

Literature, &c.

THE BRITISH MAGAZINES.

From Hogg's Instructor.

LEAVES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF A CURATE.

HELEN CORRIE.

HAVING devoted myself to the service of Him who said unto the demoniac and the leper, 'Be whole,' I go forth daily, treading humbly in the pathway of my self-appointed mission, through the dreary regions, the close and crowded streets, that exist like a plague-ground in the very heart of the wealthy town of L—.

They have no atmosphere of their own, those dilapidated courts, those noisome alleys, those dark nooks, where the tenements are green with damp, where the breath grows faint and the head throbs with an oppressive pain; and yet, amid the horrors of such abodes, hundreds of our fellow-creatures act the sad tragedy of life, and the gay crowd beyond sweep onward, without a thought of those who perish daily for want of the bread of eternal life. Oh! cast it upon those darkened waters, and it shall be found again after many days. There we see human nature in all its unveiled and degraded nakedness—the vile passions, the brutal coarseness, the corroding malice, the undisguised licentiousness. Oh, ye who look on and abhor, who pass like the Pharisee, and condemn the wretch by the wayside, pause and look within: education, circumstances, have refined and elevated your thoughts and actions; but blessed are those who shall never know by fearful experience how want and degradation can blunt the finest sympathies, and change, nay, brutalise the moral being.

How have I shuddered to hear the fearful mirth with whose wild laughter blasphemy and obscenity were mingled—that mockery of my sacred profession, which I knew too well lurked under the over-strained assumption of reverence for my words, when I was permitted to utter them, and the shout of derision that followed too often my departing steps, knowing that those immortal souls must one day render up their account; and humbly have I prayed, that my still unwearied zeal might yet be permitted to scatter forth the good seed which the cares and anxieties should not choke, nor the stony soil refuse!

Passing one evening through one of those dilapidated streets, to which the doors, half torn from their hinges, and the broken windows, admitting the raw, cold, gusty winds, gave so comfortless an aspect, I turned at a sudden angle into a district which I had never before visited. Through the low arch of a half ruined bridge, a turbid stream rolled rapidly on, augmented by the late rains. A strange looking building, partly formed of wood, black and decaying with age and damp, leaned heavily over the passing waters; it was composed of many storeys, which were approached by a wooden stair and shed-like gallery without, and evidently occupied by many families. The lamenting wail of neglected children and the din of contention were heard within. Hesitating on the threshold, I leant over the bridge, and perceived an extensive area beneath the ancient tenement; many low-browed doors, over whose broken steps the water washed and rippled, became distinguishable. As I gazed one of them suddenly opened, and a pale haggard woman appeared, shading a flickering light with her hand, I descended the few shabby wooden steps leading to the strange abodes, and approached her. As I advanced, she appeared to recognise me.

Come in sir, she said hurriedly; 'there is one within will be glad to see you;' and, turning, she led me through a winding passage into a dreary room, whose blackened floor of stone bore strong evidence that the flood chafed and darkened beneath it.

In an old arm-chair beside the rusty and almost fireless grate, sat, or rather lay, a pale and fragile creature, a wreck of blighted loveliness.

'Helen,' said the woman, placing the light on a rough table near her, 'here is the minister come to see you.'

The person she addressed attempted to rise, but the effort was too much, and she sank back, as if exhausted by it. A blush mantled over her cheek, and gave to her large dark eyes a faint and fading lustre. She had been beautiful, very beautiful; but the delicate features were sharpened and attenuated, the exquisite symmetry of her form worn by want and illness to a mere outline of its former graceful proportions; yet, even amid the squalid wretchedness that surrounded her, an air of bygone superiority gave a nameless interest to her appearance, and I approached her with a respectful sympathy that seemed strange to my very self.

After a few explanatory sentences respecting my visit, to which she assented by a humble yet silent movement of acquiescence, I commenced reading the earnest prayers which the occasion called for. As I proceeded the faint chorus of a drinking song came upon my ears from some far recesses of this mysterious abode; doors were suddenly opened and closed with a vault-like echo, and a hoarse voice called on the woman who had admitted me; she started suddenly from her knees, and with the paleness of fear on her countenance, left the room. After a moment's hesitating pause, the invalid spoke in a voice whose low flute-like tones stole upon the heart like aerial music.

'I thank you,' she said, 'for this kind visit those soothing prayers. Oh, how often in my wanderings have I longed to listen to such words! Cast out, like an Indian pariah, from the pale of human fellowship, I had almost forgotten how to pray; but you have shed the healing balm of religion once more, upon my seared and blighted heart, and I can weep glad tears of penitence, and dare to hope for pardon.'

After this burst of excitement, she grew more calm, and our conversation assumed a devotional yet placid tenor, until she drew from her bosom a small packet, and gave it to me with a trembling hand.

'Read it sir,' she said; 'it is the sad history of a life of sorrow. Have pity as you trace the record of human frailty, and remember that you are the servant of the Merciful.'

She paused, and her cheek grew paler, as if her ear caught an unwelcome but well-known sound. A quick step was soon heard in the passage, and a man entered, bearing a light; he stood a moment on the threshold, as if surprised, and then hastily approached us. A model of manly beauty, his haughty features bore the prevailing characteristics of the gipsy blood—the rich olive cheek, the lustrous eyes, the long silky raven hair, the light and flexible form, the step lithe and graceful as the leopard's; yet were all these perfections marred by a man of reckless licentiousness. His attire, which strangely mingled the rich and gaudy with the worn and faded, added to the rufianism of his appearance; and as he cast a stern look on the pale girl, who shrank beneath his eye, I read at once the mortal secret of her despair.—With rough words he bade me begone, and as the beseeching eye of his victim glanced meaningly towards the door, I departed, with a silent prayer in my heart for the betrayer and the erring.

A cold drizzling rain was falling without and I walked homewards, musing on the strange scene in which I had so lately mingled. Seated in my little study, I drew my table near the fire, arranged my reading-lamp, and commenced the perusal of the manuscript confided to my charge. It was written in a delicate Italian hand upon uncouth and various scraps of paper, and appeared to have been transcribed with little attempt at arrangement, and at long intervals; but my curiosity added the links to the leading events, and I gradually entered with deep interest into the mournful story.

'How happy was my childhood!' it began. I can scarcely remember a grief through all that sunny lapse of years. I dwelt in a beautiful abode, uniting the verandahs and vine-covered porticoes of southern climes with the substantial in-door comforts of English luxury. The country around was romantic, and I grew up in its sylvan solitudes almost as wild and happy as the birds and fawns that were my companions.

I was motherless. My father on her death had retired from public life, and devoted himself to her child. Idolised by him, my wildest wishes were untrammelled; the common forms of knowledge were eagerly accepted by me, for I had an intuitive talent of acquiring anything which contributed to my pleasure; and I early discovered that, without learning to read and write, the gilded books and enamelled desks in my father's library would remain to me only as so many splendid baubles; but a regular education, a religious and intellectual course of study, I never pursued. I read as I liked, and when I liked. I was delicate in appearance, and my father feared to control my spirits, or to rob me of a moment's happiness. Fatal affection! How did I repay such misjudging love!

Time flowed brightly on, and I had already seen sixteen summers, when the little cloud appeared in the sky that so fearfully darkened my future destiny. In one of our charitable visits to the neighbouring cottages, we formed an acquaintance with a gentleman who had become an inhabitant of our village; a fall from his horse placed him under the care of our worthy doctor, and he had hired a small room attached to Ashtree farm, until he recovered from the lingering effects of his accident. Handsome, graceful, and insinuating in his address, he captivated my ardent imagination at once. Unaccustomed to the world, I looked upon him as the very 'mould of form,' a new and blissful enchantment seemed to pervade my being in his presence, and my girlish fancy dignified the delusion with the name of love.

My father was delighted with his society; he possessed an inexhaustible fund of anecdote and strange adventure, was a good musician, and had the agreeable tact of accommodating himself to the mood of the moment. He was a constant visitor, and at length became almost domesticated in our household.

Known to us by the name of Corrie, he spoke of himself as the son of a noble house, who, to indulge a poetic temperament, and a romantic passion for rural scenery, had come forth on a solitary pilgrimage, and cast aside for a while what he called the iron fetters of exclusive society.

How sweet were our moonlight ramblings through the deep forest glens; how fondly we lingered by the Fannies' Well in the green hollow of the woods, watching the single star that glittered in its pellucid waters. And on, what passionate eloquence, what romantic admiration was poured forth upon my willing ear, and thrilled my susceptible heart.

Before my father's eye he appeared gracefully courteous to me, but not a word or glance betrayed the passion which in our secret interviews worshipped me as an idol, and enthralled my senses with the ardency of its homage. This, he told me, was neces-

sary for my happiness, as my father might separate us if he suspected that another shared the heart hitherto exclusively his own.

This was my first deception. Fatal transgression. I had departed from the path of truth, and my guardian angel grew pale in the presence of the tempter.

Winter began to darken the valleys; our fireside circle was enlivened by the presence of our accomplished guest. On the eve of my natal day he, spoke of the birthday fetes he had witnessed during his continental and oriental rambles, complimented my father on the antique beauty and massy richness of the gold and silver plate which, rarely used, decorated the sideboard in honor of the occasion; and, admiring the pearls adorning my hair and bosom, spoke so learnedly on the subject of jewels, that my father brought forth from his Indian cabinet my mother's bridal jewels, diamonds, and emeralds of exquisite lustre and beauty. I had never before seen these treasures, and our guest joined in the raptures of my admiration.

'They will adorn my daughter,' said my father, with a sigh, as he closed the casket, and retired to replace it.

'Yes, my Helen,' said my lover, 'they shall glitter on that fair brow in a prouder scene, when thy beauty shall gladden the eyes of England's nobles, and create envy in her fairest daughters.'

I listened with a smile, and, on my father's return passed another evening of happiness—my last.

We retired early, and oh, how bright were the dreams that floated around my pillow, how sweet the sleep that stole upon me as I painted the future—an elysium of love and splendor.

I was awakened by a wild cry that rang with agonizing terror through the midnight stillness: it was the voice of my father. I sprang hastily from my couch, drew on a wrapper, seized the night lamp, and hurried to his chamber. Rufians opposed my entrance; the Indian cabinet lay shattered on the floor, and I beheld my father struggling in the fierce grasp of a man who had clasped his throat to stop the starting cry. With maniac force I reached the couch, and seizing the murderous hand, called aloud for help.

The robber started with a wild execration; the mask fell from his face and I beheld Gilbert Corrie!

When I recovered consciousness, I found that I had suffered a long illness—a brain fever, caused, the strange nurse said, by some sudden shock. Alas, how dreadful had been that fatal cause. Sometimes I think my head has never been cool since; a dull throb of agony presses yet upon my brow; sometimes it passes; my spirits mount lightly and I can laugh, but it has a hollow sound—oh, how unlike the sweet laughter of bygone days.

We were in London. My apartments were sumptuous: all that wealth could supply was mine; but what a wretch was I amid that scene of splendor. The destroyer was now the arbiter of my destiny. I knew his wealth arose from his nefarious transactions at the gaming table.

I knew my father was dead; the severe injuries he had received on that fatal night and the mysterious disappearance of his daughter had laid him in the grave. Gilbert Corrie was virtually his murderer, yet still I loved him. A passion parting of delirium bound me to his destiny. I shrank not from the caress of the felon gamester—the plague-stain of sin was upon me—the burning ploughshares of the world's scorn lay in my path, and how was the guilty one to dare the fearful ordeal?

For fallen woman there is no return; no penitence can restore her sullied brightness; the angel plumes of purity are scattered in the dust, and never can the lost one regain the Eden of his innocence. The world may pity, may pardon, but never more respect; and oh, how dreadful to mingle with the pure and feel the mark of Cain upon your brow.

A change soon came upon Gilbert. There was no longer the lavish expenditure, the careless profusion: his looks and tone were altered. A haggard expression sat upon his handsome features, and the words of endearment no longer flowed from his lips; a quick footstep beneath the window made him start, strange looking men visited him; his absences were long; his garments often changed: the veil was about to be lifted from my real position.

One night he entered hastily, snatched me from the luxurious lazeon on which I rested, and led me, without answering my questions, to a hackney coach. We were speedily whirled away, and I never again beheld that home of splendor.

By bypaths we entered a close and murky street, the coach was discharged, I was hurried over a dark miry road, and, passing thro' a courtyard, the gate of which closed behind us, was led without ceremony into a wretched apartment, thronged with fierce, ill-looking men, seated round a table well supplied with wine and ardent spirits.

Our entrance was hailed with shouts. Gilbert was called by the name of 'noble captain' to the head of the table, and I was suffered disregarded to weep alone. I seated myself by the blazing fire, and then first saw the horrors of my destiny.

From their discourse I learned that Gilbert had committed extensive forgeries, and had that night escaped the pursuit of justice. Bumpers of congratulation were drunk, plans of robberies discussed, and the gipsy cap-

tain chosen as the leader of the most daring exploits contemplated.

Since that night how fearful have been my vicissitudes. Sometimes as the splendidly dressed mistress of private gambling rooms, I have received the selected dupes in a luxurious boudoir, decoying the victims by fascinating smiles into the snare laid for them by Gilbert and his associates. Sometimes encamping with the wild gipsy tribe in some hidden dell or woodland haunt, where their varied spoils were in safe keeping. Anon, the painted and tinsel queen of an itinerant show, where Gilbert enacted the mountebank, and by the brilliancy of his fascinating eloquence drew into his treasury the hard earned savings of the rustic gazers.

To all those degradations have I submitted, and now, oh now, more than ever has the iron entered my soul. He has ceased to love me. I have become an encumbrance; my beauty has faded from exposure and neglect. I have sunk beneath his blows, writhed beneath the bitterness of his sarcasms, his brutal jests, his scornful mockery of my penitence and tears. I have endured the agony of hunger while he roted with his companions in profligate luxury; and yet, if the old smile lights up his countenance, the old look shines forth from his lustrous eye, he is again to me the lover of my youth, and the past is a hideous dream. Oh, woman's heart, how great and unfathomable is thy mystery!

The manuscript here ended abruptly. How sad a moral might be drawn from the history of this unfortunate. What rare gifts of mind and beauty had the want of religion marred and blighted! Had the Sun of Righteousness shone upon that ardent heart, its aspirations had been glorious, its course

Upwards! upwards! Through the doubt and the dismay Upwards! to the perfect day!

What mournful tragedies are ever around us, flowing on with the perpetual undercurrent of human life, each hour laden with its mystery and horror, sweeping like dim phantoms through the arch of time, and burying the fearful records in the oblivion of the abyss beyond. How few of the floating wrecks are snatched from the darkening tide.

I returned the next day to the dwelling of Helen, but it was shut up, and in the daytime appeared as if long deserted. To all enquiries the neighbors answered reluctantly that it had been long uninhabited, and that its last occupants had been a gang of coiners, who were now suffering the penalty of transportation. I often visited the same district, but all my after search was in vain, and the fate of Helen Corrie still remains an undiscovered mystery.

SELF-CONCEIT.

Theophrastus, an ancient Greek writer, says that the proud man regards the whole human race with contempt, himself excepted. If he has rendered a service to any man, he will remind him of it as he meets him in the street, and in a loud voice goad him with the obligation. He is never the first to accost any man; he returns the salute of no one in the public ways. This, as the reader sees, is a sweeping condemnation of that pride which is full of dross, and so expressive of a mean mind. Mostly, pride of person or dress creates vanity—one of the most contemptible of those numerous failings which besiege a frail human nature, and one into which the young may perhaps fall soonest of any. If a vulgar man have this exaggerated sentiment with him, nothing can be more clearly evinced, for his own person bears always the marks of it. You will find it in the redundant watch chain, the inordinately blue and extensive cravat—in the coat elaborated out of an intense bad taste—in smoking cigars out of place—in his conversation—in his manner—in everything, in fact, this puerility betrays itself. Besides that it is ridiculous, it is also a dangerous sentiment. A self love that has grown into a vanity of this kind easily breaks the slender bulwarks of moral obligation, and sticks at no means, however questionable, in order to support it.

CURIOSITY.

The desire of knowledge, though animated by extensive and adventurous motives, seems on many occasions to operate without subordination to any other principle. We are eager to see and hear, without the intention of referring our observations to a further end. We climb a mountain for a prospect of the plain; we run to the strand in a storm, that we may contemplate the agitation of the water; we rage from city to city, though we profess neither architecture nor fortification; we cross seas, only to view nature in nakedness or magnificence in ruins; we are equally allured by novelty of every kind, by a desert or a palace, a cataract or a cavern, by everything rude and everything polished, everything great and everything small. We do not see a thicket but with some temptation to enter it, nor remark an insect flying before us but with an inclination to pursue it. This passion is probably heightened in proportion as the powers of the mind are elevated and enlarged. Lucan, therefore, introduces Cæsar speaking with dignity suitable to the grandeur of his designs and the extent of his capacity, when he declares to the High Priest of Egypt that he has no desire equally powerful with that of finding the origin of the Nile, and that he would quit all the projects of the civil war for a sight of those fountains which had been so long concealed. And Homer, when he would furnish the syrens with a temptation to which his hero, renowned for