

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

THE FIRST CANNON SHOT.

BY CHARLES MACKAY, L. L. D.

Hark! over Europe sounding,
The first, the signal gun;
The fire has burst, the blow has struck,
A fatal deed is done!

From north to south i' echoes,
From the east to west afar,
The insulted nations join their hands,
And gather to the war.

From restless slumbers waking,
The thunder in her ear,
Unhappy Poland starts to life,
And grasps her broken spear.

Old Rome grows young to hear it;
There's mischief in her glance;
And Hungary mounts her battle steed,
And waves her fiery lance.

Not long shall last the combat,
Though Russia laugh to scorn;
The wrongful cause, if up to-day,
Is down to-morrow morn.

When France unites with England,
Beware defeat and shame.
Ye foes of right who force the fight
And fan the needles flame.

Hark! over Europe sounding,
The first, the signal gun;
But when the last loud cannon peal
Shall tell of victory won,

Be sure, ye proud aggressors,
Your hour shall not last long;
That may not, can not, shall not win,
Who battle in the wrong.

From Hogg's Instructor, for February.

THE WEAVER'S HOME

BY EOTHEN.

THE evening was wearing on a pace; still there was no perceptible diminution in the traffickers that choked the broad street intersecting Shoreditch. Every tributary lane and court, for a full mile, helped to swell the eddying current as it noisily swept by. There was earnestness in every movement, and an intensity of purpose stamped on every face that night. No holiday folks, no loitering sight-seers, no sauntering pleasure-seekers were there. All seemed diligently bent on business. To buy, or to sell and get gain, was the master impulse that moved the motley multitude.

Yet, was there at least one exception to this general rule; and one, therefore, that was the more striking from its singularity. Passing along the pavement, leisurely and observingly, was a young man, attired in habiliments of mourning. He was of propitious appearance, with a benevolent physiognomy, a soft kind eye, and an air of deep sadness and dejection. His sensibilities appeared to be morbidly affected by the spectacle around him. His glance was ever roving, as he threaded the intricacies of the throng, in quest of objects of distress. Such was the mood of his nature at that time, that he turned away, as by a strange instinct, from the sunnier aspects of life, towards the hideous pictures of suffering and degradation that abounded at every step. He bestowed no notice on the merry-hearted and the light-footed, as they went by, all joyously to happy hearts or to lovers' sides; neither did he seem to contemplate with any complacency those who were toiling homewards burdened with cargoes of household stores; but his eye ever settled on those wasted human forms and ghastly faces that lined the outer margin of the pathway. The sight of this swarm of wretched creatures, of all ages, from infancy to fourscore years, weakly attempting to rise from their abjectness, to seize upon some floating fragment of support to keep their chin above the abysmal waves, absorbed his faculties and excited his commiseration. Ever and anon he would pause, and bestow upon one or more of these social martyrs some substantial proof of his generosity and pity. How many fervent blessings were rained upon his head that night, as his arms dropped now into the tremulous hands of decrepit old men, and now into the tiny palms of fatherless or motherless children, we cannot stay to compute. However he might be sneered at by the heartless, and wondered at by the wise in their own eyes, he was, nevertheless, following the blessed steps of Him who 'went about doing good.'

On reaching a spot near the entrance to the railway terminus, the eye of this benevolent stranger fell upon a girl of tender years and great sweetness of countenance. She had large, lustrous eyes, that shone out from the midst of features sharpened by want, and bronzed by the wintry wind. Her attire as neat and clean, although there was

scarcely sufficient of it to cover her nakedness. As to yielding her any warm shelter from the piercing cold, that was quite out of the question. She had encoined herself in a kind of niche formed by the recessed doorway of an unoccupied shop. In her outstretched hand she held a box or two of lucifers, beseeching the passengers, as they went by, to purchase them of her.

'Buy—buy—for the love of God—buy!' she faltered, in a low soft voice, as the stranger was going past.

Thrilled by the plaintive melody of that imploring cry, struck by the evidences of innocence and faded respectability visible in her whole demeanor, and deeming it improbable that a young creature so employed and so attired had fallen yet from her womanly rectitude, he turned towards her, and inquired into her circumstances and connections. The simplicity and transparent truthfulness of her answers only served to confirm his good opinion of her character.

'Conduct me to your father's house, will you?' said the stranger.

'Excuse me, sir; but I must first dispose of these small wares, or seven of us will have nothing to eat to-morrow. My little sisters were moaning for bread before I left.'

'How many boxes have you?' asked he.

'Three only left unsold, sir.'

Putting his hand into his pocket, he drew out sixpence, which he presented to her, saying at the same time, 'Now, having removed that scruple, lead the way.'

The poor girl looked at the sixpence in perplexity for some seconds, and then said, 'I cannot give you the change, sir.'

'Keep it all, then,' was the kind reply.

How tightly she clasped that precious piece of silver in her hand; how she turned aside and kissed it, as she thought upon the pains it would allay, and the hunger it would stifle; how she murmured low words of thankfulness over it again and again, as she went along, followed by her benefactor, we cannot pause to tell; and many of the well-to-do, who never felt the dire want of such a coin in all their lives, would not perhaps believe us if we did.

The delicate questionings put by the young philanthropist, as they pursued their devious way, elicited most of the facts with which the reader is already acquainted, and others that may have been only vaguely guessed.

There had been a terrible stagnation in the trade, she said; half the hands had been at 'play,' or out of work, for months, and the other moiety were only partially employed. Starvation, which is never far from the weaver's door, showed its gaunt, grim front in every home, and breathed witheringly on every green thing; the cholera, which was then raging at its height, greedily tracked the heels of famine, and swept away from the district whole hundreds in a week. Every house, and almost every room, contained its dead. Three in her family had been smitten by the pestilence, and one—a dear brother—had perished. When the cholera had abated somewhat of its fierceness, the fever came to glean the wasted field from whence the preceding reapers had carried off such a rich death-harvest. Her father had narrowly escaped been borne away as one of its victims. Thus, what with sickness, and sorrow, and want of work, they had been reduced to a state of absolute destitution; all the comforts and conveniences of household life, and even every article of clothing that could possibly be dispensed with, were surrendered one by one, in exchange for food. A few weeks since, her grandfather, Delafosse, had obtained a *caine*; * he worked at it night and day, hoping by speedily completing it, thereby to extricate the family from its difficulties, but when he had done rather more than half the piece, the *shoot* was exhausted, which was then a week ago; and although he had been daily at the warehouse, and made urgent applications for a fresh supply, he had not been able to obtain it yet. When they don't want the work in a hurry, the masters generally treat the poor weavers thus. He had received the amount of wages to which he was entitled on the work that was executed, most of which immediately went to defray some debts that had been unavoidably contracted. 'For we would rather die of want and hunger, sir, than live dishonestly,' said the heroic maiden, with an emphatic gesture. 'About the time,' she went on, 'that Mr Delafosse's *shoot* was out, my mother obtained work, which she was compelled to take at terrible low wages; for the weavers, being a-starving, are glad to take anything that is offered; she worked so hard and incessantly at it, that she would often faint away at the loom, from having nothing to eat often for twenty hours together; whereupon grandfather would kindly take her place till she revived. The work being at length nearly finished—and we have nothing to keep us alive to-morrow—she went to-day to the shop

* This is the technical term used by weavers to describe the prepared (or organized) silk that is given out to them from the warehouse of the employer. It is derived from the French word *chaine*, and is so called from the silk being taken off the warping-mill in loops or links. The *caine* or *warpy* varies in length from 160 to 200 yards, and generally takes several weeks to weave.

and solicited the advance of a trifle on the work; but they treated her very roughly and brutally, and sent her home empty-handed and broken hearted to the starving family. You must understand, sir, that some houses advance money on the work in hand as it progresses, while others don't; the shop for which mother is working, though the principal is said to be a Christian man, who lifts his head very high, is not accustomed to give this advantage to the poor operative. This hard regulation presses very cruelly on us sometimes, sir, I assure you, and drives us into awful straits; besides which, in connexion with other oppressive hardships, it makes a great many of the men callous, hard-hearted, and infidel-like. This is the sad effect, I am sorry to say, that such ruthless treatment has had upon my father.'

Saying this, the girl and her companion entered the gloomy, condemned looking square, that brought them to the bourne of their journey. On the way, Minnie had slipped into a retired shop, and purchased a candle, which she had secreted under her scant handkerchief.

Arrived at the entrance, she politely requested the stranger to tarry a moment while she procured a light. Leaping into the darkness, she opened a neighbour's door, that let a faint glimmer into the filthy, floorless passage, and soon re-appeared, bearing a lighted taper in her hand.

'Be careful how you mount, sir,' said the fair guide; 'the stairs are very rotten, and full of holes that are dangerous to a strange foot.'

The caution was not superfluous; they were indeed in the most crazy condition. Clinging close to the naked wall, he cautiously groped his way upward. On reaching the second landing, voices were heard in earnest converse and a light shown through a crevice of the door in a long luminous line. At last, the top door was gained; and the stranger was ushered into the hushed chamber, where Misery kept its lonely vigils.

'Grandfather,' said Minnie, 'a gentleman who has been very kind to me, has desired me to introduce him to you;—here he is.'

'Step in, sir,' said the old man, advancing towards the door, with the ready courtesy and urbanity for which the weavers are generally distinguished. 'I am really ashamed, sir, that you should visit such a desolate and desert place as this is. We have nothing we can offer you even to sit down upon. A hungry belly, like Aaron's rod, has swallowed everything.'

When the light began to burn steadily, and dissipate the dense gloom that had collected there, the stranger drew back, shudderingly, as the cold, stark nakedness of the scene became gradually disclosed to him. This, then, thought he, is one of the places where, and these ghastly and emaciated creatures, with the hideous tatters of poverty hanging about them, are some of the (skillful persons by whom, those rich and sumptuous fabrics are woven, that adorn the form of beauty, and embellish the apartments of nobility.

'Your grand-daughter,' said the stranger, 'has, at my request, told me of your trials and privations; but I was utterly unprepared for such a spectacle as I behold. In passing through this ordeal of suffering, however your minds are free, I trust, from this stinging consciousness of its having been brought about, or aggravated, by your own faults—by drinking, by thriftlessness, by indolence, or by improvidence.'

'Thank God!' said the old man, in a solemn voice, 'I and my daughter here have been total abstainers from all intoxicants for years, sir. No self-imposed taxes of that sort are paid out of our scanty earnings. It is a hard battle to get bread, sir. A sore lot of the weavers are obliged to be tee-totalers, as they haven't the money to spend on beer or gin; nor the time neither.'

'I am glad to hear such sentiments from your lips,' replied the visitor, alluding to the former part of his remarks.

'I hope I shan't be thought impertinent, sir,' said Mr Delafosse; 'but you seem, thus early in your manhood, to have made acquaintance with grief. A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,' as I have read somewhere.'

'I have, indeed,' rejoined the young stranger; 'I am already a widower. I have buried the best part of my heart, and the light of my life is prematurely quenched. Last Christmas was our bridal-day. To-morrow will be its first anniversary, when my rifled home will appear cheerless and doleful as a living tomb. Knowing that there must thus be one hearth desolate and sad, which last year was lighted up with the smiles of beauty, and encircled by festivity and joy, I came forth to-night to see if I could not make some family happy, that might otherwise be wretched.'

'God bless your noble heart!' exclaimed Mrs Arle, to which the wondering old man responded by a loud 'Amen.'

'If I felt a desire before, that the gross sum of human happiness might suffer no diminution through any selfish loss which I may have sustained, that desire has been greatly strengthened since I have listened to the barrowing tale of your privations. One of the

immediate and culpable causes of your present extreme distress is, if I have understood aright, an unworthy Christian professor in the person of your employer. Be it my delightful office then to vindicate that holy name from such scandal and dishonour, and restore, as far as in me lies, its tarnished lustre, by placing at your disposal such means as will enable you to secure the restitution of all that you have been compelled to part with through the pressure of poverty, and to spend the day whose dawning is so near at hand in a manner befitting its joyous associations.'

The old man's amazement showed itself more and more; the woman, struck by the strangeness and novelty of this beneficent proposition, fell upon her knees under the constraint of a worshipful impulse; and even Mr Arle, the scoffer, was visibly softened, and began to ponder afresh, whether, after all, there might not be such a thing as real Christianity in the world.

'Where are your pledge-tickets?' inquired the young widower.

They were speedily produced; and, adding together the sums advanced on the several items, he announced the total amount to be thirty-five shillings.

'Ah! sir, it's not one-third the value of the articles,' said the poor woman, with a sigh of regret; 'but, when we're a-breaking up, sir, we've no alternation but to take what's offered to us, though it be a dead robbery, or else, see the dear children starve before our eyes.'

While she was speaking, the stranger's fingers were exploring the inside of a richly lined purse.

'Are you in debt? Do you owe anything else to any one?'

'Nothing, sir, I am happy to say, except three weeks' arrears of rent,' replied Mrs Arle. 'The landlord was here only yesterday, and said, if it wasn't paid in a few days he would drive us all out into the street; and I believe he'll be as good as his word. As a general rule, sir, rent must be paid every week, however we have to pinch for it.'

'How much does it amount to?'

'Seven and sixpence, sir; half-a-crown a week we pay for this miserable hole.'

'Well, there are two sovereigns and a half, that sum will free you from all present embarrassments, and leave a surplus with which to purchase a few necessary things for the morrow.' And he dropped the glittering gold into the extended palm of the bewildered woman.

'Bless your generous nature, noble gentleman,' exclaimed both in the same breath, while the big tears coursed down their shrunken cheeks. 'I fear, sir,' continued Mr Delafosse, 'it will be a long time before we shall be able to repay you this liberal and most welcome loan.'

'I do not desire it,' was the calm reply; 'accept it as a free donation.'

'Blessed is he that considereth the poor,' said the exulting mother, as she directed a glance towards her offspring, that seemed to say—Your deliverance is at hand; lift up your baby voices in thanksgiving.

'He that giveth to the poor, leadeth to the Lord,' devoutly chimed in the man of hoary hairs.

Seeing their benefactor about to depart, Mrs Arle, in a transport of lofty gratitude, flew to her loom, and produced a secreted Bible.

'Thanks be to God!' she triumphantly cried, holding it aloft, 'we have not, though sorely tempted, parted with this. Surely a blessing is in it; it has been to us what the ark of God was of old to those who sheltered it. Oh, sir, since I am sure you love the Bible, read from its sacred pages before you quit us; depositing, as she said this, the treasured volume in the hands of the stranger.'

He opened it; his eyes fell upon the 36th Psalm; he read with a rich unctious and thrilling emphasis; and as he read, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles,' and the numerous similar passages with which that divine ode abounds, every heart was melted, and from every eye gushed tears of irrepressible joy.

As soon as the stranger could master his emotions, he turned towards the group before him, who, with the new sensations that filled their souls, felt as though they had been suddenly translated from the depths of some horrible desert to the delicious bowers of Paradise; and telling them that he should pay them another visit on the day after Christmas, to enquire further into the deplorable condition of their trade, he bade them adieu, and departed.

If his soul drew nearer to God that night, after the divine deed that he had done; if a holy, serene, and festal peace spread itself, like a blue summer's heaven, above his spirit, where is the matter for surprise?

Strange wonder and curiosity were rife among the neighbours that night, as they lay drowsily listening on their straw pallets, to hear hour after hour, the continuous ascent and descent of heavy footsteps on the old ruined stairs, and the clattering sounds that through half the night were going on overhead.