

## Literature, &amp;c.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Hogg's Edinburgh Instructor.

## CHRISTMAS CHANGES.

Yes, it was Christmas Eve, and on such an occasion there was wont to be, year after year, a well-spread dinner-table at Ralph Curling's, graced by the presence of one or two old friends, whose worldly wisdom and dry humour rendered them especially acceptable to its master. — But where were they to-night? and where were pale Mrs Curling and kind little Charlotte? and above all, where was the little old man with the velvet skull-cap and the blue goggles, who had, for some thirty years back, never been missing from his easy-chair in the dining-room at this hour? Where was he? In his own chamber, stretched almost senseless on his luxurious bed, his gentle wife weeping bitterly beside him; and servants came and went softly; and the doctor was summoned, lest the attack should prove one of apoplexy or paralysis; and all was confusion and dismay in that comfortable suburban mansion. As for poor little Charlotte, the too lay prostrate on her bed in her own apartment, for her weakly frame could ill sustain the shock that had overtaken the family.

And the cause of all this? Have the rich man's possessions melted away from his tight grasp, leaving him in a far worse position than those on whom his stern missives and unrelenting dealings have fallen this day like a blight? Is he become a beggared bankrupt in his frail old age, after some twenty or thirty years' enjoyment of hard earned luxury? Alas! no. A mere worldly trial, the loss of a little of the shining dust which plays so conspicuous a part in the drama of life, might have rendered the man frantic, despairing, mad; but would never have prostrated him in the speechless agony that now froze his blood. In this world-hardened and generally unsympathising heart, there yet existed an unsuspected corner, where lingered the sole remaining tenderness of the man's nature; and this secret tenderness it was which had now, by the all-wise dispensations of Providence, been converted into a fountain of anguish.

Let us, however, no longer deal in parables, but carry our reader back with us to the luncheon hour at Mr Curling's, on this same Christmas Eve. The slight meal was spread in the dining-room, and Mr Curling sat in his usual easy-chair, the blue goggles more lively than usual, and the whole man pleasanter, and less critical. The truth was, he was pleased with himself. He had succeeded in overcoming certain half-preceptible, and wholly-amazing, twinges of heart or conscience, relative to his daughter Annie; which he called weaknesses, but which others might have considered gleams of a better nature, or a very allowable remnant of paternal affection for the erring one. However that might be, Ralph had got rid of the suspicious emotions in a manner peculiar to himself, and was rejoicing in his renewed liberty of mind; so that he even deigned to be facetious, in a stiff, dry sort of way, with little Charlotte, sitting near her mother at the opposite side of the table. The fire blazed cheerfully; Mrs Curling's pet canary twittered in his gilded cage in the large bay window, and peered through the plate-glass window panes at two or three sooty suburban sparrows, that hopped hither and thither on the half-melted snow of the lawn outside, leaving the prints of their tiny claws on its surface. Said canary to himself, as many of our convicted felons might say to the honest working man, 'I am better off than you, though I am in prison, and you are free; and forthwith he nibbled his rape-seed, and sipped his fresh water from the crystal bottle, with increased gusto, and carolled a sudden snatch of shrilly song. But Mr Curling could not suffer this in his dignified presence, and he signified as much to his wife; who rose to throw her pocket-handkerchief over the cage, thus silencing the noisy songster. As she did this, she caught sight of the postman coming in at the gate.

Oh! penny-postman, liveried servant of that mighty abstraction, Her Majesty's mail, how often, when in great suspense waiting for an important letter, have we in our youthful fantasies wished you endued with bells, that we might at least know were you were in our neighbourhood! And were it likewise well, oh postman! if you carried that matter-of-fact, commonplace visage of yours, according to a prescient instinct that we suspect you to possess as to the contents of that fateful budget in your hand that one might form a cursory guess whether it contain news that will please or freeze us, set us dancing with pleasure, or drive us ranting with wo or disappointment? Oh postman! such a sympathetic countenance would sometimes be a kindly warning, preventing the flood of joy or misery from too sudden and overwhelming an invasion of our frail human faculties.

Mrs Curling remained standing at the window for some moments, perhaps thinking somewhat in the above strain. At any rate she had fallen into a short but deep reverie; hearing as in a dream, the postman's ring, and the entrance of the servant with letters. She was

aroused by a terrified exclamation from Charlotte, and turned just in time to see her husband falling from his chair, while an open letter with an enclosure, lay on the table before him. So much she unconsciously noted as she sprang towards him, hurriedly desiring Charlotte, who sat as if petrified, to ring the bell for assistance.

When the stricken man had been carried to his bed, and everything done for him that duty and affection could suggest, Mrs Curling remembered the letter and sought in it the cause of this mysterious attack. Alas! it was quickly evident. The wafer (for it was an Indian letter) was black; the handwriting that of a stranger. Mr Curling's only son had perished, not on the glorious battle-field, but in his bed, of a fever caught while attending a fellow-officer; who in his turn, nursed the generous youth who had sacrificed his life for him, and now broke, as gently as might be, the shock to his mourning family. But, kindly as this was done it was too much for the father, who had bestowed the whole strength of his affection upon one cherished idol.

The Great Father, for a kindly purpose, smites us in our idols; there is no use in disguising the fact. How otherwise could the hard, cold natures of men like this Ralph Curling, be broken up sufficiently to receive the dews from heaven, and the seed of the Word that so they may, even at the eleventh hour, bring forth fruits meet for repentance?

The evening came; the half-melted snow crisped as the night set in, intensely brilliant with a frosty starlight, and a broad full moon, that hung forth in bold relief like a golden lamp in the indigo sky. The devout of various sects hurried to church and chapel; the thoughtless and the poor made their late markings for the morrow's feasting. The joy-bells rang out in the town also, and the deserted Annie heard them in her far quarter of the city, and the widower in Denton Street heard them, as he sat desolate-hearted beside his convalescent children. Ralph Curling also heard them from the little church in his neighbourhood, for sense and memory had returned with twilight, though his left side was partially paralysed. But to him they sounded like a funeral peal.

'Sarah,' he said to his wife, in imperfect accents—he had scarcely ever called her by her Christian name—'Sarah, that letter enclosed in the other, read it now.'

Mrs Curling took it from her pocket; the seal was yet unbroken, and the superscription, 'For my dear father, with speed,' was in his hand writing who should never more take pen in hand. It was like a missive from the grave.

'Are you sure you can bear it, my dear?' she said, gently, bending over her husband's pillow.

He turned his face away, and covered his eyes with his bony hand.

'Read—read,' he repeated, with a husky voice.

She obeyed. The letter was short, and written with a faltering pen, and here and there was an almost illegible line, as if the writer's scanty remnant of strength had failed him. Meanwhile, the chime of the bells mingled with her voice, and filled up the pauses.

'My beloved father,—From my bed of death I write this, at intervals as I have strength, and Grey will see that it is sent to you. I am going fast, but I thank God that he has restored by reason to pen my last farewell to you.—My dear father, I have not been, all that I ought to have been but my heavenly Parent has forgiven my sins, for my Saviour's sake, and is now my guide and support in this awful hour. Oh! father, make him yours.—Not all the gold that you may have heaped will give you one moment's pleasure, in such an hour as this. My father, kind and indulgent as you have ever been to me, I have noticed that you are hard to other people. Permit me, now standing in the light of eternity, with the portals of the other world already opening to receive me, to remind you that charity is above all things, that "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." Oh! my father, my beloved father, be merciful, be pitiful, and entreat that the Holy Spirit may enlighten your soul, that you may discern the things that belong to you eternal peace. Praying that the grace of the Saviour may rest upon you, with kindest love to my good, unknown mother, and my dear little sister Charlotte, you ever affectionate though dying son.

CHARLES CURLING.

'P. S.—Annie, father, poor disobedient Annie, I fear she will be in trouble. Forgive her, father, as you hope to be forgiven. It is my last request.'

Mrs Curling's gentle face was almost drowned in tears as she concluded. Her husband made no other comment than a deep groan, that seemed wrung as it were from the anguish of his spirit. For awhile he lay quite still, then extending his hand, and muttering, 'Give me the letter; he placed it beneath his pillow; and again turning his face to the wall, remained motionless for many hours.

These death-bed warnings, perhaps, rarely work any permanent good. In some instances, however, they are blessed, and reach their mark in the heart's core, dividing asunder the mass of old sins like a two-edged sword, stirring them up to be repented of, and causing a vital change in the whole life thereafter. Such was

the case with Ralph Curling. The gentle, respectful hints and admonitions of the loved and lost, tempered as they were with the utmost filial affection, rankled in the old man's spirit like barbed arrows, and worked silently there during several days of sickness and anguish.—Meanwhile the sale in Denton Street had been postponed, for want of further instructions,—Annie still shut herself up with her grief, subsisting on her father's churlishly-bestowed bounty; which, indeed, was scarcely yet diminished, for the sick at heart have little care for needful food. In the neighbouring town, Thomas Curling and his patient wife were much in the same position as when we saw them last, the time for the meeting of the creditors being yet undecided; while little Emily and Ralph, notwithstanding their parents' sadness revelled in their unwonted liberty. So the days elapsed; and now it was the morning of New Year's Eve.

Mr Curling had passed a calm night, sleeping soundly at intervals. His wife was surprised, when she came to his bed-side after breakfast, to mark the vivacity of his eye, the revivification of the whole man, scarcely compatible with the fact of his recent seizure. She almost suspected some access of fever. Yet his skin was cool, though his pulses bounded like those of youth.

'Sarah,' he said, as she stood looking wonderingly upon him, 'are you at liberty to help me to dress? I must get up.'

'My love,' she replied, uneasily, for this request alarmed her, 'you know the doctor said that perhaps it would be another week before you would be able rise with safety. You ought not to think of it, indeed.'

'Sarah, do not attempt to prevent me. I have work to do, I have business to see after, that requires my personal attention,' added Mr Curling, decidedly. Seeing that his wife still hesitated, 'If you will not assist me to dress, I shall be compelled to ring for Joseph to do so.'

'No, no. I would rather attend to you myself,' replied Mrs Curling, perceiving that the sick man would not be deterred from his rash design, as she considered it. She accordingly helped him to array himself, and having brought him warm water to bathe his face and hands, placed himself comfortably in his easy-chair by the fire.

The Venetian window-blind was partially raised, and the wintry sunshine filled the room with a subdued hazy lustre. The small birds twittered their remembrance of the last spring-tide or their hope for that which was hidden in the coming months. Conspicuous among them was a robin, who perched on the branch of the leafless pear-tree beneath the window, carolled a lively ditty, telling of crumbs and cheerfulness; and everything testified that this was one of those sweet winter days with which we are sometimes favoured, and which unite the mildness of early spring with the pensiveness of the fading autumn. Mr Curling sat by the crackling fire for some time in silence, then turned to his wife, who was quietly working at a small table near him.

'It is a beautiful day Sarah, is it not? almost like April.'

'Yes, my dear,' she replied, without looking up from her work.

'Have you my glasses there?'

She handed them to him. He had already put on his velvet cap, and looked much like his former self, save that there was a slight alternation of countenance, but so general and undefinable that you would have been puzzled to say in what the change consisted.

'I cannot quite manage these glasses with this awkward hand. Thank you, my dear, that will do. And now, Sarah, he continued, 'I am about to make what you will consider a most extraordinary request. You must be so good as to ring the bell, and give orders for the carriage to be brought round.'

'Not to take you out, my dear, dear husband,' exclaimed Mrs Curling, surprised out of her ordinary timidity of language, and looking really distressed, 'indeed you are too imprudent.'

Mr Curling took her hand, a thing he had never done since the days of their reserved courtship.

'Sarah,' he said, in a gentle tone, so gentle that she looked in his face to see if it were really he, 'I am not mad, as you may suspect. But for this poor helpless hand and arm, and some remaining weakness, I am not even ill.—But I have commands to execute that I dare not disobey; and you know,' he added, after a slight pause, as of partial embarrassment, 'we must work while it is called to-day.—Cease to oppose me, therefore, and do as I have said.'

His wife had intelligence enough to perceive that some wonderful change had passed over the once hard, keen old man. A prophetic gleam even of his intention shown through her woman's preception, and she hastened to obey his behests. The carriage was brought round, and into it he got, warmly clothed in a great coat and sundry furs and rappers. Mrs Curling followed, having, at his particular request, attired herself to accompany him.

'My dear,' he said, 'desire Joseph to drive to Denton Street.'

(To be continued.)

## Incidents of the War.

## JOURNAL OF THE BOMBARDMENT.

Before Sebastopol, Easter Monday, April 9.

This morning the allied batteries simultaneously opened fire on the defences of Sebastopol. It is now four o'clock in the afternoon, and the rain, which began to fall last night, is descending in torrents, accompanied by a high breeze of wind. So thick is the atmosphere that even the flashes of the guns were invisible, and the gunners must be firing by guesswork at the flashes of the batteries, as it is impossible to see more than a few yards in advance. A driving sheet of rain and a black Sea fog whirl over the whole camp, which has already resumed the miserable aspect so well known to us of yore.—Tents have been blown down, the mud has already become several inches deeper, and the ground, so far as it is visible, looks like a black lake, studded with innumerable pools of dun-coloured water. What effect this sudden change in the weather will produce on the fire of our batteries it is now beyond my power to say, nor am I in a position either to judge if we had suffered any disadvantage from it, or to form an opinion as to the relative force of our fire compared with that of the enemy. I am now seated in a hut, into which the storm and the rain drive at every gust. Man or beast could not remain without some shelter on such a day as this. All around us there is a dense veil of gray vapour, sweeping over the ground and concealing from sight the tents which are close to our camp. The firing has slackened considerably since twelve o'clock. It is not easy, so murky is the sky, and so strong the wind, to see the flashes or hear the report of the Russian guns or the French cannon on either flank, though the hut is within a couple of hundred yards of the enemy's range; but we can tell that our batteries in front are thundering away continuously in irregular bursts, and are firing some 25 or 30 shots per minute. Early in the morning they were firing from 70 to 80 shots per minute, but, as it is no longer necessary to press our gunners, they have reduced the rate of fire. From the time our batteries opened till three o'clock, the wind blew from S. W. and was right in the back of our artillerymen, so that the smoke from their guns was carried away towards the enemy, and the smoke from the Russian embrasures was driven back upon the men behind them; but the wind has now veered round more to the westward, and at times takes a little northing, so that the smoke is swept away pretty equally from both lines of batteries towards Inkermann. The enemy were taken completely by surprise when we opened fire. They replied indeed, pretty briskly at once to the French fire on our left, and the Flagstaff battery and works were immediately manned. The Garden Battery, came into play soon after we opened fire, but some time elapsed before the Round Tower works or the Mamelon answered, and for half an hour their guns were weakly handled. The Inkerman and Careening Bay Batteries were almost silent for three quarters of an hour before they answered the French batteries on our left. The knoll and ranges in front of the camp, which have hitherto been crowded, whenever there was a sharp fire, with spectators, are now utterly deserted—not a human creature is out, except the shivering camp sentinels and the men who are engaged in the batteries. It is believed that Lord Raglan received despatches of importance from Vienna on Saturday. In the course of the day General Canrobert and General Bosquet visited Lord Raglan at his quarters, and had a lengthened interview of two or three hours with his Lordship. At the conclusion of the conference Lord Raglan, attended by Sir George Brown, rode out by the camps of the 3rd, 4th, 2nd, and Light Divisions, and was warmly cheered by the men, many of whom had turned out of their tents to view the races of the 3rd Division, which were marked unfortunately by severe accidents to Captain Morris, R. E., and Captain Shiffier.

At four o'clock on Monday morning a small party, disguised in waterproofs and long boots, left the camp for the front, as it was quite certain that orders had been sent to the batteries to open fire at daybreak. The horses could scarcely get through the sticky black mud into which the hard dry soil had been turned by one night's rain, and, although it was early dawn, it was not possible to see a man 20 yards off. A Scotch mist mingled with rain, settled down on the whole camp. Suddenly three guns were heard on the left towards the French lines, and the whole of our batteries opened at once. The volume of sound was not near so great, or so deafening as that of the 17th of October, and the state of the weather rendered it quite out of the question to form a notion of the gradual effect of our fire, so that the most interesting portion of the day's proceedings was lost.—Just as the cannonade opened the sailors came streaming over the hills from the batteries, where they had been relieved, and a few men turned out of the huts in the Third Division to the front, evidently much astonished at the sudden opening of the fire. On Cathcart's Hill only one or two officers were visible, and Sir John Campbell and an aid-de-camp on foot in front of the General's tent, watching the fire.—The rain then descended in torrents, and, as