

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

THE TWO FIRESIDES.

A TALE FOR THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

By Georgina C. Munro.

PART II.—THE NEW YEAR'S HEARTH.*

All this time Caroline and her brother were awaiting Herbert's return. At length their anxiety was aroused, and loudly the name of Herbert resounded through the woods; but the echoes of their own voices, as they were caught up from cliff to cliff, were their only answer; and the light feet of Edward bore him to nothing which could explain the mystery of his friend's disappearance.

Then as hastily as possible the young Hewstons bade their canoe dart over the gleaming waters, and the alarm was soon given to the hamlet. And instantly a dozen well armed men sprang into the canoes which always were at hand, and, before nightfall, Hazel Island was carefully examined from one end to the other. But the trodden and bloodstained glass and broken boughs—tokens, as they appeared, of a fierce struggle—were all that could be discovered; and they returned grievous and disappointed at their baffled search.

How bitter were the tears shed that night beneath the Hewston's roof; for young as they were it was the love of years which bound together the hearts of Caroline and Herbert, and it seemed parting with existence itself to lose him. And as the mother sat beside her daughter, watching a grief she lamented but could not chide, it seemed to bring back to her with all the anguish of new sorrow, the death of the child who had been torn from her so many years before, yet whose loss still formed the saddest tale told around every Christmas hearth in Sandy Bay. The father and grandfather sat together. Time had somewhat bowed the latter's form, and furrowed his brow deeply, since we saw him; but the spirit, still stern and unyielding, had lost all traces of the fleeting softness, occasioned by the first whisperings of self reproach.

'It was well for old Herbert that the last winter's snows fell on his grave,' remarked the old man after a long silence. 'It has spared him the deep sorrow he would have felt this night.'

'Ah! there are none now left to mourn for poor Charles more deeply than ourselves,' replied the son. 'Would to God that some of us did not grieve so much! But how can this fresh blow have fallen upon us?'

'As fell the others,' said old Hewston, a fiery glow burning in his sunken eye. 'Tis Indian hands have done it all. My gallant sons, your darling boy, and now poor Carrie's intended husband—the same doom has overtaken all alike. Surely our wrongs have been sufficient to irritate the softest heart to hatred.'

His son did not answer, and once more there was silence. All was so still that for some time the only sound was the fizzing of the water which boiled out of the log of damp beech that crowned the fire:—

'Hark!' said William at length, 'what was that?'

Both listened attentively, and again a low feeble moan was audible from just without the door. William rose at once to open it. His father followed with a light; the same thought had struck both:—'Could it be Herbert?'

But the form which lay before them was not his, nor of one known to them. They bent over it; the scarlet mantle wrapped around him, and the glittering ornaments showed the stranger to be Indian; for indeed, it was Shingoes, who, wounded, insensible, and nearly lifeless, had thus been laid at their very door. A brief scrutiny served to convince them of his helpless state.

'Poor fellow!' said William, pityingly, as he began to raise him.

'What are you going to do with him?' demanded the elder Hewston.

'To afford him the care and assistance his suffering condition claims at our hands,' replied the younger firmly.

The same cold harshness which had marked them on that fatal Christmas Eve long years ago, came again to Richard Hewston's brow, and spoke in his voice:—

'Wait a moment,' he said, sternly, 'ere you bring him into the house, which his people have made one of mourning. I do not bid you leave the poor wretch to perish for want of aid; but call others and let them give him what care he needs. Why should we take an Indian into our home, and watch over him, we by whom least of all he should be nursed and tended? we whose hearts have been wrung and whose happiness blighted by the diabolical cruelties of his race? and that, too, when there are plenty of others to take care of him who would outrage no memory of murdered children by receiving that boy into their houses.'

William Hewston had remained kneeling beside the young Indian while his father spoke, and he now looked up steadily in his face as he replied:—'This duty is mine, and I will not seek to pass it to another. Once I listened to your voice, but there is a monitor in my own heart which I shall now endeavor to obey, and that tells me that, whether red or white all men are brothers, and that if we do not show mercy we have no right to expect it.'

* Continued from the Gleaner of April 1.

Remember, father, that I too know what it is to lose a son, but it has not shut my heart against my fellow men: no, it has by my own sufferings taught me to spare and pity others. Stand aside then, father, for this youth shall receive succor and kindness beneath our roof, our it shall no longer shelter me.

Swayed by the calm determination of his son's manner, the elder Hewston stepped back, and William carried the slight form of the unfortunate Ermine into the house. Margaret was in the room immediately, and with tears for her own and her child's sorrows still wet upon her cheeks, she warmly approved her husband's conduct; and with all the earnestness and kindness of her gentle nature, exerted herself instantly to afford needful aid to their unconscious guest. The neighbor who claimed most skill in the treatment of injuries was quickly summoned, and the serious wounds of the Indian youth attended to. And many were the curious idlers who stood looking on, and divers were their comments on William's conduct; but, we grieve to say, not all in praise.

'And yet,' said one, 'it may be as well after all, if the lad should chance to live. For he may be made to tell what has become of Herbert.'

'Ay, ay, or to pay the penalty if he cannot be found,' muttered Richard Hewston, and more than one voice whispered an echo to the suggestion. For they dwelt so far from the haunts of civilized life, that should they chance to take the law into their own hands, the authorities were little likely to be the wiser. And they heard too frequently of Judge Lynch's doings across the blue water, not to feel almost tempted to imitate his example of summary justice, when it could not be otherwise obtained.

But for many days the Ermine appeared more likely to die than live, either to aid their friendship or feel their vengeance. Fierce was the struggle of life and death in his frame. At length the latter relinquished the attempt to grasp so soon the victim that would be his some future day, and Shingoes began to recover gradually, though the buoyancy of youth had faded into languor, and the once light step was slow and feeble. He never knew when first the face of Margaret mingled like that of some bright spirit with his fever dreams, as life and reality broke on their early obscurity, for, far back as his recollection could wander, there seemed yet a period beyond in which her sweet smile and gentle voice had given him pleasure.

As soon as his mind was clear enough to comprehend the subject, Shingoes was closely questioned concerning Herbert. But he was impenetrable to their most ingenious efforts; for deeply hurt as he was at the desertion of his friends, and those dearer still who had always until then treated him with such tenderness, yet he would not betray them, even to the kind and gentle watchers by his couch of pain, who had so generously supplied the place of his hard hearted tribesmen. There were some who counselled harsh measures to extract the truth. But William Hewston withstood all arguments, and resolutely asserted his determination to defend against any violence, the young and helpless guest who, day by day, won more upon his own heart and that of Margaret.

But Caroline, what were her feelings all while? It were long to tell how deeply she sorrowed for the withering of those bright hopes which had grown up with her from year to year, and how the very doubt of Herbert's fate served but to increase the anguish of her grief.

Her engagement to their lost friend was never in any way alluded to in the young Indian's hearing, and they dreamed not that it was suspected by him. But they could not fail to notice the deep interest with which he regarded her, and how, as returning strength gave him power, he was ever ready to aid her and anticipate her wishes in all those trifles by which alone he could evince his kindly feelings; and often he would lie for hours on the pile of furs beside the fire, with his eyes fixed intently upon Caroline as she worked, or following her amid her household tasks with an attentive and thoughtful gaze. The mother might have grieved to observe this interest, and trembled lest it foreboded another child's being snatched from her, but that there was no lover-like admiration discernible in the Indian's glance, and that he was alike unobtrusive and respectful in his manner; and besides Mrs Hewston did not, could not think that the youth whom she had watched over and tended with such unwearying care, would ever work her any evil, or pour fresh anguish into her heart.

The last leaves had fallen from the trees, and the first snows lay in all the freshness of their beauty upon the earth, yet the calm still air was soft and mild, as though winter had not breathed on it; and the sun shone with dazzling brilliancy on the newly fallen snow and agate-gemmed rock which glittered around and above Caroline Hewston, as she gained the favorite spot where she had stolen away to weep unseen by those who grieved to look upon her tears. Wild and painful thoughts had haunted her lonely walk, and gathered more darkly round her now as she sat at the foot of the cliff, a prey to all the torturing fears which imagination can conjure up. Thoftentimes her heart had striven to cling to hope despair ever swept it fast away—and the conviction would press upon her, that if her lover had been borne away in life, it was but to meet the same fearful doom as her uncle's, whose dark fate her grandfather so frequently recalled. She had not even the mournful

consolation of knowing that Herbert was at rest; and she shuddered at the thought, that at that very moment he might be enduring all the torture that Indian cruelty could devise to render terrible the face of death.

Suddenly a shadow fell on the bright snow before her, and Caroline started from her painful thoughts to perceive the graceful form of the young Indian, who had paused a few paces away. He was gazing on her earnestly, and, drawing nearer to her, said in his softest tone:—

'Does the Flower of the pale-faces still weep for the hunter who sat with her beneath the sycamore boughs, when the leaves were falling?'

A momentary flush flitted across Caroline's pale face, but her heart was too sad for girlish timidity, and it passed, as she looked enquiringly at the speaker. He replied to her look:—

'The eyes of Shingoes were on my sister, and they have often looked into her heart when she believed it shut. But let her not look darkly on me, for Shingoes would give his life for the pale face.'

'Oh, is it not too late?' exclaimed Caroline, clasping her hands.

'The Ermine has dwelt in the lodge of the pale-face, and could not see the hands of his people,' said he gently: 'but has not my sister seen the sun come to dry the night dew from the flowers? She may not have to weep forever!'

'Indian!—Indian!—do not deceive me!' cried the unhappy girl; 'but tell me, truly, if he lives?'

'The Ermine is no magician, to look across the waters and through forests,' was the reply; 'but let my sister hear what an Indian will do. The Ermine is nothing among his nation; but his father is a great chief, and his brother is the bravest warrior of his tribe—and they used to love to look upon his face. He will go and see if they have forgotten the sound of his voice. If it is still pleasant to their ears, the Ermine will bring back the white hunter to cheer the drooping Flower. But if the Ermine is forgotten, he will return to give his life to the knives or the rifles of the pale-faces. Before the next moon with-

to the house, I will be back.'

last words were intended as a farewell. But the morrow and many another morrow passed away, and the young Indian did not re-appear, and people began to censure William Hewston and his wife for not having taken more advantage of the opportunity thrown into their hand; and his father was one of the most dissatisfied in his remarks.

'If the Indian had been treated properly,' they said, 'he could have been compelled to tell who and where his friends were, and all he knew concerning Herbert; and the Indians might have been communicated with, and and Shingoes been held as hostage for the prisoner's safety—if he yet lived.'

But William heeded not their reproaches, and there were many who sided with him when he replied:—

'Cruelty and harshness towards the stranger who was cast wounded and helpless on my mercy, would not recalled those who have gone nor have healed the wounded hearts which they have left. But my own sorrows teach me to feel for others, and through my act no parent shall lament a child.'

Days and weeks glided on, and at first somewhat of the lost light seemed restored to Caroline's eye, for the Indian's words had bade hope shed around her its meteor ray. But it passed, and its place on her horizon was once more void and dark. November was gone and December was ready to vanish with the dying year. The moon, which Shingoes had said should look upon his return, was waning fast—at length it ceased to cast the faintest glimmer on the night. The time was past which the Ermine had promised should bring him back. Had he then failed in his faith? or, weak and unfitted as he was to encounter fatigue and hardship when he set forth on his long journey, had he also perished?

Christmas had come and passed. It was ever now a solemn festival with the Hewstons, held with gratitude for the manifestation of Divine love and mercy it brought to more vivid remembrance—but mingled with no mirth or gaiety. And this year it was sadder than usual, for there was recent sorrow to deepen the shadow of the mournful event of which it was the anniversary, fears lest Caroline were also doomed to leave them for that better land whither her twin brother and her betrothed were already gone.

And now the new year came, to wake fresh hopes and prompt good wishes amid the dwellers at Sandy Bay. Brightly and beautifully in the cloudless sky and a land of silver and lake of glass seemed flashing back its rays, as though earth were striving to reflect the joy of heaven. Even the Hewstons endeavored to share this feeling, but it was very difficult to accomplish.

'A good New Year to you all, and God send it a happier!' was the greeting of a kind-hearted, frank spoken neighbor, as he entered the room where the family were seated quietly and somewhat sadly around the hearth.

'God grant it,' echoed William Hewston, as he clasped the other's hand in cordial welcome, and Margaret glanced involuntarily to-

wards her daughter, to whose lip a faint smile was summoned, though a tear still trembled in her eye.

'It had need be a happier one,' muttered the grandfather, 'or I never wish to see it out.'

'Do not let us murmur,' said Margaret, gently, 'for our sorrows might be weightier. Let us rather try to render ourselves worthy of the many blessings which are yet spared to us.'

'Aye, Margaret: but for all your preaching and William's practice, I do not see that it has made us one whit happier,' said her father-in-law, with bitterness.

But he had scarcely spoken when the latch was again raised, and looking round they perceived the doorway darkened by an Indian's figure, while others were visible beyond. Caroline's heart bounded with joy at the first sight; but it sank instantly, as she saw how unlike Shingoes was the tall stately Indian, who, advancing with a dignified step into the centre of the room, uttered in tolerable English the salutation common with his countrymen when visiting the white people on New Year's day, which they are in the custom of doing whenever they dwell near together. 'Wish you a merry Christmas—happy New Year.'

'You are welcome,' said William, rising from his seat by the fire, and holding out his hand. 'Will you and your friends drink with the Englishman, and wish happiness to him and his.'

But the Indian drew back and folded his arms as he replied:—'Assinack must learn if the pale face is his friend.' And immediately there stepped forward his nearest companion, who was dressed in the blue frock coat and hood commonly worn by the half Indians on the frontier.

'Caroline!—My dear friends—do you not remember me?' cried a well known, well-loved voice, as the hood was thrown back, and in another moment Charles Herbert was receiving the delighted greetings of his friends, and whispering words of love, and thanks, and gladness to his betrothed, who lay in his arms half insensible from joy.

Two other Indians stood near the entrance. The young Edward was first to glance at them. 'Shingoes,' he exclaimed, springing forward in delight. But he was waved back by the old chief, who retreated a step with the youth, whom he held firmly by the hand.

'Yes, Edward,' said Herbert, 'that is the friend to whom I owe both my life and my liberty.' And at these words Caroline raised her head from his shoulder, and smiled, while all turned towards the young Indian. But Assinack inteposed between him and them, and the Ermine stood immovable by the old chief's side, looking pale and thoughtful, and seemingly unconscious of the looks fixed upon him, save that a proud scornful smile curled his lip as his eye met that of Richard Hewston, from whom he had had to bear many a bitter taunt and covert insult during his residence beneath that roof.

'Old man,' said the Indian abruptly, 'do you remember of ever looking upon my face before?'

They all gazed earnestly on his weather-beaten features, but could not recall them, and yet a strange suspicion stole into their minds.

'Many snows have melted,' he resumed, 'since those that drifted past Shigashie as he was spurred like a dog from the lodge of the paleface, when the wife that filled his heart languished for shelter and for fire. Then said Shigashie, 'the pale-face has a heart, though it is hard to reach: an Indian will try if it can feel for the tender flower he loves to cherish in his bosom. But the flower was sweet in Shigashie's sight, and he could not harm it; but he planted it far away in his lodge, and it grew and flourished, and was dear to Shigashie's heart as if the Marito had bade it spring from the earth in his native forest. But there is no lie on the Indian's tongue, and Shigashie had said that the words of the paleface should never be forgotten. And when the flower he loved was crushed and broken, it was laid before the lodge where the blue eyes of the white squaw first watched over it. Does the pale-face understand?' continued the chief, turning his gaze from Richard Hewston to William. 'Does he wish an Indian to return what he has borrowed?'

During these words the Ermine had looked wonderingly upon the speaker. Suddenly a light flashed on his mind, and, before they ended, all the mysteries which had bewildered and grieved and pained him, were solved at once, and his heart was filled with conflicting emotions of regret and joy. Then the parents sprang forward exclaiming, 'Blessings, blessings on you, Indian!' and the youth was clasped in their arms as he could believe himself their child. Yet his heart seemed to respond to theirs, and he smiled, as Caroline, the twin sister, for whom his interest had been so strangely excited, timidly offered her cheek to his kiss. But he shrunk coldly from his grandfather's embrace, and a chill fell on the old man as he felt that he had turned away from him the heart of the child who was still, despite the long years he had been absent, so inexpressibly dear to him.

We have no time to tell of the mother's soul-felt joy to welcome back her long lost child in the young stranger who had so forced himself into her heart; nor of the father's gratitude that he had shown kindness and friendship to his own son, when, in hostile guise, cast by the sternness of Indian retribution on the humanity which once had failed. Many years had passed—years of regret and evil-