

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A POLICE OFFICER.

THE WIDOW.

Mrs Grey was alone in the front apartment of the ground floor, and received me with much politeness. She had, I saw, been weeping; her eyes were swollen and bloodshot; and she was deadly pale; but I looked in vain for any indication of that utter desolation which a woman like her, condemned to such a sacrifice, might naturally be supposed to feel. I felt greatly embarrassed as to how to begin; but at length I plunged boldly into the matter; assured her she was cruelly deceived by Gates, who was in no condition to provide for her and her son in even tolerable comfort; and that I was convinced he had no other than a mercenary and detestable motive in seeking marriage with her. Mrs Grey heard me in so totally unmoved a manner, and the feeling that I was really meddling with things that did not concern me, grew upon me so rapidly, as I spoke to that unanswerable countenance, that by the time I had finished my eloquent harangue, I was in a perfect fever of embarrassment and confusion, and very heartily wished myself out of the place. To my further bewilderment, Mrs Grey, when I had quite concluded, informed me—in consideration, she said, of the courtesies I had shown her when we were fellow travellers—that she was perfectly aware Mr Gates' motive in marrying her was purely a mercenary one; and her own in consenting to the union, except as regarded her son, was she admitted, scarcely better. She added—riddle upon riddles—that she knew also that Mr Gates was very poor—in solvent, she understood. I rose mechanically to my feet, with a confused notion swimming in my head that both of us at all events could not be in our right senses. This feeling must have been visible upon my face; for Mrs Grey added with a half-smile, "You cannot reconcile these apparent contradictions; be patient; you will perfectly comprehend them before long. But as I wish not to stand too low in your estimation, I must tell you that Mr Gates is to subscribe a written agreement that we separate the instant the ceremony has been performed. But for that undertaking, I would have suffered any extremity, death itself, rather than have consented to marry him!"

Still confused, stunned, as it were, by what I had heard, my hand was on the handle of the door, when a thought arose in my mind. "Is it possible, Mrs Grey, I said, 'that you can have been deceived into a belief that such promise, however formally set down, is of the slightest legal value? that the law recognises, or would enforce an instrument to render nugatory the solemn obligation you will after signing it, make, to love, honor obey, and cherish your husband?' I had found the right cord at last. Mrs Grey, as I spoke, became deadly pale; and had she not caught at one of the heavy chairs, she would have been unable to support herself.

"Do I understand you to say," she faintly and brokenly gasped, "that such an agreement as I have indicated, duly sealed and witnessed, could not be summarily enforced by a magistrate?"

"Certainly it could not, my dear madame, and well Gates knows it to be so; and I am greatly mistaken in the man, if, once the irrevocable ceremony over, he would not be the first to deride your credulity."

"If that be so," exclaimed the unfortunate lady with passionate despair, "I am indeed ruined—lost! Oh my darling boy, would that you and I were sleeping in your father's quiet grave."

"Say not so," I exclaimed with emotion, for I was afflicted by her distress. Honor me with your confidence, and all may yet be well."

After much entreaty, she despairingly complied. The substance of her story, which was broken by frequent outbursts of grief and lamentation, was as follows:

She was the only child of a London merchant—Mr Walton we will call him—who had lived beyond his means, and failed ruinously to an immense amount. His spirits and health were broken by this event, which he survived only a few months. It happened that about the time of the bankruptcy, she had become acquainted with Mr John Grey, the only son of an eminent East India merchant, but a man of penurious disposition and habits.

Mr Ezekiel Grey?

The same. They became attached to each other, deeply so; and knowing that to solicit the elder Grey's consent to their union, would be tantamount to a sentence of immediate separation and estrangement, they unwisely, thoughtlessly, married, about ten months after Mr Walton's death, without the elder Grey's knowledge. Gates, an attorney, then in apparently fair circumstances, with whom young Grey had some acquaintance, and Anne Crawford, Maria Walton's servant, were the witnesses of the ceremony, which, after due publication of banns, was celebrated in St. Giles's Church. The young couple, after the marriage, lived in the strictest privacy, the wife meagerly supported by the pocket-money allowance of Mr Ezekiel Grey to his son. Thus painfully elapsed nine years of life, when, about twelve months previous to the present time, Mr Grey determined to send his son to Bombay, in order to the arrange-

ment of some complicated claims on a house of agency there. It was decided that during her husband's absence, Mrs John Grey should reside in Guernsey, partly with a view of economy, and partly for a change of air, which it was said their son required—Mr Gates to be the medium through which money and letters were to reach the wife. Mr Ezekiel Grey died somewhat suddenly about four months after his son's departure from England, and Mrs Grey had been in momentary expectation of the arrival of her husband, when Gates came to Guernsey, and announced his death at Bombay, just as he was preparing for the voyage to England! The manner of Gates was strange and insolent; and he plainly intimated that without his assistance both herself and child would be beggars; and that assistance, he audaciously declared, he would only afford at the price of marriage. Mrs Grey, overwhelmed with grief for the loss of a husband by whom she had been as constantly as tenderly beloved, and dizzy with ill-defined apprehension, she started at once for London. A copy of the will of Mr Ezekiel Grey had been procured, by which in effect he devised all his estate, real and personal, to his son; but in the event of Mr John Grey dying unmarried, or without lawful issue, it went to his wife's nephew, Mr Skelton—

Skelton of Knightsbridge?

Yes: in case of Mr John Grey marrying, Skelton was to be paid an immediate legacy of five thousand pounds.

So far, then, as fortune went, the widow and her son seemed amply provided for. So Mrs Grey thought till she had another interview with Gates, who unblushingly told her that unless she consented to marry him, he would not prove, though he had abundant means of doing so, that the person she had married at St. Giles's church was the son of Ezekiel Grey, the eminent merchant.

"The name," said the scoundrel, "will not do; there are plenty of John Greys on that Register; and as for Anne Crawford, she had been long since dead."

Mrs Grey next called on Mr Skelton, and was turned out of the house as an impostor; and finally, having parted with everything on which she could raise money, and Gates reiterating his offer, or demand rather, accompanied by the proposal of an immediate separation, she had consented.

"Courage, madame!" I exclaimed at the end of her narrative, of which the above is the substance, and I spoke in a tone of joyous confidence, which, more than my words, reassured her: "I already see glimpses of daylight through this maze of villany. Gates has played a desperate game, certainly, but one which we shall, you may rely on it, easily baffle." A knock at the door interrupted me: I peered through the blind, and saw that it was Gates: "Silence, secrecy!" I emphatically urged in a low voice, and with my finger on my lip, and left the room before the street door could be answered; and by my friend Roberts' contrivance, I was in a few minutes afterwards in the street, all the time unobserved by the intruder.

The next day early, Jackson called on me. He had seen Rivers, but he seemed to know nothing, except, indeed, that it was quite true Gates had received a five hundred pound draft from a house in India, which he, Rivers, had got notes for at the Bank of England. There were also in the same parcel a gold watch, he knew, and some jewelry, but from whom it all came, he, Rivers, was ignorant. Nothing but that had Jackson been able to discover.

"Call you that nothing?" said I, starting up, and hastily swallowing my last cup of coffee. "It is enough, at all events, to transport William Gates, Esquire!"

I had to wait that morning on especial business on the commissioner; and after the business upon which I had been summoned had been despatched, I related the case of Grey versus Gates as clearly and succinctly as I could. He listened with great attention, and in about a quarter of an hour I left him with as clear and unmistakable a path before me as it was possible to desire. I was passing down the stairs when I was re-summoned.

"You quite understand, Waters, that Skelton is not for a moment to be lost sight of till his disposition has been taken?"

Certainly, sir.

That will do then.

Arrived at home, I despatched my wife in a cab for Mrs Grey. She soon arrived, and as much as was necessary of our plan I confided to her. Mr Gates had pressed her earnestly that the ceremony should take place on the following morning. By my directions she now wrote, although her trembling fingers made an almost unintelligible scrawl of it, that as it was to be, she agreed to his proposition, and should expect him at nine o'clock.

Two hours afterwards, Jackson and I, having previously watched the gentleman home, knocked at Mr Skelton's house, Knightsbridge, and requested to see him. At the very moment he came out of a side-room, and was proceeding up stairs.

Mr Skelton, said I, stepping forward, "I must have a private interview with you!" He was in an instant as pale as a corpse, and shaking like an aspen—such miserable cowardice does an evil conscience make men—and tottering led the way, without speaking, to a small library.

"You know me, Mr Skelton, and doubtless guess the meaning of my errand?"

He stammered out a denial, which his trembling accents and ashy countenance emphatically denied.

"You and Gates of the Minorities are engaged in a felonious conspiracy to deprive Mrs Grey and her infant son of their property and inheritance!"

Had he been struck by a cannon shot, he could not have fallen more suddenly and helplessly upon the couch by which he was standing.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "what is all this for?"

Perceiving he was quite sufficiently frightened, I said, "There is no wish on Mrs Grey's part to treat you harshly, so that you aid us in convicting Gates. For this purpose you must at once give the numbers of the notes Gates obtained for the cheque, and also the letter in which the agent at Bombay announced its transmission through Gates."

"Yes—he stammered, rising and going to a secretaire. 'There is the letter.'"

I glanced over it. "I am glad to find," I said, "that you did not know by this letter that the money and other articles here enumerated had been sent through the dying husband to his wife through Gates."

"I most solemnly assure you I did not," he eagerly replied; "until—"

"Mr Gates informed you of it, and seduced you to conspire with him. He has been playing a double game. Whilst amusing you, he purposes marrying Mrs Grey to-morrow morning."

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed, "but I suspected—"

"No doubt. In the meantime you will if you please accompany us. There is every desire to spare you," I added, perceiving him hesitate; "but our orders are peremptory." With a very ill grace Mr Skelton complied, and we were rapidly driven off.

The next morning Skelton, Jackson, and myself were in Sherrard Street before daylight. Mrs Grey was already up, and at eight o'clock we sat down with her and her son to an excellent breakfast. She was charmingly dressed in the wedding garments which Gates had purchased with her stolen money, and I almost felt it in my heart to pity the unfortunate bridegroom, rascal as he was, about to be suddenly disappointed of such a bride and fortune! It was very necessary that she should be so arrayed, for, as we had thought quite probable, Rivers called a few minutes past eight with a present of jewelry, and the bride's appearance completely disarmed any suspicion which his master might have entertained.

Breakfast was over: Mrs Grey and her son were seated on a couch in the front room, and we were lying *perdu* in the next apartment, separated only by folding doors, when a coach drew up before the house; a bridegroom's impatient summons thundered at the door; and presently forth stepped Mr Gates resplendently attired, followed by his man Rivers, who was, it appeared, to give the bride away. Mr Gates entered the presence of beautiful Mrs Grey in immense triumph. He approached her with the profoundest gallantry; and was about to speak, when Jackson and I, who had been sedulously watching through the clink of the slightly opened door, advanced into the room, followed by Mr Skelton. His attitude of terror and surprise was one of the most natural performances I ever witnessed. He turned instinctively as if to flee. My grasp was in an instant on his collar.

"The game is up, Gates; I arrest you for felony!"

Felony!

"Aye, truly. For stealing a gold watch, diamond pin, and a cheque for five hundred pounds, sent through you to this lady."

All his insolent swagger vanished in an instant, and the abject scoundrel threw himself at Mrs Grey's feet, and absolutely howled for mercy.

"I will do anything," he gasped; "anything you require, so that you will save me from these men!"

"Where is Crawford?" I asked hoping to take immediate, but not, I hope, unfair advantage of the rascal's terror; she who witnessed this lady's marriage."

"At Leamington, Warwickshire," he replied.

"Very good. Now, Mrs Grey, I shall be obliged if you will leave us. We must search this gentleman, and perhaps— She vanished in an instant; her gentleness of disposition was, I saw, rapidly mastering all resentment. I carried the watch we took out of Gates's pocket to her, and she instantly recognised it to be her husband's. A fifty and a twenty pound bank note, corresponding to the numbers on our list, were extricated from the disappointed bridegroom's pocket book. And now sir, if you please, we will adjourn to your lodgings," said I. A savage scowl was his only reply, not at all discomposing to me, and we were soon busy ransacking his hidden hoards. We found several other articles sent by Mr John Grey to his wife, and three letters to her, which as corroborative evidence, would leave no doubt as to who her husband was. Our next visit was to a police court, where Mr William Gates was fully committed for trial. He was in due time convicted for stealing the watch, and sentenced to transportation for seven years.

Mrs Grey's marriage, and her son's consequent succession to the deceased merchant's wealth, were not disputed. She has never remarried, and now lives in beneficent affluence in one of the new squares beyond the Edgeware road with her son, who, though now six and twenty years of age, or thereabouts, is still unappropriated; but the good time is coming, so at least hinted a few days ago the fashionable "Morning Post."

From the London People's Journal.

COMMON PEOPLE.

In certain societies all persons who live by manual labor, or are not fortunate enough

to be able to keep a fat man-servant in plush breeches, are esteemed and spoken of as 'the common people'; and, with the sort of folk alluded to, any connexion with trading pursuits, however slight and distant, is voted *mem. con.* to be low and 'vulgar,' except when accompanied by great riches. Half a century since, these notions were much more general than now, and descended through all grades of life, from the duchess who looked upon the merchants' fair daughter as a *parvenu*, to the suburban tailor's wife, who considered her washerwoman a 'low person.' In our day, thanks to the spread of liberal opinions, the universality of the term 'people' has come to be slowly and reluctantly acknowledged, and may, at last, be said to include the rich as well as the poor; the lord as well as the dustman; the great capitalist who lives in Belgravia as well as the miserable weaver who vegetates in a court in Spitalfields.

But with the educated and the thoughtful only has this concession been made, for even now with a large body of her Majesty's loving subjects—the well dressed and poorly taught—the phrase 'common people' includes all those of scantily furnished purses and laborious occupations. That it should be so, is sincerely to be lamented; but that it is, is patent to the world.

The sort of bigotry alluded to, like bigotry of another and more dangerous character, particularly affects the proud of purse, the ignorant, and the pretending—the last two characteristics by the way, being generally coupled.

The writers of the last century appear to have considered the rich and well-to-do their only audience, and talk of the 'common people' with a smug complacency that is quite amusing now. Even the learned Doctor Johnson could not resist the prevailing weakness; for, besides constant reference to the uneducated and the hard working as the 'common people,' he gratuitously insults the million by defining the word 'vulgar' as 'the common or lower people,' and by wilfully refusing to acknowledge—or, perhaps, not understanding—that the term 'common' meant nothing more than universal after all. 'The great art of life,' says the Doctor, 'is to play for much and to stake but little'; and the authors of his time, very literally followed his pithy advice—for, having only a small audience to address, and never thinking of writing for the improvement or education of the 'common people,' they played for places and pensions, and merely threw down their reputations on the mendacious gaming-board of life! Of the class of writers alluded to, a critic in the 'Edinburgh Review' speaks in a terse and satisfactory manner there is no mistaking. 'Of that generation of authors,' it may be said, 'observes the writer, 'that as poets they had no force or greatness of fancy, no pathos, and no enthusiasm; as philosophers, no comprehensiveness, depth, or originality; they are sagacious, neat, clear and reasonable; but for the most part, cold, timid, and superficial. Writing with infinite good sense and great grace and vivacity—and, above all, writing in a tone that was peculiar to the upper ranks of society, and upon subjects that are almost exclusively interesting to them, they naturally figured as the most accomplished, fashionable, and perfect writers that the world had ever seen; and made the wild luxuriant, and humble sweetness of our earlier authors appear rude and untutored in the comparison.' What wonder, therefore, that, with such teachers, the rich and great hesitated not to consider all who moved in a narrower circle than themselves, essentially the 'common people.' In his 'Representative Men,' Emerson retails a well-worn anecdote—Mr Pope was one day with Sir Godfrey Kneller, the painter, when the nephew of the latter happened to come in. 'Nephew,' said Sir Godfrey, 'you have the honor of seeing the two greatest men in the world.'—'I don't know how great you may be,' said the nephew, who was a trader in slaves on the coast of Africa, 'but I don't like your looks. I've often bought many a man much better than both of you, all muscles and bones, for ten guineas.' Now, if 'common' means vulgar and narrow-minded, then was Sir Godfrey Kneller, in his estimation of himself and his small friend, a very 'common' person indeed.

But, in these our own times, the term 'common' has come to have a narrower signification. Except with the ignorant and the prejudiced, it no longer means the ill-dressed, the poor, and the uneducated exclusively, but it is understood to include in mind, whether rich or poor, the narrow-minded, and the bigoted.

Indeed, the tide, of late, has set in strong the other way; and, with it a certain class of writers, the hard-fisted and the unwashed alone possess the virtues and are your only true nobility. The rich, with them, are avicious, hard-hearted, craven, grinding, fow-souled, and despicable—while the poor are virtuous, long-suffering, noble minded, brave, true, open-handed, and unprejudiced. Without attempting to deny that the poor are virtuous and brave surpassingly—for we know that many are we may just observe, that those writers who flatter the self-love, or pander to the prejudices, the vanities, the ignorances, or the vices of a class, whether that class be rich or poor, are undoubtedly 'common people,' and quite unworthy the noble vocation to which they are called.

But with your gentled people—I have a mortal horror of gentility, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, which does not necessarily mean nobility, or even respectability or virtue, but simply the possession of a certain income, a man-servant, a seat at church, the giving of good dinners to people they don't