

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From Hogg's Instructor.

## A MYSTERY IN OUR VILLAGE.

GREAT was the stir in our village. Groups of idle men in shirt sleeves, and with short pipes in their mouths, gathered at Lazy Corner, and discussed the matter with jest and oath. Women sat, in little knots of fours and fives, at doorways, with babies on their laps and at their feet, and wondered and surmised. The bar of the Ram's Head, and the tap-room of the White Bull, were filled with their usual frequenters though the day was yet young. The Misses Brown visited the Misses Smith long before conventional visiting hours; and the three Misses Twigg set all out on different routes—and so did their maid, so soon as they were gone—to glean the latest particulars. The doctor on his morning rounds was stopped fifty times and questioned; and, in our newsroom, the Times, the Mail, and Herald, contained nothing so exciting as what had happened within our own sphere. But the great centre of attraction was the burn-side, just where it forms a little bay, sweeping round the corner of our village, and then shortly losing itself in the ocean. To-day it was swollen and turbid with recent rains. Not that, however—for that was a frequent occurrence—made this spot the scene of so much interest. Here on a little grassy knoll, close to the bank, had been found at early dawn, by one Andrew M'Ilwraith, a female's bonnet; and now around it—for Andrew had not touched, but merely surveyed it, and brought the first man he met to do likewise, remarking, 'It was gay and queer it should have been left in sic an unco spot'—were gathered a group of excited interested spectators. The bonnet was turned over and examined—looked into and over: nothing could be made of it. There were marks of footsteps on the sand at the burn's brink; they, too, were examined, and the muddy burn itself peered into, as if some dread secret lay beneath its unquiet surface; but nothing came out of it. Anon the crowd increased, and speculations multiplied as to the owner of the found article, the fate of the owner, and the meaning of the footprints. It was plain the article itself belonged, or had belonged, to a female; and it was also plain that the place where it had been left was a very unusual one for such goods to be deposited. Here facts ended and conjecture began. Fearful suspicions crossed many minds, and, as the lookers-on multiplied, they shaped themselves into words. Could it be that some unholy deed had been perpetrated on this spot, under cloud of night; or could it be that some accident had occurred? Could it be that some one had perished, self-sacrificed to love, despair or madness? or, still more awful thought, had some unhappy victim fallen beneath the murderer's grasp, and these traces of the deed had been forgotten to be removed? These two last conclusions were the most popular. The first established itself in the female mind; the last, amongst the male portion of the crowd.

New light, however, burst upon the unbelieving, and confirmed the surmises, as one female, who had been minutely inspecting the bonnet, suddenly let it drop with a mark of astonishment, exclaiming:

'That's Peggy Armstrong's bonnet! I ken it by the blue ribbon wi' the white raised forget-mes. There no anather marrow till't in the parish.'

An 'Oh!' burst simultaneously from the lips of the female portion of the auditors, while the men grouped closer round the discoverer.

'And that, that's the very bonnet she had on Sunday was a fortnight. Mair by token, Jock Paul and his wife were kirked on that day.'

This was conclusive, rendered doubly so by the confirmatory evidence of certain others of the sex, who, now that a clue was found, had no difficulty in supporting the assertions of the discoverer with various facts and inferences of their own.

'Rin, man, Watty—rin doon to Peggy Armstrong's, and see what ye can learn about her,' urged one or two of the company, on a ragged lad, with a sort of half vacant, half keavish look, known in our village by the sobriquet of Watty Wagtail, and who is generally employed as errand boy or runner to the village. Watty departed, the request having been backed by the promise of a penny if he came back speedily.

But who was Peggy Armstrong? Briefly, she was a village belle—the toast at our country balls, the source of countless rivalries, and the cause of numberless broken heads and damaged hearts. Peggy was pretty; she was clever; and, like most clever and pretty people, rather vain, a little proud of her conquests, and a little proud of herself. Setting these most natural female faults aside, she was generous and kind, and, perhaps, had what not many of us have, more well-wishers than detractors. Our portrait of her is in outline. Which of us have not known a handsome little girl, whose features linger in recollection, and whose good nature and modesty struggled through all vanity and coquetry? From her fill up that outline, and you will have Peggy Armstrong before you, better than we could detail.

Who can depict the augmented consternation of the gathering by the burnside, when Watty returned with the intelligence that Peggy had not been seen or heard since the previous evening. The news had already spread through the village, and created the

stir we have endeavored to describe at the beginning hereof, and, like all village rumours and intelligence, had lost nothing in rolling about.

'Weel, I aye thought something would come ower that misleart lassie. It's lang since I warned her granny, gin she didna bridle her better, she wad bring sorrow on herself,' observed Jenny Mawkin, our village oracle, to her confidante, with a flavor of malice propense peculiar to female gossips.

'Aye, Jenny, that was a true saying. Had she but hearkened to the minister's text last Sunday, 'A haughty sperrit goeth before destruction, and pride before a fall,' instead o' glancin' her een at the young lads, and thinkin' o' daffin' instead o' religion, I wat this wadna hae happened,' responded the charitable confidante.

'Dinna ye think,' whispered a third, 'she was mair than maidenly in her look a while back? Yet she braved it oot weel, wi' a saucy face an' a bauld front. As ye richtly observe, neighbor, the destruction has come. It's ill to bide shame, an' she couldna, wi' her proud look and scornfu' gait, hae stood the waggin' tongues, and be made the bye-word o' ilka body.'

'Ay, ay, kimmer; ill-faured deeds come to light. Is no a' virtue an' innocence that wears a brave front, and feigns a clear laugh.'

'That comes o' the upbringin' o' lasses noo a days,' observed Jenny Mawkin. 'When I was a young maiden, oor wark was before men; but noo, it's lassie try an' get a man an' ne'er mind the cost. Aih, but it's a sorrowfu' market young women buy their gear in noo a days! There's mony a change since I mind, and that's no fair back, and most o' them for the waur.'

'Never mind the changes, Jenny. Here's the fiscal comin' wi' his man, to investigate the matter. We'll ha' the oot's an' in's o't by an' bye.'

How foreign is the charity that thinketh no evil to our nature. How uniformly does the bias of our thoughts incline to an evil report. Surely, brother, it is not a hard thing to believe the best, and impute the best, to our neighbor, and we are sure it is the happiest course for us. Better is the jubilant note of the bird than the hiss of the snake. Men cherish the one, but avoid the venom of the other. Let us learn from example.

On the spot now arrived the fiscal, a dapper little man, with a sharp visage, an infinite respect for the criminal law, and a pair of green spectacles. His follower, or our criminal officer—who holds a monopoly of employments, being town-crier, parish-head, minister's man, and tax collector, and rejoices in the name of Jem Dot, baptismally James Dottle—is rather inclined to obesity, has a slow, solemn look, partaking of the sagacity of the domestic owl, and the astuteness of an undertaker. His speech is monosyllabic, and rendered emphatic by a peculiar jerk of the head. In ordinary life he is dignified; in official, despotic over small boys who delight in marbles, and crouch, on winter nights, shivering, with their feet in their bonnets, at the pastry shop window, and other places of resort. Towards beggars, street musicians, and handbarrow toffy-men, he wages a desultory, but perpetual war. In other respects he is a very harmless animal; and as his intellects are more vexed than sharpened by his official duties, he answers his end very well in our village.

The fiscal proceeded to make such general enquiry into the matter as seemed requisite under the circumstances. Andrew M'Ilwraith was duly questioned as to the discovery of the bonnet in the morning; but nothing further was elicited from him, than that 'he had been takin' a dander by the waterside, to freshen himself a bit after an extra tumbler the preceding night in a certain bar-room, when he suddenly stumbled on the article.' Andrew might have added that he had in view in his 'bit dander,' the examination of certain trout lines he had set in the burn over night. But this, for obvious reasons, he did not advert to. The information did not throw much light on the matter beyond what was already known, gathered from Peggy's grandmother—to wit, that Peggy had gone to bed about the usual hour on the preceding evening, and next morning was not found in the house, or anywhere, visible in the flesh.

'Does any of you know, or have ye heard, anything more about the matter?' enquired the fiscal.

'I wadna wonder, sir, but oor ass, May, could gie ye an inklin' mair, gif ye could get it oot o' her,' observed a farmer who lived by the burn.

'Eh! ah! we'll go and see May. I hope she can say something to the purpose. Come along, Jem.'

In a few minutes, the pair were seated by the farmer's ingle, and May most unwillingly introduced to them. She was stout, and rather good looking, with plenty of damask in her cheek, and roguish eye in her lead, but obviously in trepidation and confusion in the circumstances she found herself involved in.

'Now, May, my young woman, ye know it is always oor duty to speak the truth when called upon, both for our own interests and those of our fellow creatures; and I'm sure, from your honest face, I need hardly say I expect nothing else from you, and nothing less. Sit down and tell us all you know about the disappearance of the young woman, Peggy Armstrong.'

'I ken naething, sir,' replied May, seating herself, with an innocent expression, as nearly allied to the point of intellectual capacity she alleged as it was possible to assume.

'Remember, May, you may be put on your

oath about the matter, and it will be an awful thing to perjure your soul. If you tell us frankly what you know this may be unnecessary.'

'How could I ken anything about it, urged she, hesitatingly.'

'That is not answering my question,' said the fiscal.

'Young woman do an-swer when you are in-ter-ro-gated by a law-fu' au-tho-ri-tie,' interposed Jem.

'Oh, haud thy wheesht, thou solemn idiot. An thou'd gang an' grind white mice in an organ, wi' a monkey dancin' til', that wad fit the better than sittin' here,' responded May, with a display of temper which silenced Jem for a time.

'That will do, May. Now, where were you last night?'

'In the house, sir, to be sure.'

'Nowhere else than in the house?'

'I was maybe oot o't a while.'

'What was you doing out of the house?'

'In the byre, looking after the beasts, and other things.'

'Was you out after eleven o'clock, or late at night?'

'I didna pay any attention to the clock, sir. Maybe I might be oot before or after that.'

'And who was with you?'

'Sick a question! Is't ava likely that onybody wad be wi' me?' said May, with a blush.

'Well, I understand. I do not wish you to tell his name.'

'I didna say it was a him, sir.'

'Or her name, then, in the meantime. We will just suppose you were out talking with some one.'

'Very weel, sir.'

Now, during the time you were out last night, did you not see or hear anything unusual?'

'Weel, sir, since ye maun hear it a', I was standin' at the barn door, maybe inside an' maybe outside the door, no engaicht in anything particular, when I thoct I heard somebody gang by the hoose saftly, walin' their steps like. It was an unusual hour for onybody to be on the tramp, and thinks I it'll be some o' thae tinkler bodies. I see warrant some o' the hens will be missin' in the morn' frae somebody's roost—no meanin' oot's, for I'm aye particular about lockin' the yett at night. So, ye see, whae'er it was hadna lang passed, till I hears something play splash i' the burn, wi' a sound that gied a stoun to my heart. 'Oh, gracious! Jo—' No, I didna say that. 'O gracious,' says I to them that was wi' me, 'can onybody hae tumelt intil the burn? 'I'll gang away an' see,' says they. 'Na, na,' says I, 'I canna be left here alone.'

'Wheesht a moment,' says they, 'I think I hear somebody comin'; and the words werna weel spoken, and scarcely afore we had time to slip round to the corner o' the house, when wha should we see passin' in the moonlicht but Barney Trigg, the Irishman. He passed quite close to us, whistlin'.'

'Whistling did you say?' interrupted the fiscal, looking up from his notes.'

'Aye, whistlin'.' There came a young man; and he passed on by the village, and I saw nae mair o' him.'

'There is something strange, and not very consistent in this. I am afraid I must know who the 'them' is who was along with you. You need not be the least afraid to tell me, as I will not abuse your confidence in any way.'

'Maybe no, sir, but it's best till lippin that to onybody. If I maun tell, I maun tell; but I'll no tell till I canna help it.'

As it appeared there was no likelihood of obtaining the secret from May, the fiscal left, having, however made enquiry at some neighboring farm-lasses, and obtained a pretty rough guess as to May's companion. It appeared, though not clearly so, that Barney Trig had something to do with the disappearance of Peggy, or, at least, was probably aware of some circumstance connected with it, and it seemed the best course immediately to obtain a warrant, and have Barney apprehended on suspicion.

Barney, as May alleged, was an Irishman. He and certain others of his kindred had appeared in our village during the railway epidemic; and, as we have found by the experience of similar cases, that, whatever may be the beauties or excellencies of the sister Isle, and however loudly its offspring exalt it, they never illustrate their patriotism by returning to its shores; thus altogether disproving the truthfulness, and dispelling the sentiment of that popular melody, 'The Exile of Erin.' Barney, once located, seemed resolved to abide. What shifts will an Irishman not invent and practise to obtain a living? Of this, Barney was a fertile example. He traded in dogs, in walking sticks, in pigeons, in old clothes, in fish, and in fowls—was suspected by the gamekeepers, and watched by the one policeman—and yet Barney thrived. He was ready witted and active; willing to work at anything; generally serviceable to whomsoever employed him; and always kept to the windy side of the law. Barney had a national horror of two things—'wake sperrits and a peliseman,' and it was not to be wondered at, when the slow and solemn Jem Dot, with warrant in his pocket, encountered him lounging about the quay, examining the herring boats, and suggested that he had a word to say to him in private, that Barney should jump on board a wherry and invite Jem to say his word in public.

[To be concluded.]

Idleness and melancholy keep constant company.

Anger has made many a man a fool.

From the London People's Journal.

## SOMETHING FOR THE LADIES TO READ.

A young lady commits a breach of confidence when she reveals the fact that a sighing swain has offered himself to her, and she has rejected him. Among the rules or laws of intercourse between individuals is a principle of trust, or to be more exact, a principle of confidence. A breach of trust evinces a want of that common principle which keeps human society together; but a breach of confidence betrays a more than ordinary share of baseness and depravity. Matters reposed in the bosom of another in a confidential manner, should never be brought to private or public notice except for purposes of public justice. Thus in conversation one may say: 'This is told you in trust, not to be mentioned to any one.' Or, if communicating with another by epistle, and wishing his thoughts to be considered private, he will prefix to his letter the significant term 'confidential,' or terminate the same by saying 'confidentially yours,' &c. Now, for one to reveal a subject thus entrusted, in the manner described, would meet with the merited disapprobation and contempt of every person professing the principles of virtue and true nobleness of soul. For even in the pagan world a betrayer of secrets has been considered as only fit for the companionship of the vile and the abandoned. Among the ancient Egyptians, to bring to public notice anything related in confidence was considered a capital offence. But there are certain subjects or secrets which should never be divulged, even when these provisos are not made in epistles or conversation: from the very nature of the intercourse it should be held in sacred confidence. Yet in certain instances we have noticed a disregard to the law or general principles of confidence, as in the case of a declined offer for matrimony by a gentleman to a lady. Is there not a great breach of confidence committed when a moral, high-minded young man offers his hand and heart to a professedly virtuous woman; and she from considerations of vanity, or pride, or perhaps no motive at all, reveals the same either directly or indirectly? It is not to be questioned for a moment that the lady, after receiving a proposition for marriage, in her wisdom; after due consideration, may say 'Nay,' yet at the same time it may be asked whether, in nine cases out of ten, when matters of love go so far as to call for an open declaration, that she had not acted the part of a heartless jilt, who had given her lover every reason to believe that her affections were sincere and ardent? A popular writer, treating on the delicate subject of popping the question, concludes his remarks by saying: 'As a general rule, a gentleman never need be refused. Every woman, except a cold, heartless coquette, finds the means of discouraging the man whom she does not intend to marry, before the matter comes to the point of a declaration.' But suppose for a moment, dear lady reader, that the term 'heartless coquette' may not be applied to you in the least degree, but that you received the visits and epistles of Mr. A—in no other light than that of a virtuous friend. Yet from what principle of refined sensibility and noble action ought even this friend to be allowed to be betrayed—one who has visited your home for months and for years? Perhaps you may say, it was violated in a private manner to your brother and sister; at the same time you knew that they in turn would have their professed confidants; so that in a little period it would soon become public property. Or perhaps you may say that no request was made to keep the matter secret. Suppose this were the case? Such was the respect entertained for your moral worth, that your lover could not for a moment suppose that you would meanly betray the trust reposed in you. Was the proposal made in a public manner, that the town, or even your own family, might hear of it? Was it not done in private, when you were alone? Should it be the custom for the lady to make the proposition to the gentleman, would you, in the case of a refusal, like to have the same made public? Act then according to the golden rule: 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.' But perhaps you may say that no injury has been inflicted upon your friend by making known the fact that he had offered himself to you. But of this you are not so certain. If he is a man of a sensitive disposition and retiring manners, I have no doubt but that he is affected by the impropriety of your conduct; first in your refusal, and secondly, in your revealing that which was really confidential, although no request was given not to divulge it.

All those ladies who betray in the slightest degree a confidence of this nature generally reap the reward of their own doings. The consequence is, that men are generally afraid of them. We once knew a young man of fortune, intelligence, and great moral worth, who rather fancied a beautiful lady, of agreeable manners and fascinating address. When some persons saw fit to recommend her, by saying that she had received some two or three offers, he replied: 'If she has deceived others she shall not have the opportunity of acting so toward me. Besides, she cannot have a pure heart, or else she would never have told it.' She lived and died a sour, disappointed old maid, notwithstanding her numerous 'offers.' Let the fair girls and their good mothers understand that their can be no greater breach of good manners, or a grosser violation of christian principles, than to reveal that which has been placed in the secret keeping of one bosom.

There are, however, two sides to the pin