

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Hogg's Edinburgh Instructor.

THE YOUNG AUTHORESS.

Clara, dear, just look down the street, and try if you can see the postman.

No, sister; not yet. Wait, there he is at Mrs Watson's door.

Oh! Clara, if he should bring no letter for me. How my heart beats! I wish he would make haste.

The postman came leisurely on, never dreaming of caring that his packet of epistles bore along with it the weal or woe of some hundreds of expectant human hearts. He lingered at Mrs Kenworthy's door to joke with the maid, teased a little dog that rushed out to bark at its daily tormentor, hailed a friend in the street, and altogether behaved in a way which, though natural enough in a country postman, was calculated to drive those whose very existence perhaps depended on the tidings he brought nearly wild with suspense and anxiety.

Of the number of these was Harriet Lee, whom our friend Clara had addressed as 'sister.' Unable to wait any longer, she descended the steps, and ran out into the street, careless of the fact that she had on neither bonnet nor shawl to conceal her bright hair and well-saved dress from the scrutiny of the passers-by. She soon returned, breathless and trembling, and laid two large packets on the table, not yet having gained courage to break the seals.

Oh, Harriet, what are those? exclaimed Clara, jumping up from her drawing, and running to her. Surely not the return of all your nice tales?

I fear so, Clara, instead of the money I expected for them; and we have not a shilling in the house. Oh! Clara, dear, never attempt to follow in my steps, and depend for a livelihood upon writing for the periodicals. Better be a common sempstress all your days.

The packets, when opened, contained, in fact, a number of returned 'articles,' though the mortification of the young authoress was in one case softened by the editor's friendly intimation, that he was compelled to return the tales, on account of the magazine for which they were intended passing into other hands.

Then he would have retained them but for that, said Clara, exultingly.

Perhaps so, replied Harriet. But that does not alter our position. We must pay our weekly rent to-morrow, and I cannot borrow of any one here. I dare not ask Mr Willoughby for another advance on the translations he has of mine; and meanwhile, even if our landlady be indulgent, and consent to wait, we are in danger of starving. Never, surely, were two poor girls so situated, without a friend to assist them.

Be comforted, sister. It is not like you to despond. We have hands, and we can work; and if you will allow me, I will immediately go to Mrs Watson, and ask her to give us her plain sewing.

Are you serious, Clara? Do you not feel timid about it? And you are so shabby, my poor little sister!

Yes, said Clara, sadly, looking down on her faded gingham. I know I am not very fit for a lady's drawing room. But so much the more reason that I should get something to do at once. It is of no use waiting until I am qualified for a daily governess. And drawing brings in very little. Those screens that I painted, sister, you know Hanson has them yet on hand. He says there is no demand for such things.

Not in a town like this, Clara. I often wish we were in London, only it must be very miserable for two young females to be alone in so large a place.

But if we wished ever so much to go there, Harriet, we have not money for the journey.

True. Follow your own suggestion, then, Clara, dear; and, as a beginning of humbler but more certain employment, let us secure Mrs Watson's plain sewing. Other employment may turn up afterwards.

Mrs Watson was a good-natured, though somewhat ostentatious woman, with a liberal husband, and a large family of small children. The little Watsons contrived to keep their mother and two nurses constantly engaged in looking after them, so that all the sewing was done out. Harriet and Clara were aware of this, for Mrs Watson's extravagance was a favourite theme with her neighbours, and many exaggerated tales were told of the sums yearly paid to the linendraper, the baby linen warehouse, the sempstress, and the dressmaker. Though not above half of these tales were to be believed, still it was very certain that Mrs Watson's plain sewing would amount to no inconsiderable sum per annum. And Clara Lee evinced her usual plain good sense, in determining, if possible, to secure it. She had, besides, a latent hope that Mrs Watson might possibly employ her as a daily governess, as soon as she thought any of her little ones old enough to require one. At present they were educated entirely by Mrs Watson herself, who, in this respect, certainly gave the lie to the popular reports of her extravagance.

Well, Clara, said Harriet, on the return of the former from her expedition, 'how have you succeeded? Did Mrs Watson overpower you with her kind condolence?'

Rather, sister; but I had made up my

mind not to care for trifles. I have succeeded even better than I could have expected. Look! And Clara drew a large parcel from beneath her shawl. 'Here are two sets of little nightgowns. They are to be made very neat, after the enclosed pattern, and edged with crochet-work, and we are to let her have them in a fortnight.'

Well, done, brave Clara. I will put aside this unprofitable scribbling, though I had a capital idea whilst you were out, and wrote four pages of a new tale. But now we will stitch our fingers to the bone; won't we, Clara? You, dear, had better begin on the crochet-edging, for you know I am but a bungler at fancy-work. We must manage to complete our order within the fortnight. How much do you think it will come to, Clara?

The first day the sisters felt their new occupation, from want of use, extremely fatiguing. Their backs ached, and their fingers became sore; but the hope of placing themselves above the grinding poverty that had lately been their portion, supported them through these comparatively trifling inconveniences. As they sewed, they consulted together how to persuade their landlady, who was a very sharp woman, to wait another week for the rent of their two small rooms.

Have we nothing we can offer her as security? asked Clara, who, as our readers will have perceived, had a very business-like turn of mind. 'There is the ring,' she added, softly, after a short pause; 'the ring our poor mother gave me before she died.'

And papa's miniature, presented to me at the same time, added Harriet, beneath her breath.

But you would not like to part with that Harriet!

Nor you with your ring. Still a ring, however dear from associations, is not like a miniature.

Well, you dear, unselfish creature, just as you think best. But perhaps we need not part with either of these relics. We will tell Mrs Jenkins the truth, and appeal to her kindness. I know she has a heart beneath that sour exterior. Witness her care of her orphan niece.

We also are orphans. And a tear stole down Clara's rosy cheek, but she quickly wiped it away, and resumed. Well, you shall do your best with her, and I will go to a few shops, and endeavour to obtain upon credit what will suffice until Mrs Watson pays us for this work. Fortunately, we owe very little anywhere.

And never will again, Clara, if we can help it. And now come a little nearer to the window, that we may make the most of the fading light.

The landlady, subdued by Harriet's sweet and gentle manner, agreed to be patient, and the grocer and general provision merchant willingly supplied the sisters with the few necessities they required. Few indeed were these, for they had long found it advisable to give up sugar to their tea, and butter to their bread.

Harriet and Clara Lee were singularly placed, and yet, could we know the histories of those whom we daily pass regardless in the streets, there are probably many others equally so. Since the death of their parents, who, coming total strangers to a strange place, had in vain endeavoured to establish themselves in a respectable line of business, Harriet and Clara had lived almost entirely upon the precarious earnings of the former, who was, as we have seen, a contributor to several of the periodicals of the day. But her success was far from uniform, and extreme anxiety and almost hopelessness of ever earning a sufficiency had undermined the little talent she formerly possessed. Clara had gained a few pounds by painting small pictures and screens in water colours; and once, at a time when the sisters were very hard pressed, a distant relative had sent them a trifle. But this relative, whom they had never seen, and who was a selfish, gripping woman, little disposed to take notice of two portionless orphans, who, she thought, could never do her any good in return, had accompanied her paltry donation with so galling a letter, that Harriet and Clara at once determined never again, in any extremity, to refer to Mrs Williamson. Far rather would they, they both felt, enter any service, however lowly, than again expose themselves to the rich widow's insulting pity, and insinuated blame of those dear though unfortunate parents, of whose affectionate guidance they so sorely experienced the need.

The fortnight wore slowly on, only cheered by the prospect of the twelve or fifteen shilling which the sisters expected at the end of it. At length the work was completed, a day before the time fixed; and Clara put on her little straw bonnet, with green ribbons and faded shawl, and took it home. When she returned, Harriet had opened her desk, and was busy among her papers.

So there you are at your unprofitable writing again, you dear, old bluestocking, cried the young girl, who appeared unusually gay.

Yes, Clara; for now, after a fortnight of drudgery at the needle, it is quite delightful to take up my pen once more. But sit down close by me, and tell me how you have sped. That sagacious little face tells a pleasant tale.

And a true one, Harry. But you will never guess. Look here, then. And, putting her hand into the pocket of her dress, Clara drew forth an old knitted purse, and proceeded to empty the contents on to her sister's lap. Here is the gold by itself at this end, and here is the silver. All this heap sister,

A little beautiful new half sovereign, and—eight shillings, Mrs Watson has never given you all this, Clara, for those tiny nightgowns? Eightpence apiece.

Indeed, but she has; she said they were so neatly done, and the crochet-edging so pretty. With all her pomposity, she is a dear, good woman, and a real friend to the destitute. Now, don't smile at my earnestness, Harriet. I only wish Mrs Williamson were like her. And she preaches religion, and talks about her being humble. Well, well, Harriet, I daresay I ought not to talk so. And, after all, what does Mrs Williamson's behaviour matter to us, when we have eighteen shillings nearly a pound, earned within a fortnight by the cleverness of our own fingers?

But out of that, you must remember, you little chatterbox, said Harriet, affectionately passing her arm round her sister's waist, 'that we have nine shillings to pay for rent.'

And then we shall only have nine left, and out of that we must pay three shillings to the provision merchant and two to the baker. Four shillings left. Ah, dear Harriet! And Clara sighed at this rapid disposal of their hard earned money.

Yes, my sister, it is hard; and when so many are rolling in wealth. But we must not indulge in envious, discontented feelings, but be thankful that we are able to pay our way, and that our health is preserved to us. And for the promotion of the latter, we will cease from labour this one evening, and recruit our weary eyes and backs by a walk in the fields. It is a sweet evening. Let us make haste with our tea.

After despatching their frugal meal, the sisters set out; and having called upon their landlady by the way, and paid their little bills at the two shops that had supplied them with provisions, they left the streets, and proceeded along a winding town lane, full of gossiping women, and noisy children. This was unpleasant enough, but the quiet, green fields lay at its termination, and they hastened their steps to reach them.

How peaceful and soothing it is, said Clara, in a low voice, as they sauntered across a wide meadow, where every blade of grass shone with a golden hue in the level rays of the setting sun. 'One could almost believe that one had left all weariness and labour behind in the noisy town, and that here one might live like the lilies on that pond, who "toil not, neither do they spin."'

If this could be, replied her sister, would it be better, for us? It was a high decree that said, 'In the sweat of thy brow—'

But we are tolerably far from the smoke now, said Harriet, 'for we are just at Ivy Cottage.'

Oh, yes; where that strange gentleman lodges, whom they talk so much about. I wonder if we could get a glimpse of him this fine evening. And Clara placed one foot across the ditch that separated the sisters from the bank and hedge surrounding the little garden in front of Ivy Cottage, and peered through the stems of the hawthorn bushes. 'There he is, Harriet,' she whispered, sitting on a bench with his back to us. Now he turns. What a striking countenance. Do look, Harriet; I will make room for you.

But Clara, in her hasty withdrawal, had not calculated the width of the ditch, nor the depth of the little stream of water that ran beneath the shade of the nettles and buttercups. The bank gave way beneath her foot, and down she slipped, before Harriet could so much as stretch out a preventing hand. The fall was accompanied by an involuntary shriek, and in a moment the dark countenance of the singular stranger appeared above the garden hedge.

Can I be of any service, ladies? he asked, in a rich, deep-toned voice. 'You appear to have met with an accident, young lady,' he added, looking at Clara.

Poor Clara cut rather a ludicrous figure, as she stood with her wet skirts clinging to her, and her downcast face covered with blushes; and her sister could not, with all her sympathy for her plight, help smiling as she glanced at her. Harriet's smile was peculiarly sweet, and it appeared to have attracted the attention of the stranger, for when she looked up in his face to answer his polite inquiry, she found his gaze rivetted upon her.

I beg your pardon, he said at length, and it seemed that some internal agitation caused his voice to tremble slightly. 'Your smile reminded me of a dear friend. But I am detaining this young lady in her wet things. Do me the honor to walk in. Mrs Casson, my hostess, will I am sure, be happy to render any assistance that may be needed.'

Harriet and Clara thanked him and gladly accepted his offer, for it was impossible for the latter to return through the streets in her drenched condition. When they were comfortably installed in Mrs Casson's neat kitchen, and while Clara was engaged in taking off her wet shoes, and drying her dress and stockings by the cheerful fire, the good woman, made Harriet sit down, and opened out for a little bit of gossip.

Well, she said, 'what do you think of my lodger? They are making a pretty fuss about him in the town, I suppose. They fancy him a nabob, and make out all manner of tales concerning him. But I know best, only I keep my own council.'

He is a very gentlemanly man, Harriet replied. 'Not handsome exactly, but so distinguished looking.'

And so he is, miss. I wish you could

but see his linen, and all his fine 'curiosities.' Oh, he has such beautiful clothes. Just now, though all his shirts are as good as new, he wants a new set making; and I'm sure I don't know whom to engage to do it, for he is so particular.'

Harriet and Clara looked at each other. 'Would you trust us with them?' said the former. 'Our name is Lee, and we live in Summer Street.'

Mrs Casson glanced at her visitors inquisitively. 'Well, now, I believe I could trust you. You seem nice, lady-like young women. But have you been used to making shirts?'

Harriet replied that both her sister and herself were neat sewers, and had always made their father's shirts. The negotiation was soon concluded. Mrs Casson agreed to walk over on the morrow to their lodgings with the piece of Irish linen, which her 'gentleman,' she said, had commissioned her to purchase at Walker & Dawson's, 'as fine as could be bought for money.'

Clara could not help jumping for joy as they walked home in the twilight. 'More work, sister. The proverb is true, "God helps those that help themselves."'

Mrs Casson kept her promise of calling with the piece of linen, and the shirts were speedily completed. As Clara had caught a severe cold the evening of her aquatic adventure, Harriet volunteered to take the work home herself; and at the termination of her expedition was ushered, somewhat reluctantly, into Mr Somerton's sitting-room. That gentleman was out in the garden, but Mrs Casson said she would let him know that his shirts were come home, and meanwhile Harriet amused herself by looking at several of the 'curiosities' which Mrs Casson had mentioned on their first visit, and which were disturbed on the tables of the apartment. Among them she perceived a miniature, set in gold and pearls, which she ventured to take up and examine more closely, and started to discern in its features a striking resemblance to her own mother, only younger and handsomer, as though it had been taken when that dear parent was in the bloom of youth and beauty, ere anxiety and impending poverty had paled the roses on her cheek, and dimmed the lustre of her mild, blue eyes. Harriet was in the act of turning the miniature round to look for some name or initial that should confirm or contradict her impression, when a step was heard, and she hastily put it down. But her heightened colour and tearful eyes were not so easily got rid of, and as Mr Somerton entered, and was about to address his visitor with his usual politeness, he appeared struck by something in her countenance.

This can be no accidental resemblance, he muttered to himself. 'Just as I saw her last, on the eve of my departure. Young lady,' he added aloud to Harriet, who, having recovered her composure, was speculating on the causes of this singular emotion, evinced at each interview with herself; 'young lady, answer me one question, I beseech you, and be assured that it is no idle curiosity that dictates it. What was your mother's maiden name, and where was she born?'

My poor mother's maiden name was Harriet Leslie, and she was born at Sunnylea, a village in Devonshire, Harriet replied, succinctly, immediately connecting these inquiries with the miniature she had discovered.

It is as I suspected, said the stranger; and, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, beside which he was standing, and covering his face with his hand, he in vain struggled to disguise the emotion that shook his thin, nervous frame. 'You said my poor mother, at length he resumed, looking up for a moment. She is dead, then?'

She is, sir. She died eighteen months ago. My poor father had departed before her; and my sister and I am now alone in the world.'

Maintaining a hard contest against poverty. Is it not so?'

God is good, sir. He 'tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.'

Miss Lee (I believe that is your name?)—Harriet bowed—'shall you think me very impertinent if I request you to inform me where and in what condition of life your—your mother died, and how her daughters are situated at present? Have you any relatives who interest themselves about you? Tell me, in fact, and fear not to tire me—I have a deeper interest in the matter than you can imagine,' added the mysterious speaker, parenthetically—'tell me, as well as you can, your family history.'

Harriet had the good sense to do as requested, without timidity or hesitation; and the interview lasted so long, that twilight had deepened into dusk, and poor Clara had grown quite feverish with apprehension as to the cause of her sister's delay, ere the latter bade good by to her new friend at the entrance of the fields leading to Ivy Cottage.

'Keep yourself as quiet as possible,' were his parting words, 'and waste no time in conjectures as to the nature of my interest in you and your sister. You have too much preception to suspect it to be of an invidious description. In three days you shall hear farther. Meanwhile, as I am a punctual man in pecuniary matters, allow me to place myself in some degree out of your debt.'

Harriet would have refused the proffered sovereign, saying that it was too much for the work done, but the stranger insisted; and so they parted.

The sun was setting on the third evening after the interview above recorded, and Harriet and Clara were seated at the window of their little apartment, dressed in their best at-