

## Literature, &amp;c.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From the London Working Man's Friend.  
**CLARA GREGORY: OR THE STEPMOTHER.**

A Story in ten Chapters.

## CHAPTER I.

'Do, dear Clara, stay at home to-night; father will be so grieved.'

'He certainly has shown no great regret for my feelings, and he cannot expect me to be over-tender of his. I am sure I could not endure to stay here, and my marvel is that you can.'

Clara Gregory did not observe the tear that glistened in her sister's eye, as she spoke these words, in a bitter tone; yet her voice was gentler when she spoke again.

'Please, Alice, just tie my tippet for me; my hands are gloved. There, thank you.'

She opened the hall-door, and stood for a moment listening to the moan the leafless trees made as they shivered in the blast.

'Well, Alice, I suppose it is of no use asking you to go with me; so, good night!' And she slowly descended the steps, and passed down the street.

Alice stood watching her receding form until she disappeared, and then, with a shiver, she turned away.

'How cold it is!' she said to herself. 'I must be sure to have it warm and pleasant for them when they come. Let me see. I will have a fire in the little back parlour; it looks so bright and cheery. I know father will like that best.'

The fire was kindled, the rooms were lighted, and the young girl wandered through them, again and again, to assure herself that nothing could make them more home-like and inviting. In the large parlours, in their rich furniture and furnace heat, there was little for her to do.

A certain awe forbade her to interfere with 'Aunt Debby's' accustomed arrangements, but in the 'dear little back parlour' she might do as she listed; and she found ample employment for her fairy-fingers.

The fuchsia must be taught to droop its bright blossoms over the pale cello, the door of Canary's cage was to be set open, the father's slippers to be placed before his chair, the favourite books to be laid upon the table.

All, at last, was done. The pictures on the wall, the crimson curtains, and the carpet on the floor, reflected the streaming light of the fire with a grateful glow of comfort. One momentous question remained to be decided. Should the old dog be suffered to crouch as usual on the hearth-rug, or be banished to less honorable quarters? After deep and anxious deliberation this was also settled.

Carlo was permitted to esconce himself in the chimney-corner, while his young mistress placed herself in the great arm-chair before the fire, and fell to dreaming. Alice Gregory was but fifteen years old; yet any one would have longed to know of her dreams, who might have looked on her as she sat there, her thoughtful eyes fixed on the glowing coals, and her youthful face inwrought with feeling. And much she had to make her think and feel; for Alice was a motherless child, and this night was to bring a stranger into that place, so hallowed by the memory of her who had passed thence, into the heavens.

Two long hours did the girl sit there, awaiting her father's return. Sweet visions of the past, dim visions of the future, were about her. All the saddest and the happiest hours of her brief life came back to her. They came as old familiar friends, sorrowful as were some of their faces, and she clung to them, and could not bear to leave them for those coming hours that beckoned to her with so doubtful promise.

'I hope she will love me,' mused she of the strange mother; 'but she cannot as Aunt Mary does, and nobody, nobody can ever love me as my own dear mother did.' She sobbed, with a gush of tears. But presently they staid in their fountain, for she thought of her mother still loving her, and of her saviour, ever near, loving her more than mortal could.

'I will try to be good and gentle,' thought she, 'and she will love me. Nine o'clock! Aunt Debby thought they would be here by seven; I must go and ask what the matter can be.'

The individual yclept 'Aunt Debby' was no less a personage than Mrs Deborah Dalrymple, whose pride it was, that, for twenty years the light of her wisdom, and the strength of her hands, had been the dependence of Dr. Arthur Gregory's household. On this occasion, Alice found her in the dining room, seated in state, her bronzed visage graced by the veritable cap with which she had honoured the reception of the first Mrs Gregory. Its full double ruffle and bountiful corn coloured bows, made her resemble the pictures in the primers of the sun with puffed cheeks, surrounded by his beams. She would show no partiality not she. What Dr. Gregory thought was right, was right. He had been a good master to her as ever a woman need have, and she was sure of a comfortable home the rest of her days whoever came there. Dr. Gregory was in all things her oracle, her admiration, her sovereign authority. The world did not often see such a man as he, that it didn't. But, barring the doctor, she sensibly realised the world had no more reliable authority than Mrs Deborah Dalrymple. There she sat, anxiously speculating on the approaching regime, and plying the needles

on her best knitting work with uncommon zeal.

'Aunt Debby, do you know it is nine o'clock?'

'I heard the clock strike nine.'

'Father should have been here two hours ago.'

'I don't know that.'

'Why, you said he would be here at seven.'

'I don't know that.'

'What then?'

'I expected him.'

'Well, what can be the reason that he does not come?'

'Great many things.'

'But what is the reason?'

'He knows better than I.'

'What do you suppose?'

'Nothing.'

Alice came to a pause with a decidedly unsatisfied expression.

'Was it winter when he brought my mother home?'

'No.'

'Summer?'

'Yes.'

'Was it a pleasant day?'

'Yes.'

Despairing of Aunt Debby's communicativeness, Alice returned to her solitude, roused a vigorous flame in the grate, and sitting down on an ottoman beside Carlo, commenced an attack on his taciturnity.

'But hark! those are father's bells. No—yes, yes, they are come.'

Girl and dog sprang to their feet together, and ran to the door. In her haste, Alice brushed something from the worktable. It was nothing but her mother's needlebook, but she pressed it to her lips as she tenderly replaced it, and passed more slowly into the hall.

'She is not pretty,' thought she. 'Very unlike mother—taller and statelier, with black eyes and hair—still, her features are noble, and she looks good.'

She came to this satisfactory conclusion just as her father suddenly exclaimed—

'Where did you say Clara was, Alice? Has she not returned from Belford?'

'Yes, sir; she is staying with Ellen Morgan to-night.'

'Is Ellen Morgan sick?'

How Alice wished she could say yes, or anything else than the plain, reluctant no—but out it must come. An expression of pain and displeasure came over the doctor's countenance, and he glanced quickly at his wife. But she seemed to have no other thought than of the plants over which she was bending.

'What sweet flowers have come to you, in the midst of the snow, Alice,' she exclaimed, as she lifted a spray of monthly rose, weighed down with its blossoms.

Alice's eyes glistened with pleasure as she saw that her darlings had found a friend.

'They were mother's,' she began, then stopped suddenly.

'You must love them very dearly,' said Mrs Gregory, with feeling. 'But where is the little Eddie? Shall I not see him?'

'Oh! he begged to sit up and wait, but he fell asleep, and Aunt Debby put him to bed. Would you like to go up and look at him?—He is so pretty in his sleep.'

'Indeed he is pretty in his sleep,' thought the stepmother, as she bent over the beautiful child in his rosy dreams. She laid back his soft, bright curls, and lightly kissed his pure cheek, gazing long and tenderly upon him. Tears shone in her eyes as she, turning toward Alice, said softly—

'Can we be happy together, Alice dear?'

'I am sure we shall,' answered the warm-hearted girl impulsively. 'Indeed, I will try to make you happy.'

## CHAPTER II.

Late the next morning, Mrs. Gregory was sitting in the parlour with little Eddie at her side, where he had been enchained for five long minutes by the charms of a fairy tale. But as some one glided by the door, he bounded away, crying—

'There's sister Clara! Clara, come and see my new mamma!'

Presently, however, he came back with a dolorous countenance, complaining—

'She says I have no new mamma, and she does not want to see her either. But I have,' he continued emphatically, laying hold of one of her fingers with each of his round white fists; 'and you will stay always, and tell me stories, won't you? Was that all about Fennella?'

'We will have the rest another time, for there is the dinner bell, and here comes your father.'

The joyous child ran to his father's arms, and then assuming a stride of ineffable dignity, led the way to the dining room.

'Has not Clara yet returned?' asked the doctor, in a tone of some severity.

'Yes, father,' said her voice behind him; and as he turned she greeted him, respectfully, yet without her usual affectionate warmth.

Then came her introduction to the stepmother, who greeted her with a gentle dignity peculiar to her. Clara's manner, on the contrary, was extremely dignified, without any special gentleness, ceremonious and cold. As the family gathered around the table, all but one made an attempt at conversation. But the presence of one silent iceberg was enough to congel the sociability of the group. Remarks became shorter than the intervals between them, and finally quite ceased. Mrs. Gregory, meanwhile, had time to observe her eldest daughter. She was a hand-

some, genteel girl of about seventeen, elegantly dressed. Her fair face was intelligent, though clouded at this time with an expression of determined dissatisfaction. The red lips of her pretty little mouth pressed firmly together, as though to make sure that no word should escape them; the dark blue eyes were continually downcast.

Suddenly little Eddie exclaimed, directing his spoon very pointedly towards Clara.

'What made you say I had no new mamma? There she is!'

The crimson blood rushed to Clara's temples, as she visited a most reproving glance on the child, while Alice hastened to relieve the awkward predicament by suggesting to him the desirableness of more sauce on his pudding. He was hushed for the moment, but presently broke forth again, as though a bright thought had flashed upon him.

'She isn't the same dear mamma I used to have, is she? Say, father, did you go up to heaven to bring her back? Oh, why didn't you let me go too?'

'No, my child,' said Dr. Gregory very seriously, 'I could not go for your dear mamma, nor would I if I could, for she is with those whom she loves more than even us. But, perhaps, she has sent you this mother to love you, and take care of you, till you can go to her, if you are good.'

'I will be good,' said the child very resolutely, and they rose from the table.

Alice and her mother lingered talking at the western window, which commanded a fine sea view.

'She is certainly a delightful woman,' thought Alice, as, after a long chat, she tripped blithely up to her chamber.

As she opened the door, she discovered Clara thrown upon the bed, her face hidden in the pillows, sobbing aloud. She hesitated a moment, then going up to her, said entreatingly—

'Don't, dear Clara, cry so.'

But her only answer was a fresh burst of tears. So she sat down on the bed-side and took her mother's miniature, which Clara clasped between her hands. It was a picture of rare beauty, as well might be that of a faultless form, in the first pride of womanhood, glowing with life and love. Alice gazed on it with mournful tenderness, and kissed its small, sweet face many times.

'Oh, I am wretched, wretched,' moaned Clara; 'the happiness of my life is gone for ever.'

Alice took her hand in hers, and said softly—

'You knew we thought, when mother died we could never cease to weep, we could not live at all. Yet we have been even happy since that, though we love her and think of her just as much as ever. Indeed, I believe I love her more and more. I think we shall be happy still.'

'Happy! with this strange woman thrust upon me, every day, in my mother's stead? I tell you, Alice, it will never, never be. I cannot say to you may enjoy life as well as ever, but not I. I do not want to be happy—I will not be happy with a stepmother. Oh, the odious name!'

In her excitement she rose from the bed and paced the floor.

'You can, undoubtedly, be as unhappy as you choose, and you can hate father's wife if you want to; but I think it would be a great deal easier to love her,' said Alice. 'I am sure, if our own blessed mother could speak to us, she would bid us treat her very kindly, and try to make her happy with us.'

'There is no danger but she will be happy enough,' retorted Clara. 'Yet she shall lament the day she ever intruded upon us here.'

'Oh, Clara, Clara, you are very wrong. You ought not to speak so or feel so,' said Alice, sadly, joining her arm about her sister's waist and putting in her walk. 'Certainly she had a right to love our father and to marry him, and I do not see the need of suspecting her of a plot upon our peace.'

'But what infuriated father to ask her? How could he forget my beautiful mother so soon,' and Clara threw herself, weeping, into a chair.

'He has not forgotten her,' replied Alice, almost indignantly. 'And you and I have no right to doubt that he loved her even better than we. But I know not why that should render it impossible for him to appreciate loveliness in another. He was very desolate, and I am thankful that he has found such a friend.'

'Such a friend? I see nothing remarkably lovely about her.'

'Why, I think she is very attractive.'

'Attractive! Pray what has attracted you, dear? She is, certainly, very plain.'

'I do not think she is.'

'She looks as though she meant to rule the world, with her great black eyes and military form.'

'Her "great black eyes" are soft, I am sure, and I admire her form. Then she looks so animated when she speaks, and her smile is absolutely fascinating.'

'Only look at the picture you hold in your hand, Alice, and say, if you can, that you admire her.'

'Nobody is so lovely as mother. But, if you were not determined to find fault, I know this face would please you. At any rate, you cannot dislike her manner: she is very ladylike. She dresses, too, in perfect taste.'

'I suppose she is well bred, and I have no reason to doubt her dressmaker's taste. But once more, Alice, I never shall like her, and I beg you never to speak to me of her, except from necessity. You, of course, can love her

just as well as you have a mind to, but you must not expect me to. I shall try to be civil to her.'

'Oh, I wish you could see Aunt Mary, I am sure she could convince you that you are wrong.'

'You think I cannot understand your feelings, and that nothing is easier for me than to receive a stranger here. But, Clara, you do know that you love not our precious mother more devotedly than I, nor cherish her memory more sacredly; I am quite sure that no child could. It was terrible for me, at first, to think of seeing another here in her place, of calling another by her consecrated name. It was sacrilege to me. But Aunt Mary talked to me so kindly, and taught me to think calmly and reasonably about it, and I became certain that I ought to be an affectionate, dutiful child to my father's wife, if it were in my power. And I am sure it will be easy, for she is lovable.'

'I am grateful to father for giving me so excellent a friend. I shall never love her better than Aunt Mary, indeed; but it is so pleasant for us to be together once more in our own home. Only think—once at boarding school, Neddie at grandfather's, I at uncle Tallord's, and poor father here alone. I am sure we shall be vastly happier here together, if you will only be a good girl.'

'I am not going to be, said Clara, with a pouting smile.'

'Ah, not another word,' cried Alice, with a playful menace. 'I shall call it treason to listen to you. I shall go away so that you may have nobody to say wicked things to.'

And with the words she ran from the room and shut the culprit in.

(To be Continued.)

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## OUR BEST SOCIETY.

If gilt were only gold, or sugar candy common sense, what a fine thing our society would be! If to lavish money upon objects *de vertu*, to wear the most costly dresses, and always to have them cut in the height of the fashion; to build houses thirty feet broad, as if they were palaces; to furnish them with all the luxurious devices of Parisian genius; to give superb banquets, at which your guests laugh, and which make you miserable; to drive a fine carriage and ape European liveries and crests, and coats of arms; to resent the friendly advances of your baker's wife, and the lady of your butcher (you being yourself a cobbler's daughter); to talk much of the 'old families,' and of your aristocratic foreign friends; too despise labor; to prate of 'good society,' to travesty and parody, in every conceivable way, a society which we know only in books and by the superficial observation of foreign travel, which arises out of a social organization entirely unknown to us, and which is opposed to our fundamental and essential principles: if all this were fine, what a prodigiously fine society would ours be.

This occurred to us upon lately receiving a card of invitation to a brilliant ball. We were quietly ruminating over our evening fire, with D'Israeli's Wellington speech, 'all tears' in our hand, with the account of a great man's burial, and a little man's triumph across the channel. So many great men gone, we mused, and such great crises impending. This democratic movement in Europe; Kossuth and Mazzini waiting for the moment to give the word; the Russian bear watchfully sucking his paws; the Napoleonic empire redivivus; Cuba, and annexation, and slavery; California and Australia, and the consequent considerations of political economy; dear me, exclaimed we, putting on a fresh hod of coal, we must look a little into the state of parties.

As we put down the coal scuttle there was a knock at the door. We said, 'come in,' and in came a neat Alhambra watered envelope, containing the announcement that the queen of fashion was 'at home' that evening week. Later in the evening, came a friend to smoke a cigar. The card was lying upon the table, and he read it with eagerness. 'You'll go, of course,' said he, 'for you will meet all the best society.'

Shall we, truly? shall we really see the 'best society of the city,' the picked flower of its genius, character, and beauty? What makes the 'best society' of men and women? The noblest specimens of each, of course. The men who mould the time, who refresh our faith in heroism and virtue, who make Plato, and Zeno, and Shakespeare's gentlemen, possible again. The women, whose beauty and sweetness, and dignity, and high accomplishment and grace, make us understand the Greek Mythology, and weaken our desire to have some glimpse of the most famous women of history. The best society is that in which the virtues are most shining, which is the most charitable, forgiving, long suffering, modest, and innocent.

The best society is, in its very name, that in which there is the least hypocrisy and insincerity of all kinds, which recoils from, and blasts, artificiality, which is anxious to be all that human nature can be, and which sternly reprobates all shallow pretence, all coxcombry and soporific, insists upon simplicity, as the infallible characteristic of true worth. That is the best society, which comprises the best men and women.

Had we recently arrived from the moon, we might, upon hearing that we were to meet the 'best society,' have fancied that we were about to enjoy an opportunity not to be overvalued. But unfortunately we were not so freshly arrived. We had received other cards, and had perfected our toilette many times, to meet this same society, so magnificently des-