment at the singular taste of his early years—I was reading a treatise on Comparative Anatomy. On looking up I perceived that I had made two mistakes: the old gentleman had not addressed me, and the girl in half mourning had something extremely pleasing in her countenance; her smile was beautiful—a happy union of intelligence and gentleness. Her voice also was very agreeable, as she replied:

'I suppose there are very few boys with whom it is not a favorite. This is a new edition. Perhaps you would like to look at it?' and she handed it to the old gentleman.

He put it back courteously but decidedly, with something between a smile and a sigh: 'No—no, my dear young lady, I would rather not look at any new edition. It is a better one than the old, I daresay: it has engravings of a good quality. I perceive it is not like my old one—the memory of that is better to me than the finest new edition. I would rather talk about Robinson Crusoe, than read any improved and illustrated edition—that is only fit for the new and illustrious race of boys who are springing up in these days. Is that copy—for it looks new—intended as a present to some fortunate urchin?'

She smiled without the least affectation, and replied, 'Yes: it is intended as a gift to my brother, who is just eleven year of age.'

I, too, had been an enthusiastic admirer of the indefatigable Robinson Crusoe, and of his industry and ingenuity; and so I ventured to say a word in favor of the book.

'You are right, sir,' replied the old gentleman. 'It would be worth living through half a weary life again for the pure pleasure of being a boy once more, and living a month or six months, in imagination, with Robinson on his island.'

'As I never was a boy,' said the lady, 'that may be the reason the book never gave me so much delight as it seems to have given you. It always riveted my attention, and it does so still, but it does not satisfy me.'

'Why! what is there to find fault with in the book? What is there that you do not like in it?' asked the old gentleman, somewhat angrily, as if she had attacked the character of his dearest friend.

The girl colored slightly, but replied in a gentle, though firm voice: 'It is not so much the presence of anything I don't like, as the absence of something which I do like. Is not the character of Robinson very selfish and hard? The whole of his arduous duties are undertaken to make himself comfortable. His heart is never sick yearning after the dear ones at home. His father and mother do not form important objects of his thoughts. He longs for a companion, it is true, because he finds solitude tedious, and because he wants assistance in his work—not because there is a void in his affections which he wants to have filled up. As soon as he does get a companion, he makes a servant of him. He takes good care that Friday shall treat him with distant respect. Like kings, Robinson has no friend; and unlike most kings, he never seems to feel the want of one.'

'Why, young lady, you are quite eloquent! That is a woman's view of the subject. I suppose, now, you would have admired Robinson more had he been constantly mourning and longing for a wife and children?' said the old gentleman with a pleased, but half comic expression of countenance.

'I think it is most likely that I should,' she replied, a little embarrassed; but with such sweet temper in her smile that I began to think her lovely. 'Besides,' she added, 'it is not a mere woman's view of the case. I met the other day with my own sentiments on this subject admirably expressed by an author whose taste in books and estimate of human nature in its ordinary phases is worth something.'

'And who is that?' enquired the old gentleman.

'Leigh Hunt.'

'I doubt his judgment of human nature. I have lived much longer in the world than he has.'

'But do you doubt his opinion in this matter? I asked. Do you not think that this feeling (for it is more feeling than thought) expressed so well by this lady, is a just one? It never struck me before, but it seems to me to be perfectly true. I have never read Robinson Crusoe since I was a boy; and a boy is not likely to detect a want of feeling or a want of higher motive than selfishness for the interesting details of labor in that marvellous life. But I think it probable that if Defoe had endowed his hero with an affectionate nature, he would have been of much more benefit to the moral nature of English boys than he has been; and that is saying a great deal—for the reading of this book produces incalculable effects in the way of rousing energy and perseverance among children.'

The old gentleman seemed pleased to converse; and we glided from Robinson Crusoe to real narratives of voyages and shipwrecks. In this talk the lady took part occasionally, but she seemed to enjoy listening most. As we two gentlemen possessed a considerable stock of information on these extensive subjects, we passed the time very agreeably. Marco Polo, Mandeville, Drake, Hawkins, Frobisher, Columbus, Vasques, de Gama, Ma-

gellan, Behring, Byron, Anson, Cook, and later navigators, especially those engaged in discovering the north-west passage. There is nothing like mutual interest in a subject of art or literature for bringing into intimacy. In the course of an hour, the old gentleman, who had it seemed collected a Library of voyages, and travels, in various languages, had promised to lend me one or two rare works, and I had given him my card.

'Are you going to remain long in Liverpool?' he enquired, as he looked at it.

'Three days,' I answered.

'Do you intend to return by this coach to town?'

'Yes.'

'Then I will leave the books packed up and left for you with the landlord of the Crown, at W—, where the coach always stops; and then you can carry them off with you on your return. You can send them to my house in town when you have done with them. I will send the address with the books; and, perhaps you will come and see me, and tell me what you think of them.'

I thanked him, and said I should be happy to do so.

(To be continued.)

From Hogg's Instructor.

HOPES OF EARTHLY HAPPINESS.

It was a lovely summer day, the sun shone brightly, and the sky was of a deep blue, and all below was joy and gladness; the songs of the birds mingled with the music of the brooks, with the hum of the honey laden bees, and with the gentle rustle of the soft wind, carrying upon it the sweet breath of the honeysuckle and the rose. Amid all this beauty and gladness and beauty, a little boy was seen playing in a meadow which was covered all over with buttercups, primroses and gowans. But the child did not seem pleased; his restless and uncertain steps showed that he wanted something more to make him happy, but what that was he could not tell. As he grew still more unhappy he saw a large butterfly, whose beautiful wings glittered with sparkling gems. No sooner had his eye lighted upon it than he uttered a cry of joy, for he thought he had now discovered what his soul longed for. For a moment he gazed with delight on the gorgeous insect, and as its sparkling wings dazzled in the sunbeams, he bounded forward that he might seize it. The butterfly was not to be so easily caught: it spread its speckled wings, alighted on another and more distant flower, and the child followed. And thus did it weary him, now flying and now alighting on some tall flower, as if waiting to be taken, but as the eager boy stretched out his hand, certain of making all its beauties his own, it was suddenly up and away! The child continued to follow it with urgent haste and parted lips, and glistening eyes, and growing keener and keener in the chase; for, thought he, could I but make this beautiful butterfly my own, oh how happy I should be! At last when almost wearied he caught the insect; and in his fear lest it should again fly from him, he rudely pressed it in his hands. And now, having gained his utmost wish, everjoyed, he sat down on a bank of primroses and violets, that at leisure he might examine the really beautiful thing he had caught. But, alas, when he opened his hand, all his hopes were disappointed, and all his labor lost, for the sparkling creature he had so wearied himself in catching, was only an ugly worm, whose gilded beauties soiled his hand. Disgusted, the disappointed child flung it away, and wept himself to sleep.

A burning sun is glowing upon the scorched sands of Africa, and a footsore and weary traveller is crossing that silent region of desolation and death. His supply of water has been for some time at an end, and now with a parched mouth and burning thirst he seeks water. Water! All he has in the world he now gladly exchange for one cooling draught, that the intense agony of his awful thirst might be appeased. And now as his fatigue and torture make even death desired, there suddenly rise up before him the orange tree laden with its golden fruit, the tall palm, and the graceful acacia, and the ground, far as his ravished eye can reach, is carpeted over with a covering of the freshest verdure, and through the delightful landscape there flows a limped stream of living water, and its murmurs, as it glides over its pebbly channel makes sweet music in his ears. He rushes forward that he may plunge into the stream and live. But, lo! as he thus hurries on, this Canaan of his soul flies before him! and yet, as his eyes and his ears could not have detected him, still does he pursue the flying Eden, and still does it mock his pursuit. And now, with the fierce sun glaring upon him, trembling with fatigue, with bloodshot eyes, his tongue on fire, and a bursting heart, the victim of despair, he throws himself down to die. Alas, foolish traveller, thou hast been chasing the shadowy mirage of the desert, for no graceful trees, no shady glades, no enamelled meads or silvery brooks were there.

And thus, dear children, does it happen to every one who expects to find happiness in the things of this vain world. Like the child chasing the butterfly, earthly happiness is beautiful and desirable only so long as it is in the distance; or, like the weary, baffled dying traveller chasing the mirage of the wilderness, it can never be overtaken.

Some sets of harness lately ordered in Paris for the Pacha of Egypt's state carriage, are covered with diamonds to the value of some hundred thousand francs.