

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

FANNY BENTLEY.

A TALE IN SIX CHAPTERS.

Chapter IV.

THE OLD STORY.

'So, then, I am completely cast out into the world!' thought Fanny, as she sat with her hand closed in the rough but honest grasp of Mrs Smith. It was enough for her motherly heart to know that the poor girl was an orphan; and thought of what might be the sufferings of her own dear, self-willed Henryretta, as she called her in such a case.

'There, lie down in the drawing room a bit, dear, and try to get a little sleep; then you can pick something for dinner. Poor thing, obliged to work so hard for such a trifle, and then to be back-bited; and your brother employed to the last moment at night at that old Titley Wilson's, working like a precious galley slave. I haven't patience with the lot of them. There, lie down, dear, in this nice quiet room, and when Henryretta comes home, she shall call you.'

Poor Fanny! her thoughts wandered back to the home of her childhood—the garden with its simple flowers; the tall trees that waved their graceful boughs above the cottage; the window round which the jasmine and clematis twined in loving fragrance; and the room within that seemed never forgotten—was again before her eyes: the faded roses, the thin white fingers, and the dying clasp; the cry that had so startled her from her suffering brother; the chill, the fear for which she could not find a name—all, all rushed upon her heart and crushed it in its desolation. Then the school days—the remembrance of the pang which every year increased, when she fully understood that she had no home: when the holidays came, and other children departed in glee, she had crept to her little bed, and prayed to heaven that it would let her soon be laid in the grave so well remembered. The return of the children with presents and words of love to tell from parent's lips, or kind and gentle friends, was a trial most severe; and she would listen when they played upon the grass, and talked of their future prospects: then would the bright tears gather in her eyes—then would the young heart sicken for the kiss of love—they hurried to their sports, but she, poor child, had sought repose upon the soft, green grass she loved to look on, because it was the covering of her mother's grave! Was it a wonder that her bruised bosom beat to return the love which Bertrand Lee had so often vowed? It is easy for the happy to preach philosophy—easy for those whose path has been of roses, to talk lightly of the rough ground over which their suffering fellow beings are condemned to pass. She dared not think of the present—disgraced, friendless and desolate, how could she hope that he would stoop from the high blessings which fortune had showered upon him to think of her! Her brother, too, when he should hear of her disgrace, what would he suffer? Then what would she do for future support?

'Come along, ducky,' said Mr Smith, accompanying Henrietta, 'come and have some dinner; it will be all right, I tell you.' There was a mischievous twinkle in old Smith's eyes, the very type of his daughter's, and in marvellous contrast to the serious look which he generally wore when in the presence of his 'better half,'—a lurking fun that seemed struggling with propriety to make itself manifest to the world in general.

'Dear sir,' said Fanny, 'don't take any trouble about me, I beg of you, I shall do very well here, and I cannot eat, many thanks to your kindness for the offer.'

'Come down, Fanny, we have a surprise for you; I did not like to bring them up here because I know how you have suffered to-day,' said Henrietta.

'Bring who up?'

'There now, don't go turning red and white like that; if you do I won't tell you anything about it; what if I were to say—I can't do it, pa', you must; she makes me as nervous as herself by looking at me in that strange way.'

'Well, then, Miss Bentley, two gentlemen are in our little back parlor, and wish to see you directly; one of them is your brother William, and the other Mr Bertrand. They seem capital friends, though your brother seems very thin and bad, poor fellow.'

'What is the matter, Fanny?' said Henrietta, as the pale girl sank upon the sofa, cold and senseless, as if that bright moment of her life had stolen sense and existence away together. She imagined the purport of their visit, and the young heart so sorely tried, was no proof against such overwhelming joy. Then, perhaps, they might not have heard of that morning's insult. It was too much: the struggle between hope and fear had overpowered her, weak and exhausted as she was. And when William Bentley and his true friend entered the room, they scarcely knew whether their hopes were not blighted, and that they did not behold her dead.

Chapter V.

JOY AND SORROW.

But thou, thou hast outlived the sweet deceit;
Knowledge hath brought distrust, and at thy feet
World world on world imperial honors pour,

Thy sun bath set, thou could'st believe no more.'

SOME three months after the discharge from Mrs Perks', a bridal party issued from an elegant house in a pretty and foreign looking square near the Hackney road. First came the bridegroom, fashionably dressed, and leaning on his arm the white gloved hand of a merry, smiling young lady, whose heart was brim full of joy, if one might judge from the heightened colour on her cheek, and the full, pouting lips that tried ineffectually to appear provokingly demure. The second couple—a pale, tall young man, bearing on his mild features the hard traces of sorrow, more than age; his figure, slightly bent, and a bright wandering of the large blue eyes told of the first symptoms of incipient consumption. The girl, a fair, bright creature, looking all love and trust as she glanced frequently at Bertrand Lee and Miss Smith, who had reached the gate of the tasteful garden, and were waiting for her first to enter the carriage.

The news of Fanny's intended marriage had been canvassed in every possible phase at the juvenile wardrobe establishment; Mrs Perks of course, retrograding from her previous opinion of Miss Bentley's character, and having no doubt whatever that, for old acquaintance sake, Mrs Lee would honor the Perks' establishment with her first order in the small way. Poor Miss Foster had been taken very ill a few hours after the news arrived, and solicited a day's indulgence at a very newly-discovered aunt's, as the marriage was to take place in London; and on the following morning, Mrs Perks was in a vortex of perspective bridecake, cards, gloves, little long frocks and little cockades, so that she readily consented—without her usual dose of whys or wherefores, ever ready when a favor was required of her.

Helter skelter off ran Miss Foster—after having passed the night previous to the wedding at the home of one of the work-girls—through the jumble of vehicles, omnibusses, cabs, gigs, drays, carts—the drivers looking as serious as if they had the affairs of the world to settle, and not more than twenty minutes allowed them for the undertaking—eyes staring from within, finely illustrating the perplexity of the brains behind them, that were coming to a philosophical resignation, being in momentary expectation of a collision and upset. Through all the scrambling ran Miss Foster, seemingly with the relentless determination of exterminating her prim, formal little body—'hip hi', 'ma'am!' 'halloa!' and 'get out of the way, can't you!' increased the terror of her nearly copper-coloured visage. Shivering and shaking till her teeth chattered, she at length landed on the opposite side of the street, having navigated as turbulent a sea of vehicles, quadrupeds and bipeds, as river rolled on through that part of the city.

But she was in time, absolutely in time to be gratified by the invigorating sight of Fanny coming from the church door, leaning on the arm of Bertrand Lee, his beautiful, his idolised wife.

'So it was true then,' said the poor, forlorn little old damsel, in a most confidential tone, to herself—these boys will marry anybody while sterling merit—What will you charge to take me to High Holborn?' she cried after a cab as it leisurely passed her.

'Two shillings, ma'am,' said the cabman, vehemently rubbing his nose with the sleeve of his coat, to hide the broad grin he could not entirely subdue at sight of the lady's red nose and tearful eyes, looking so comically pathetic.

'Well, I'll give it to you, if you'll promise to drive slow, and take me there in safety.'

The cabman would have been much puzzled if the lady had requested him to drive fast. If one might believe in the Pythagorean doctrine, surely cab horses must have been very naughty people in their previous state of existence.

'Warranted ma'am. There you are,' said he, pocketing the two shillings, and slamming the door within a hair's-breadth of the lemon colored kids that were resting on the side of the cab as she stretched her head out to catch one more glimpse of the church that had snapped off her virgin bud of hope. The two shillings had been cherished in the strong box for a day's pleasure; but as Miss Foster never intended anything to be pleasant again, it was perfectly immaterial, in the present dejected state of her mind what became of them.

There had been another witness of that morning's marriage—one whose lacerated heart seemed with its burning throbs to dry the life-blood of the agonised bosom. All faded as in a charming vision before her bewildered sight, till memory became a cheat upon the straining sense. What had she not done—what would she not have dared, to gain the love of that man, now indifferent alike to her idolatry or malice. Why will the young, the gay, thoughtless, breathe vows in the moment of a baseless passion that leave, upon the mind of a woman such deep mementos that even the rough tide of a cheerless, changeful future can never wash away? The stately beauty of Emily Wilson had attracted the boyish admiration of Bertrand Lee: he sought and paid court to her as an elegant and fascinating girl, who evidently honored his attentions with a preference but no more—vows of friendship and brotherly regard, but no love. Such was the argument with which he tried to lull the upbraidings of his conscience for having devoted hours of flattery and homage to the fascinations of a lady for whom his heart never acknowledged a real affection. Distracted, heedless of the

gaping crowd, she left the church some few minutes after the marriage party had gone. No thought of home, no latent feelings of revenge, accompanied the knowledge of the present, though the future seemed a dark void, an interminable path of sorrow and despair. All had been discovered, too; and the dread of meeting William's eye in reproach, had absorbed her waking and her sleeping thoughts, and now that the last blow had fallen, the over-wrought brain reeled, and the events that had so tortured her proud and passionate heart, were nothing now but a fearful chaos of misery, urging on to the one desperate effort of eternal forgetfulness.

'Onery, onery, ickery, au,' sang Matty, in a sort of half recitative style—being impossible to put an absolute tune to such very mysterious words:—this was generally the burden of Matty's song when under the influence of any particularly puzzling thoughts. 'Bipsy, bopsy, Solomon, sau,' continued he walking all over the road, going towards Mr Wilson's cottage. 'We won't care will we? nor more wont I care. Miss Wilson, she's going to kill me, is she, 'cause I told all I knew? the wretches!—didn't she write the letters, that's all—didn't I post some of 'em; and didn't I go into the back parlor one day with the coals, and heard her talking to herself for more than an hour? Kill me, will she!—and Mr Wilson has given her the cut though he is her cousin. They didn't think when they used to tie me to the leg of the bureau with a bit of cotton, and fancied I was as fast as a church—they didn't think I used to keep my ears open when they talked about ever so many things. Ah, but I told all I knew, the wretches. Mr William knows now that he's Mr Wilson's nephew, only he was too mean to own him, because his poor sister, Mr William's mother, was buried almost by charity. And I told him too, that the old rogue wanted Miss Emily to marry him, because all his money must come to Mr William at his death, being the next akin in the male way. They shouldn't have tied me up when mother was at work at the cloak-making in the show room. I hadn't a father, never, to take my part. But, Lord, how dark its getting; and the moon rising; I shall catch it if I don't hurry. Bipsy, bopsy, Solomon, sau.' Off he started with fresh speed to the strange chaunt of his mysterious ditty. The shadows of the stunted trees began to be visible upon the smooth, dry road as the moon climbed higher in the cloudless heavens, tipping the hedges with a pale silvery light, like the touches of a thick hoar frost. A large field on the left lay in comparative darkness, from the bright streak of water in the distance, for the beautiful broad canal looked but little more than a glittering line of light reflecting the 'queen of night' upon its moveless bosom. Matty had become silent, straining his eyesight in close observation of every object as he passed. On a sudden there was a confused murmuring of voices, and a muffled, distant sound, like the trampling of many feet: they seemed coming that way across the field, a gate being at the extreme end, beyond Mr Wilson's house. On observing steadily, he saw that lights like torches were dancing to and fro among a crowd. It came nearer: Matty wandered on as it were instinctively. The throng was now close to the hedge on the other side, and he plainly heard the words—'Drowned, poor thing! and we found her bonnet on the bank.' One said that he had passed that way not more than half an hour before, and then there was no one near that part of the canal, and no bonnet lying there on the side they had gone. Another said he had given the alarm, and then they dragged the water and found the poor girl quite dead.

The flesh seemed to creep upon the boy's bones as he listened: he dreaded their coming through the gate, and yet he had not power to move from the spot. Crouching down, he held his breath lest he should loose a word, but all was silent—nothing to be heard but the muffled tramp, tramp upon the yielding grass, the creaking of something that bore the body of the lifeless one. Matty's breath came in thick cold gusts, as they passed the gate and approached the spot where he was lying low upon the ground. He started forward with a desperate effort to meet the crowd. There was no covering over the beautiful face, as it lay with its filmy, sightless eyes, staring open in ghastly unconsciousness upon the evening sky. The torches, as they moved about in the hands of the people, cast a sickly and uncertain glare upon the pale, worn features, rigid and cold as sculptured marble; the long, dark ringlets of hair clung to the bosom of her dress as if to hide the wild, unmeaning stare of the glazed eyes. The terrified boy begged of them to stop, as he cast himself upon his trembling knees beside the corpse. Taking its passive hand, he implored in accents of bitter anguish that she would forgive him all he had done—implored that she would live for William Bentley's sake; not until the bystanders assured him that the spirit had long since fled to Him who gave it, could he be pacified sufficiently to make them understand where the body should be taken. Wilson's house was first upon the road near the canal, and there were the remains of Emily placed, still lying on the temporary bier, upon that very table where she had written the cruel mischief, dictated from the overflowing gall of her deep, unbridled passions. Fearing the scorn of the world, heart-broken and despairing, she did not tremble to meet the presence of an angry God. And was there no sigh to mourn, no tear to weep, for the fate of one so lovely? Her uncle, shocked, and for once startled from his apathy, strove to bury all remembrance of the past in ostentatious acts of ill-judged boun-

ty. Many rush desperately into religion, as a last source, when everything fails; not in the fashion of the meek and lowly One who sought to climb in knowledge from the wisdom of the elders in the temple; but with a baseless enthusiasm, imagining to find at once a removal of all doubts, without a stream to ford, or entangled path to tread; not pressing on gently with a bowed and gentle spirit, but with the self-satisfied certainty of being found worthy of acceptance before God.

And there was one who knelt in his lonely chamber and prayed that the cup might pass from him—prayed for the departed soul that had not sought a pardon for itself. He had forgiven all the past, and the lingering love in his sorrowing heart chid him for hasty resolve to leave her forever. Again he saw the bright dark eyes, as they flashed in their anger that evening when she spoke of Bertrand Lee: word after word came back on his memory, till he accused himself of a too hasty determination. Where is the philosophy which has so buoyed us up to strength, when death has stepped between us and our anger? Where, then, is the cold, indifference which we so proudly boasted? He could even find excuses for her blind love, as he groaned beneath the sufferings of his own bereaved and wounded heart. But little had he known of joy or happiness; the tree had been early bent, and now its branches swept the earth; the pitiless storm had bowed them lower in their maturer growth, but they were unbroken still; and, as the wind blew and the rain fell, the trembling leaves still looked green and fresh—hopes that turned them from the fading pleasures of this life to seek with a firm trust for peace in heaven.

Chapter VI.

CHANGE MAKES CHANGE.

Again the corn will rise a golden sheaf,
Again will wither the autumn leaf
Reveling seasons, for the soul to scan
The mortal and immortal type of man.

'Three bunches a penny—sweet primroses,' shouted a man with the full power of his deep sonorous voice, holding forth the pale heralds of spring to gladden the eyes of the eager gazers as they leant from the doors and windows of a little, dark, narrow street, to catch a glimpse of the bright things, that were as rare to them as if they grew in another world, and were sent by good angels to bless the sight of those that knew but little of the beautiful; poring day after day over the same dull work, aliens from the free path of nature—from the green fields and fertile lands, the clear springs and sunny sky, that in their calm pure beauty so soothe and freshen the heart of man. It was the May of eighteen forty one—a warm cheery morning, inducing all who had small wares for sale to rally forth into the soft open air and offer their merchandize. A thin, flat-faced boy, with sharp eyes and a big cap, chimed in with his small weak tones, as he held before a low window his heavily laden basket, piled with a motley collection of blown glass vases and motley china.

'Do look sir; don't say you have n't got nothing to change for glassen ornaments, or cheyny, an old pair of boots too bad to burn; or an old hat with the crown out—I'll buy 'em if they're ever so rubbishy—old worn stockings, anything.'

'Dare say—shouldn't wonder!' bawled Matty, tapping the window; 'and if you'd got them you'd want ever so many more things, of course, for a little bad crockery—a painted up, ugly monkey for an instand or two or three bandy-legged squinting dogs, and expect to get some of our good left-off trowsers and coats for them. Ah, you Jew boys are knowing blades! There, cut along—trot away.'

The crockery vendor looked a vast deal surprised at Matty's impudence; but perhaps not taking the affront as particularly personal, he hoisted his basket higher in his arms, and walked leisurely away, not deigning a reply.

'Quary, quary, next to Mary—nine—about—clock—about—ten!' muttered Matty, halting between the last few words as though in serious deliberation. He had a problem to solve, and had sought the deep recess of a dark front parlor tenanted by the illustrious washerwoman of the house of Wilson. Mrs Pitman, the sole proprietress of a large chain mangle, had retired to collect from the dry-place Matty's extensive assortment of nether clothing; leaving the boy in full possession of the apartment. On such occasions the mysterious haze of *non-understandable* words, thickened into a dense fog from which Matty with all his wisdom could hardly extricate himself. 'So the spring's come again, is it? and they're all gone down into Hampshire to live; Mr Wilson is gone there for something else—bin, bun, must be done—tickle 'em tackle 'em, twenty-one—and now old Titley Wilson's dead I'm a free agent—hurrah!—the wretches.'

'Here's the things, Matthew; and I am very sorry I'm going to lose another customer. Every little is some help now, you know.'

'And a very little mine must have been, Mrs Pitman,' replied Matty, half stupidly as he looked in the red shining face of the laundress, who smilingly handed him his wardrobe, wrapped in a flaming red and yellow handkerchief, once the property of his late respected master.

'Are you going down to the New Forest with the Lees, Master Matthew?' enquired Mrs Pitman.

'No; master's family's an unlucky one, and I don't care to follow it. I've come to my conclusion since I have been sitting here alone and am now decided.'