

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

PRESS ON.

BY PARK BENJAMIN.

PRESS ON! there's no such word as fail,
Press swiftly on, the goal is near—
Ascend the mountain, breast the gale,
Look upward, onward—never fear!
Why should thou faint? Heaven smiles
above,
Though storm and vapor intervene;
That sun shines on, whose name is Love,
Serenely o'er life's shadowed scene.

Press on! surmount the rocky steps—
Climb boldly o'er the torrent's arch—
He fails alone who feebly creeps,
He wins who dares the hero's march.
Be thou a hero! let thy might
Tramp on eternal snows its way,
And through the ebon walls of night
Hew down a passage unto day.

Press on! if once and twice thy feet
Slip back and stumble, harder try;
From him who never dreads to meet
Danger and Death, they're sure to fly.
To coward ranks the bullet speeds,
While on their breasts who never quail,
Gleams, guardian of chivalric deeds,
Bright courage like a coat of mail.

Press on! if Fortune play thee false
To-day, to-morrow, she'll be true;
Whom now she sinks she now exalts,
Taking old gifts and granting new,
The wisdom of the present hour
Makes up for follies past and gone—
To weakness strength succeeds, and power
From frailty springs—press on, press on!

Press on! what though upon the ground
Thy love has been poured out like rain?
That happiness is always found
The sweetest, which is born of pain.
Off mid the forest's deepest glooms
Which mortal yet did never see,
And in the dreariest desert blooms
A never-dying rose for thee.

Therefore, press on! and reach the goal,
And gain the prize, and wear the crown;
Faint not! for to the steadfast soul
Come wealth and honor and renown,
To thine one self be true and keep
Thy mind from sloth, thy heart from soil:

Press on! and thou shalt surely reap
A heavenly harvest for thy toil.

From Dickens's Household Words.

THE HEART
OF JOHN MIDDLETON.

WELL! I cannot bear to recur to that time again. Five weeks I lived in the agony of suspense—from which my only relief was in laying savage plans for revenge. If I hated him before, what think ye I did now? It seemed as if earth could not hold us both, but that one of us must go down to Gehenna. I could have killed him; and would have done it without a scruple, but that seemed too poor and bold a revenge. At length—oh, the weary waiting; oh the sickening of my heart—Nelly grew better—as well as she ever was to grow. The bright color had left her cheek; the mouth quivered with repressed pain; the eyes were dim with tears that agony had forced into them; and I loved her a thousand times better and more than when she was bright and blooming! What was best of all I began to perceive that she cared for me. I know her grandmother's friends warned her against me, and told her I came of a bad stock; but she had passed the point where remembrance from bystanders can take effect—she loved me as I was, a strange mixture of bad and good, all unworthy of her. We spoke together now as those whose lives are bound up in each other. I told her I would marry her as soon as she had recovered her health. Her friends shook their heads, but they saw she would be unfit for farm service or heavy work, and they perhaps thought as many a one does, that a bad husband is better than none at all. Anyhow, we were married; and I learned to bless God for my happiness, so far beyond my deserts. I kept her like a lady. I was a skilful workman, and earned good wages; and every want she had I tried to gratify. Her wishes were few and simple enough, poor Nelly! If they had been ever so fanciful, I should have had my reward in the new feeling of the holiness of home. She could lead me as a little child, with the charm of her gentle voice and ever kind words. She would plead for all when I was full of anger and passion; only Dick Jackson's name passed never between our lips during all that time. In the evenings she lay back in her bee-hive chair and read to me. I think I see her now, pale and weak, with her sweet young face, lighted by her holy, earnest eyes, telling me of the Saviour's life and death, till they were filled with tears. I longed to have been there, to have avenged him on the wicked Jews. I liked Peter the best of all the disciples. But I got the Bible myself, and read the mighty act of God's vengeance in the Old Testament, with a kind of triumphant faith that, sooner or later he would take my cause in hand, and revenge me on mine enemy.

In a year or so, Nelly had a baby—a little girl, with eyes just like hers, that looked with a grave openness right into yours. Nelly re-

covered but slowly. It was just before winter; the cotton crop had failed, and master had to turn off many hands. I thought I was sure of being kept on, for I had earned a steady character, and did my work well; but once again it was permitted that Dick Jackson should do me wrong. He induced his father to dismiss me among the first in my branch of the business; and there was I, just before the winter set in, with a wife and new born child, and a small enough store of money to keep body and soul together till I could go to work again. All my savings had gone by Christmas Eve, and we sat in the house foodless for the morrow's festival. Nelly looked pinched and worn, and the baby cried for a larger supply of milk than its poor, starving mother could give. My right hand had not forgotten its cunning, and I went out once more to my poaching. I knew where the gang met, and I knew what a welcome back I should have—a far warmer and more hearty welcome than good men had given me when I tried to enter their ranks. On the road to the meeting place I fell in with an old man—one who had been a companion to my father in his early days.

'What, lad,' said he, 'art thou turning back to the old trade? It's the better business, now that cotton has failed.'

'Ay,' said I, 'cotton is starving us out-right. A man may bear a deal himself, but he'll do aught sinful to save his poor wife and child.'

'Nay, lad,' said he; 'poaching is not sinful. It goes against man's laws, but not against God's.'

I was too weak to argue or talk much. I had not tasted food for two days. But I murmured—

'At any rate, I trusted to have been clear off for the rest of my days. It led my father wrong at first. I have tried and I have striven. Now I give all up. Right or wrong shall be the same to me. Some are foredoomed; and so am I.'

As I spoke some notion of the futurity that would separate Nelly, the pure and the holy, from me, the reckless and desperate one, came over me with an irrepressible burst of anguish. Just then the bells of Bolton in Bolland struck up a glad peal, which came over the woods on the solemn midnight air, like the sons of the morning shouting for joy—they seemed so clear and jubilant. It was Christmas day, and I felt like an outcast from the gladness and salvation. Old Jonah spoke out:

'Yon's the Christmas bells. I say, Johnny, my lad, I have no notion of taking such a spiritless lad as thou into the thick of it, with thy rights and thy wrongs. We don't trouble ourselves with such fine lawyer's stuff, and we bring down the 'varmint' all the better. Now, I'll not have thee in our gang, for thou art not up to the fun, and thou'd hang fire when the time came to be doing. But I have a shrewd guess that plaguey wife and child of thine are at the bottom of thy half-and-half joining. Now, I was thy father's friend before he took to them helter-skelter ways; and I have five shillings and a reck of mutton at thy service. I'll not list a lasting man; but if thou'll come to us with a full stomach, and say, 'I like your life, my lads, and I'll make one of you with pleasure, the first shiny night, why, we'll give you a welcome and a half; but to night make no more ado, but turn back with me for the meat and money.'

I was not proud; nay, I was most thankful. I took the meat, and boiled some broth for my poor Nelly. She was in a sleep or a faint, I know not which. But I roused her, and held her up in bed, and fed her with a teaspoon, and the light came back to her eyes, and the faint moonlight smile to her lips; and when she had ended, she said her innocent grace, and fell asleep with her baby on her breast. I sat over the fire and listened to the bells, as they swept past my cottage on the gusts of the wind. I longed and yearned for the second coming of Christ, of which Nelly had told me. The world seemed cruel, and hard, and strong—too strong for me; and I prayed to cling to the hem of his garment, and be borne over the rough places, when I fainted and bled, and found no man to pity or help me but poor old Jonah, the publican and sinner. All this time my own woes and my own self were uppermost in my mind, as they are in the minds of most who have been hardly used. As I thought of my wrongs, my sufferings, my heart burned against Dick Jackson; and as the bells rose and fell so my hopes waxed and waned, that in those mysterious days, of which they were both the remembrance and the prophecy, he would be purged from off the earth. I took Nelly's Bible, and turned, not to the gracious story of the Saviour's birth, but to the records of the former days, when the Jews took such wild revenge upon all their opponents. I was a Jew—a leader among the people. Richard Jackson was as Pharaoh, as the King Agag, who walked delicately, thinking the bitterness of death was past.—In short, he was the conquered enemy over whom I gloated, with my Bible in my hand—that Bible which contained our Saviour's words on the Cross. As yet, those words seemed faint and meaningless to me, like a tract of country seen thro' the starlight haze; while the histories of the Old Testament were grand and distinct in the blood-red color of sunset. By and by that night passed into day, and little piping voices came round carol-singing.—They awakened up Nelly. I went to her as soon as I heard her stirring.

'Nelly,' said I, 'there's money and food in the house; I will be off to Padham seeking work, while thou hast something here to go upon.'

'Not to day,' said she, 'stay to day with me. If thou wouldst only go to church with me this once—for you see I had never been inside a church but when we were married, and she was often praying me to go; and now she looked at me with a sigh just creeping forth from her lips, as she expected a refusal. But I did not refuse. I had been kept away from church before because I dared not go; and now I was desperate and dared do anything. If I did look like a heathen in the face of all men, why I was a heathen in my heart; for I was falling back into all my evil ways. I had resolved, if my search of work at Padham should fail, I would follow in my father's footsteps, and take with my own right hand and strength of arm what it was denied me to obtain honestly. I had resolved to leave Sawley, where a curse seemed to hang over me; so what did it matter if I went to church; all unbeknowing what strange ceremonies were there performed? I walked thither as a sinful man—sinful in my heart. Nelly hung on my arm, but even she could not get me to speak. I went in; she found my places and pointed to the words, and looked up into my eyes with hers, so full of faith and joy. But I saw nothing but Richard Jackson—I heard nothing but his loud nasal voice, making response, and desecrating all the holy words. He was in broadcloth of the best, in my fustian jacket. He was prosperous and glad, I was starving and desperate. Nelly grew pale as she saw the expression in my eyes, and she prayed ever and ever more fervently as the thought of me tempted by the Devil even at that very moment came more fully before her.

By and by she forgot even me, and laid her soul before God, in a long, silent, weeping prayer, before we left the church. Nearly all had gone—and I stood by her, unwilling to disturb her, unable to join her. At last she rose up, heavenly calm. She took my arm and we went home through the woods, where all the birds seemed tame and familiar. Nelly said she thought all living creatures knew it was Christmas day, and rejoiced, and were loving together. I believe it was the frost that had tamed them; and I felt the hatred that was in me, and knew that whatever else was loving, I was full of malice and uncharitableness, nor did I wish to be otherwise. That afternoon I bade Nelly and our child farewell, and tramped to Padham. I got work—how I hardly know; for stronger and stronger came the force of the temptation to lead a wild, free life of sin; legions seemed whispering evil thoughts to me, and only my gentle, pleading Nelly to pull me back from the great gulph. However, as I said before, I got work, and set off homewards to move my wife and child to that neighborhood. I hated Sawley, and yet I was indignant at leaving it, with my purposes unaccomplished. I was still an outcast from the more respectable, who stood afar off from such as I: and mine enemy lived and flourished in their regard. Padham, however, was not so far away for me to despair—to relinquish my fixed determination. It was on the eastern side of the great Pendle hill; ten miles away may be. Hate will overleap a much greater obstacle than that.

I took a cottage on the Fell, high up on the side of the hill. We saw a long, black moorland slope before us, and then the grey stone houses of Padham, over which a black cloud hung; different from the blue wood or turf smoke about Sawley. The wild winds came down and whistled round our house many a day when all was still below. But I was happy then, I rose in men's esteem, and I had work in plenty. Our child lived and thrived. But I forgot not our country proverb, 'Keep a stone in thy pocket for seven years; turn it and keep seven years more; but have it ever ready to cast at thine enemy when the time comes.'

One day a fellow workman asked me to go to a hill side preaching. Now I never cared to go to church; but there was something newer and freer in the notion of praying to God right under his great dome; and the open air had a charm to me ever since my wild boyhood. Beside, they said these ranters had strange ways with them, and I thought it would be fun to see their way of setting about it; and this rant of all others had made himself a name in our parts. Accordingly we went; it was a fine summer's evening, after work was done. When I got to the place I saw such a crowd as I never saw before, men, women and children; all ages were gathered together, and sat on the hill side. They were careworn, diseased, sorrowful, criminal; all that was told them on their faces, which were hard and strongly marked. In the midst, standing in a cart was the rant, When I first saw him I said to my companions, 'Lord! what a little man to make all this pother! I could trip him up with one of my fingers,' and then I sat down and looked about me a bit. All eyes were fixed on the preacher, and I turned mine on him too. He began to speak; it was in no fine drawn language, but in words such as we heard every day of our lives. He did not call our short-comings pride or worldliness, or pleasure-seeking, which would have given us no clear notion of what he meant, but he just told us outright what we did, and then he gave it a name, and said that it was accursed,—and that we were all lost if we went on so doing.

By this time the tears and sweat were running down his face; he was wrestling for our souls.—We wondered how he knew our inmost lives as he did, for each one of us saw his sin set before him in plain spoken words. Then he cried out to us to repent; and spoke first to us, and then to God in a way that would have shocked many—but it did not

shock me. I liked strong things, and I liked the bare full truth: and I felt brought nearer to God in that hour—the summer darkness creeping over us, and one after one the stars came out above us, like the eyes of the angels watching us—than I had ever done in my life before.—When he had brought us to our tears and sighs, he dropped his loud voice of upbraiding, and there was a hush, only broken by sobs and quivering moans, in which I heard through the gloom the voices of strong men in anguish and supplication, as well as the shriller tones of women. Suddenly he was heard again, but by this time we could not see him; but his voice was now tender as the voice of an angel, and he told us of Christ, and implored us to come to him. I never heard such passionate entreaty. He spoke as if he saw Satan hovering over us in the dark dense night, as if our only safety lay in a very present coming to the Cross. I believe he did see Satan; we know he had the desolate old hill, waiting his time, and now or never it was with many a soul. At length there was a sudden silence, and by the cries of those nearest the preacher we heard that he had fainted. We had all crowded round him as if he were our safety and our guide; and he was overcome by the heat and fatigue, for we were the filthiest set of people whom he had addressed that day. I left the crowd who were leading him down, and took a lonely path myself.

Here was the earnestness I needed. To this weak and weary fainting man religion was a life and a passion. I look back now and wonder at my blindness as to what was the root of all my Nelly's patience and long-suffering; for I thought now I had found out what religion was, and that heretofore it had been altogether an unknown thing to me.

Henceforward my life was changed; I was zealous and fanatical. Beyond the set to whom I had affiliated myself I had no sympathy. I would have persecuted all who differed from me, if I only had the power. I became an ascetic in all bodily enjoyments. And, strange and inexplicable mystery, I had some thoughts that by every act of self denial I was attaining to my unholy end, and that, when I had fasted and prayed long enough, God would place my vengeance in my hands. I have knelt by Nelly's bedside and vowed to live a self-denying life, as regards all outward things, if so that God would grant my prayer. I left it in his hands. I felt sure he would trace out the token and the word; and Nelly would listen to my passionate words, and lie awake sorrowful and heartsore through the night; and I would get up and make her tea, and re-arrange her pillows, with a strange and wilful blindness that my bitter words and blasphemous prayers had cost her miserable sleepless nights. My Nelly was suffering yet from that blow. How or where the stone had hurt her I never understood; but in consequence of that one moment's action her limbs became numb and dead, and, by slow degrees she took to her bed, from whence she was never carried alive. There she lay propped by pillows, her pale face ever bright, and smiling forth a greeting; her white pale hands ever busy with some kind of work, and our little Grace was as the power of motion to her. Fierce as I was away from her, I never could speak to her but in my gentlest tones. She seemed to me as if she had never wrestled for salvation as I had; and when away from her I resolved many a time and oft, that I would rouse her to her state of danger when I returned home that evening—even if strong reproach were required I would rouse her up to her soul's need. But I came in and heard her voice singing softly some holy word of patience, some psalm, which, may be, had comforted the martyrs, and when I saw her face, like the face of an angel, full of patience and happy faith. I put off my awakening speeches till another time.

One night long ago, when I was yet young and strong, although my years were past forty, I sat alone in my houseplace. Nelly was always in bed, as I told you, and Grace lay in a cot by her side. I believed them to be both asleep; though how they could sleep I could not conceive, so wild and terrible was the night. The wind came sweeping down the hill in great beats like the pulses of heaven; and during the pauses, while I listened for the coming roar, I felt the earth shiver beneath me. The rain beat against windows and doors, and sobbed for entrance. I thought the Prince of the Air was abroad; and I heard, or fancied I heard, shrieks come on the blast, like the cries of sinful souls given to his power.

The sounds came nearer and nearer. I got up and saw to the fastenings of the door; for though I cared not for mortal man, I did care for what I believed was surrounding the house, in evil might and power. But the door shook as though it too were in deadly terror, and I thought the fastenings would give way. I stood facing the entrance, lashing my heart up to defy the spiritual enemy that I looked to see every instant, in bodily presence; and the door did open, and before me stood—what was it? a man or demon? a grey-haired man, with poor worn clothes all wringing wet, and he himself battered and piteous to look upon, from the storm he had passed through.

'Let me in,' he said. 'Give me shelter. I am poor, or I would reward you. And I am friendless too,' he said, looking up in my face, like one seeking what he cannot find. In that look, strangely changed, I knew that God had heard my prayer, for it was the old cowardly look of my life's enemy. Had he been a stranger I might not have welcomed him, but as he was mine enemy I gave him welcome in a lordly dish. I sat opposite to him