LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

THE PURE SPOT IN THE HEART.

BY G. P. R. JAMES.

THERE is within the heart of man—
  Corrupt as it may be—
A touch of that which Eden knew
  Ere Eve profaned the tree.

A love of guileless innocence
  Forever lost, not dead,
Which makes the first words of a child
  All music to his ear.

One time, in a far sunny land,
  And years long, long ago—
A land of love, and tale, and song,
  I saw a scene of wo.

I stood within four noisome walls
  That formed a felon's cell;
I listened to his dark, cold words,
  I marked his visage fell.

Kind I bespoke him; for I ne'er
  Could trample on a worm,
And fain would raise each flower again
  That's broken by the storm.

After a sort, his bosom warmed:
  He spoke of his past life;
And many an awful deed he own'd,
  Told tales of bloody strife.

He was a man without remorse,
  Who feared not God, nor fiend;
Pleasure, not happiness he'd found,
  Companions, but no friend.

And there he was, next day to die
  For his worst deed of all,
He murder'd one, who trusted him,
  For pittance bare and small.

Yet no compunction he betray'd,
  No hope, no fear, no grief;
He seemed a man without a soul,
  And hard beyond belief.

Yet as he talk'd the sounds of life
  Came upward from the street,
And merry laughs and joyous tones,
  And children's voices sweet.

At that last sound, a pleasant smile
  Pass'd o'er his iron face,
Which seem'd to give each haggard line
  A strange redeeming grace.

"I love to hear a child's dear tongue,"
  That man of horrors said;
"It brings back days when I was young
  And by my mother play'd.

And gather'd flowers and foolish th ings,
  And chased the butterfly,
And little thought I thus should live—
  Still less, I thus should die."

He fell into a fit of thought,
  His face grew cold and gray,
No farther converse would he bear,
  I turn'd and went my way.

From Dickens's Household Words.

THE HEART OF JOHN MIDDLETON.

I WAS born at Sawley, where the shadow of Pendle Hill falls at sunrise. I suppose Sawley sprang into a village in the time of the monks who had an abbey there. Many of the cottages are strange old places; others again are built of the abbey stones, mixed up with the shale from the neighboring quarries; and you may see many a quaint bit of carving worked into the walls, or forming the lintels of the doors. There is a row of houses, built still more recently, where one Mr Peel came to live there for the sake of the water-power, and gave the place a fillip into something like life; through a different kind of life, as I take it from the grand slow ways folks had when the monks were about.

Now it was—six o'clock, ring the bell, throng to the factory; sharp home at twelve; and even at night, when work was done, we hardly knew how to walk slowly, we had been so bustled all day long. I can't recollect the time when I did not go to the factory. My father used to drag me there when I was quite a little fellow, in order to wind reels for him. I never remember my mother. I should have been a better man than I have been, if I had only had a notion of the sound of her voice, or the look of her face.

My father and I lodged in the house of a man who also worked in the factory. We were sadly thronged in Sawley, so many people came from different parts of the country to earn a livelihood at the new work; and it was some time before the row of cottages I have spoken of could be built. While they were building my father was turned out of his lodgings for drinking and being disorderly, and he and I slept in the brick-kiln; that is to say, when we did sleep o' nights; but, often and often went poaching; and many a a hare and pheasant have I rolled up in clay, and roasted in the embers of the kiln. Then, as followed to reason, I was drowsy next day, over my work; but father had no mercy on me for sleeping, for all he knew the cause of it, but kicked me where I lay, a heavy lump on the factory floor, and cursed and swore at me till I got up for very fear, and to my winding again. But when his back was turned I paid him off with heavier curses than he had given me, and longed to be a man that I might be revenged on him. The words I then spoke I would not now dare to repeat; and worse than hating words, a hating heart went with them. I forget the time when I did not know how to hate. When I first came to read and learnt about Ishmael, I thought I must be of his doomed race, for my hand was against every man, and every man's hand against me. But I was seventeen before I cared for my book enough to learn to read.

After the row of works was finished father took one, and set up for himself in letting lodgings. I can't say much for the furnishing, but there was plenty of straw, and we kept up good fires; and there is a set of people who value warmth above everything. The worst lot about the place lodged with us. We used to have a supper in the middle of the night; there was game enough, or if there was not game there was poultry to be had for stealing. By day we all made a show of working in the factory. By night we feasted and drank.

Now, this web of my life was black enough and course enough; but by and by a little golden filmy thread began to be woven in; the dawn of God's mercy was at hand.

One blowy October morning, as I sauntered lazily along to the mill, I came to the little wooden bridge over a brook that falls into the Bribble. On the bank there stood a child, balancing the pitcher on her head with which she had been to fetch water. She was so light on her feet that, had it not been for the weight of the pitcher, I almost believe the wind would have taken her up, and wafted her away as it carries off a blow-ball in seed time; her blue cotton dress was blown before her, as if she was spreading her wings for a flight; she turned her face around, as if to ask me for something, but when she saw who it was she hesitated, for I had a bad name in the village, and I doubt she had been warned against me. But her heart was too innocent to be distrustful, so she said to me timidly:

'Please, John Middleton, will you carry this heavy jug just over the bridge?'

It was the very first time I had ever been spoken to gently. I was ordered here and there by my father and his rough companions; I was abused and cursed by them if I failed in doing what they wished; if I succeeded there came no expression of thanks or gratitude. I was informed of facts necessary for me to know. But the gentle words of request or entreaty were afore time unknown to me, and now their tones fell on my ear soft and sweet as a distinct peal of bells. I wished that I knew how to speak properly in reply; but though we were of the same standing as regarded worldly circumstances, there was some mighty difference between us, which made me unable to speak in her language of soft words and modest entreaty. There was nothing for me but to take up the pitcher in a kind of gruff, shy silence, and carry it over the bridge as she had asked me. When I gave it her back again, she thanked me, and tripped away, and leaving me wordless, gazing after her like an awkward lout as I was. I knew well enough who she was. —She was grandchild to Eleanor Hadfield, an aged woman, who was reputed as a witch by my father and his set, for no other reason that I can make out than her scorn, dignity, and fearlessness of rancour. It was true we often met her in the morning when we returned from poaching, and my father used to curse her under his breath for a witch, such as were burnt, long ago on Pendle hill top; But I had heard that Eleanor was a skilful sick nurse, and ever ready to give her services to those who were ill; and I believe that she had been sitting up through the night (which we had been spending under the wild heavens in deeds as wild) with those who were appointed to die. Nelly was her orphan granddaughter—her little handmaiden—her treasure—her one ewe lamb. Many and many a day have I watched by the brookside, hoping that some happy gust of wind coming with opportune bluster down the hollow of the dale, might make me necessary once more to her. I longed to hear her speak to me again. I said the words she had used to myself, trying to catch her tone, but the chance never came again. I do not know that she ever knew how I watched for her there. I found out that she went to school, and nothing would serve me but that I must go too. My father scoffed at me, but I did not care. I knew nought of what reading was, nor that it was likely that I should be laughed at; I, a great hulking lad of seventeen or upward, for going to learn my A, B, C, in the midst of a crowd of little ones. I stood just this way in my mind. Nelly was at school; it was the best place for seeing her, and hearing her voice again. Therefore I would go too. My father talked, and swore, and threatened, but I stood to it. He said I should leave school, weary of it in a month. I swore a deeper oath than I like to remember, that I would stay a year, and come out a reader and a writer. My father hated the notion of folks learning to read, and said it took all the spirit out of them; besides he thought he had a right to every penny of my wages, and though when he was in good humor, he might have given me many a jug of ale, he grudged my two pence a week for schooling However, to school I went. It was a different place to what I had thought it before I went inside. The girls sat on one side and the boys on the other; so I was not near Nelly. She too was in the first class; I was put with the little toddling things that could hardly run alone. The master sat in the middle, and kept pretty strict watch over us. But I could see Nelly, and hear her read her chapter; and even when it was one with a long list of hard names, such as the master was very fond of, giving her, to show how well she could hit them off without spelling, I thought I had never heard prettier music. Now and then she read other things. I did not know what they were, true or false; but I listened because she read; and, by and by, I began to wonder, I remember the first word I ever spoke to her was to ask her (as we were coming out of school) who was the Father of whom she had been reading, for when she said the words "Our Father," her voice dropped into a soft, holy kind of low sound, which struck me more than any loud reading, it seemed so loving and tender. When I asked her this she looked at me with her great blue wondering eyes, at first shocked; and then, as it were, melted down into pity and sorrow, she said in the same way, below her breath, in which she read the words 'Our Father,'

'Don't you know? It is God.'

'God?'

'Yes; the God that grandmother tells me about.'

'Tell me what she says will you? So we sat down on the hedge-bank she a little above me, while I looked up into her face, and she told me all the holy texts her grandmother had taught her, as explaining all that could be explained of the Almighty. I listened in silence, for indeed I was overwhelmed with astonishment. Her knowledge was principally rote-knowledge; she was too young for much more; but we, in Lancashire, speak a rough kind of Bible language, and the text seemed very clear to me. I rose up, dazed and overpowered. I was going away in silence, when I bethought me of my manners, and turned back, and said 'Thank you,' for the first time I ever remember saying it in my life. That was a great day for me in more ways than one.

I was always one who could keep very steady to an object when once I had set it before me. My object was to know Nelly. I was conscious of nothing more. But it made me regardless of other things. The master might scold, the little ones might laugh; I bore it all without giving it a second thought. I kept to my year, and came out a reader and writer; more, however, to stand well in Nelly's good opinion, than because of my oath. About this time, my father committed some bad cruel deed, and had to fly the country. I was glad he went, for I had never loved or cared for him, and wanted to shake myself clear of his set. But it was no easy matter. Honest folk stood aloof; only bad men held out their arms to me with a welcome. Even Nelly seemed to have a mixture of fear now with her kind ways towards me. I was the son of John Middleton, who, if he were caught would be hung at Lancaster Castle. I thought she looked at me sometimes with a sort of sorrowful horror. Others were not forbearing enough to keep their expression of feeling confined to looks. The son of the overlooker at the mill never ceased twitting me with my father's crime; he now brought up his poaching against him, though I knew very well how many a good supper he himself had made on game which had been given him to make him and his father wink at late hours in the morning. And how were such as my father to come honestly by game?

This lad, Dick Jackson, was the bane of my life. He was a year or two older than I was and had much power over the men who worked at the mill, as he could report to his father what he chose. I could not always hold my peace when he 'threaped' me with my father's sins, but gave it him back sometimes in a storm of passion. It did me no good; only threw me farther from the company of better men, who looked aghast and shocked at the oaths I poured out—blasphemous words learnt in my childhood, which I could not forget now that I would fain have purified myself of them; while all the time Dick Jackson stood by, with a mocking smile of intelligence; and when I had ended, breathless and weary with spent passion, he would turn to those whose respect I longed to earn, and asked if I were not a worthy son of my father, and likely to tread in his steps. But this smiling indifference of his to my miserable vehemence was not all, though it was the worst part of his conduct, for it made the rankling hatred grow up in my heart, and overshadow it like the great gourd tree of the prophet Jonah. But his was a merciful shade, keeping out the burning sun; mine blighted what it fell upon.

What Dick Jackson did besides, was this, his father was a skilful overlooker and a good man; Mr Peel valued him so much that he was kept on although his health was failing, and when he was unable through illness, to come to the mill, he deputed his son to watch over and report the men. It was too much power for one so young—I speak it calmly now. Whatever Dick Jackson became, he had strong temptations when he was young, which will be allowed for hereafter. But at the time of which I am telling, my hate raged like a fire. I believed that he was the one sole obstacle to my being received as fit to mix with good and honest men. I was sick of crime and disorder, and would fain have come over to a different kind of life, and have been industrious, sober, honest, and right-spoken, (I had no idea of higher virtue then,) and at every turn Dick Jackson met me with his sneers. I have walked the night through in the old abbey field, planning how I could outwit him, and win men's respect in spite of him. The first time I ever prayed was underneath the silent stars, kneeling by the old abbey walls, throwing up my arms and asking God for the power of revenge upon him.

I had heard that if I prayed earnestly, God would give me what I asked for, and I looked upon it as a kind of chance for the fulfilment of my wishes. If earnestness would have won the boon for me, never were wicked words so earnestly spoken. And oh, later on, my prayer was heard and my wish granted. All the time I saw little of Nelly, her grandmother was failing, and she had much to do in doors. Besides, I believe I had read her looks aright, when I took them to speak of aversion; and I planned to hide myself from her sight, as it were, until I could stand upright before men, with fearless eyes, dreading no face of accusation. It was possible to acquire a good character; I would do it—I did it; but no one brought up among respectable, untempted people can tell the unspeakable hardness of the task. In the evening I would not go forth among the village throng, for the acquaintances that claimed me were my father's old associates, who would have been glad enough to enlist a strong young man like me in their projects: and the men who would have shunned me and kept aloof were the steady and orderly. So I staid in doors and practised myself in reading. You will say I should have found it easier to earn a good character away from Sawley, at some place where neither I nor my father was known. So I should, but it would not have been the same thing to my mind. Beside, representing all good men, all goodness to me, in Sawley Nelly lived. In her sight I would work out my life and fight my way upward to men's respect. Two years passed on. Every day I strove fiercely; every day my struggles were made fruitless by the son of the overlooker; and I seemed but where I was —but where I must ever be esteemed by all who knew me—but as the son of the criminal—wild, reckless, ripe for crime myself. Where was the use of my reading and writing? These acquirements were disregarded and scouted by those among whom I was thrust back to take my portion. I could have read any chapter in the Bible, and Nelly seemed as though she would never know it. I was driven in upon my books, and few enough of them I had. The pedlers brought them round in their packs, and I bought what I could. I had 'The Seven Champions,' and the 'Pilgrim's Progress;' and both seemed to me equally wonderful, and equally founded on fact. I got Byron's 'Narrative,' and Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' but I lacked the knowledge which would give a clue to all. Still they afforded me pleasure, because they took me out of myself, and made me forget my miserable position, and made me unconscious (for the time at least) of my one great passion of hatred against Dick Johnson.

When Nelly was about seventeen her grandmother died. I stood aloof in the churchyard behind the great yew tree, and watched the funeral. It was the first religious service that ever I heard; and to my shame as I thought, it effected me to tears. The words seemed so peaceful and holy that I longed to go to church, but I durst not because I had never been. The parish church was at Bolton, far enough away to serve as an excuse for all who did not care to go. I heard Nelly's sobs filling up every pause in the clergyman's voice, and every sob of hers went to my heart. She passed me on her way out of the churchyard, she was so near I might have touched her, but her head was hanging down, and I durst not speak to her. Then the question arose, what was to become of her? She must earn her living; was it to be as a farm servant, or be working at the mill? I knew enough of both kinds of life to make me tremble for her. My wages were such as to enable me to marry if I chose; and I never thought of woman, for my wife, but Nelly.—Still I would not have married her now if I could, for as yet I had not risen up to the character which I determined it was fit that Nelly's husband should have. When I was rich in good report, I would come forward and take my chance, but until then I would hold my peace. I had faith in the power of my long-continued dogged breasting of opinion. Sooner or later it must, it should yield, and I be received among the ranks of good men.—But meanwhile, what was to become of Nelly? I reckoned up my wages, I went to inquire what the board of a girl would be, who should help her in her household work, and live with her as a daughter, at the house of one of the of the most decent women of the place; she looked at me suspiciously. I kept down my temper, and told her I would never come near the place; that I would keep away from that end of the village, and that the girl for whom I made the inquiry should never know but what the parish paid for her keep. It would not do, she suspected me, but I know I had power over myself to have kept my word; and besides I would not for worlds have had Nelly put under any obligations to me, which should speck the purity of her love or dim it by a mixture of gratitude—the love that I craved to earn not for my money, not for my kindness, but for myself. I heard that Nelly had met with a place in Bolland, and I could see no reason why I might not speak to her once before she left our neighborhood. I meant it to be a quiet friendly telling her of my sympathy in her sorrow. I felt I could command myself. So, on the Sunday before she was to leave Sawley, I waited near the wood path, by which I knew that she would return from afternoon church. The birds made such a melodious warble such a busy sound among the leaves, that I did not hear approaching footsteps, till they were close at hand, and then there were sounds of two persons' voices. The wood was near that part of Sawley where Nelly was staying with her friends, the path through it led to their house, and their's only, so I knew it must be she, for I watched her setting out to church alone.

But who was the other?