

Literature. &c.

BYGONE DAYS.

O bygone days! how beautiful
Your sunshine and your shade!
How true the friends who once to us
Of earth an Eden made!
How green the leafing of your trees!
How soft your summer's wind!
Ah! what are all our present joys,
To those we've left behind?

O coming days! how beautiful!
For hope's resplendent light
Is shining there, and making all
Most gloriously bright.
No shadow rests upon our path,
No angry storm-cloud lowers.
Ah! what are all our present joys,
To those that will be ours?

O weary heart! Oh discontent!
Why idly thus deplore
The loss of joys that once were thine,
But may be thine no more?
Or why fill all the future with
Bright things that may not be?
For ah! thou canst not tell what change
One day may bring to thee.

O, never look upon the Past
As on a graveyard filled
With hope that some untimely blast
Hath breathed upon and chilled.
It had its joys, it had its woes,
Its clouds, its sunny rays—
Yes, even like the Present, were
Those mourned for, bygone days?

And vainer still, to think that all
Thy coming life will be
Without dark gloomy skies, to mar
Its fair serenity.
Sorrows will come, and o'er thy path
Their dreaded shadows cast;
And all thy future days will be
E'en like those that are past.

As darksome night alternates with
The glorious light of day—
As summer comes when winter hath
Vanished away,
So sorrow chaseth joy, and joy
Then shines where grief hath been—
O world of instability!
O ever-changing scene!

NEW WORKS.

THE MISSING LETTER.

By the Author of 'Philip and Millicent Crane.'

HE sped back swiftly and entered the house by way of the kitchen. He knew the locality well. There was no one about, but he heard the voice of Molly—he remembered that well, also—calling out in a sobbing, startling tone, to know who was there.

She started much more when he went in and she saw who it was. A look of blank dismay, not unmingled with resentment, overspread her countenance.

'What do you want, Master Ledbitter? What brings you here?'

'I come to render aid—if any be in my power. By Miss Sterling's desire,' he added, distinctly. 'By the time the doctor got here he would be past aid,' he continued, looking at the unfortunate man. 'Get me a wash-basin, and some linen to make a bandage. Have you any hot water?'

'Yes,' sobbed Molly, 'a biler full. I put it on to wash out my kitchen.'

'Then get a bucket of it, and bring all the mustard you have in the house, while I take off his shoes and stockings. Make haste. We may restore him yet.'

John Ledbitter spoke with an air of authority, and Molly, to her own astonishment, obeyed, much as she despised him. Little time lost he. There was no lancet at hand, but he bared the farmer's arm, and used his own sharp penknife. He was an intelligent man, knew something of surgery, and when Anne Sterling returned she found her father had been rescued from imminent danger. Mr Jelf was not with her: he was on the other side of Layton, visiting a patient, but they had sent after Anne. A neighbor or two returned with Anne.

'He ain't in no favor with honest folk, that John Ledbitter,' remarked Molly to Miss Sterling, when she came in, 'but as sure as we are sinful creatures, you may thank him, Miss Anne, that you have got a living father. He was at the last gasp.'

He did more besides restoring him. He was strong and active, and, with a little help from the women, he got Mr Sterling up stairs, undressed him and placed him in bed. 'I will remain and watch him, with your permission,' he said, looking at Anne, 'till the surgeon comes.'

'If you will kindly do so,' she answered. 'I am very grateful to you, indeed I am,' she added, through her tears, as she kindly held out her hand to him. 'My mother will not know how to thank you when she learns that to you, under Heaven, he owes his life.'

Mr Ledbitter did not take her offered hand. He extended his own, and turned it round from side to side, as if to exhibit its horny,

rough texture, bearing the impress of hard, out-door work, whilst a peculiar smile of mockery and bitterness rose to his face. 'It is not so fitting as it once was to come in contact with a lady's,' he observed; 'these last six years have left their traces on it. You would say also, as the world says, that worse marks than those of work are on it—that it bears the impress, as Cain bore his.'

She looked distressed. What was there that she could answer?

'And yet, Anne—pardon me, the familiar name rose inadvertently, not from disrespect: I used to call you so, and you have never since, in my mind, been anything but Anne Sterling—what if I were to assert that the traces of rough usage are the worst guilt of which that hand can righteously be accused—that it is dyed with no deeper crime? What then?'

'I don't know,' she faltered.

'I do,' he answered. 'You would throw my assertion to the winds, as others did, and leave me to toil, and die in them, rather than accord to me the sympathy so necessary from man to man, even though it were but the sympathy of pity. A messenger of Heaven might whisper such to a fallen angel.'

Farmer Sterling got better, but only for a time, and a very short one: hardly long enough, as the old gentleman himself said, to make his peace with his Maker. He never left his bed again. Mrs Sterling, whose disorder appeared to abate, and her strength to revive with the necessity of the case, now managed to reach her husband's room daily, and to sit with him for several hours.

About three weeks subsequently to the farmer's attack, his daughter went to Higham by the morning coach, to see her cousin, Mrs Grame. As she entered the passage of the house, the office was on her right, and Mr Grame was there, stamping some letters.—Anne waited a moment, thinking he might see her, and she observed that his eyes were red, and his hands shaking.

'Good morning, Walter,' she said at length. 'Is Selina up stairs?'

The postmaster looked up. 'What, is it you, Anne? You have just come, I suppose. How is the old gentleman?'

'He is better, but gains no strength, and does not get up. This is the first day he has seemed sufficiently comfortable for me to leave him, or I should have been in to see Selina before.'

'And I have been so bothered with one thing or other that I have not had a minute to ride over. What tale's that about Ledbitter having saved his life?'

'He certainly did. My father must have been dead before the surgeon came, had it not been for John Ledbitter. He applied the necessary remedies, and bled him, as handily and effectually as Mr Jelf could have done.'

'Ah, women are easily frightened,' carelessly repeated the postmaster. 'You came across him, we heard, as you were running into Layton, for Jelf.'

'It was so.'

'Well, then I must tell you Anne, that I contradicted that report. For I never could believe that you would have permitted yourself to hold speech with such a character, still less to admit him inside the house.'

'Not to save my father?' returned Anne.—'I would use any means, any instrument, when his life was at stake.'

'You did not know it would save his life,' persisted Mr Grame. 'I am astonished at your imprudence, Anne.'

'My father was dying for want of assistance, she retorted, warmly. 'I am thankful that Providence threw even John Ledbitter in my way to render it.'

'Providence!' sarcastically ejaculated the postmaster.

'Providence,' quietly repeated Anne. 'The longer I live the more plainly do I see the hand of Providence in every action of our lives. Even in those which to us may appear insignificantly trivial, at the moment of their occurrence.'

'You'll avow yourself a fatalist next,' rejoined the postmaster.

'How's the baby?' inquired Anne, by way of turning the conversation.

'Oh, it's well enough, if one may judge by its squalling. I never heard a young one with such lungs, I think Selina must manage it badly. 'You'll find them all up stairs.'

Miss Sterling ascended to an upper room, Mrs Grame's bed chamber, and knocked at the door. But there was so great a noise inside of children crying, that she found little chance of being heard. She opened it. Mrs Grame sat in a rocking chair, in an invalid wrapper and shawl, her countenance ghastly from illness, presenting so painful a contrast to the once blooming and lovely Selina Clevee, that few could have traced a resemblance. The infant in her arms was crying, as if in pain; another little fellow, of two years, stood by her knee, roaring also, from temper.

Anne went up and kissed her. 'What are you doing here, with these crying children, Selina?' she said.

'Oh dear, do try and quiet them, Anne! Mrs Grame helplessly uttered, bursting into tears; 'my very life is harassed out of me. Since

the nurse left, I have the trouble of them all day.'

Miss Sterling threw her bonnet and shawl on the bed, and taking a paper of home-made cakes from her pocket drew the elder child towards them. The tears were arrested half-way, the mouth remained opened, and the noise ceased.

'These cakes are for good little boys who don't cry,' said Anne, seating the young gentleman on the floor, and putting some into his pinafore. Then she took the infant from its mother, and carried it about the room. When soothed to silence and sleep, she sat down with it on her knee.

'Selina,' she began, 'I am not going to tell you now that you are a bad manager, for I have told you that often enough when you were well. But how, comes it that you have no nurse?'

'Ask Walter,' replied Mrs Grame, a flood of resentment escaping with her tone.

'Now be calm, and speak quietly of things. You surely purpose taking a maid for the children?'

'I purpose!' bitterly retorted Mrs Grame; 'it is of very little use what I purpose or want. Walter squanders the money away on his own pleasures, and we cannot afford to keep two servants. Now you have the plain truth, Anne.'

'I have thought,' resumed Miss Sterling, after an awkward pause, 'that you have sometimes appeared not quite at ease as to money. But a case like this is one of necessity: your health is at stake, and it is Mr Grame's duty to provide an additional servant, if only for a few months.'

'Listen, Anne,' resumed Mrs Grame, speaking with an excitement her cousin in vain endeavoured to arrest. 'You thought I married well; that if Walter had been living freely, as a young man, and anticipated his inheritance, he was steady then, had a good home to bring me to, and a liberal salary. You thought this—my uncle and aunt thought it—I thought it. But what were the facts? Before that child was born—and she pointed to the little cake-eater—I found he was over head and ears in debt, and they have been augmenting ever since. His quarter's salary, when paid, only serves to stop the most pressing, and supply his private expenses, of which he appears to have abundance. Such expenses are shameful for a married man.'

'Be calm, Selina.'

'Calm! how can I be calm? I wish I had never seen him! I wish I had been a thousand miles off, before I consented to marry him! I never did love him. Don't look reprovingly at me, Anne; it is the truth. I loved but one, and that was John Ledbitter. When he turned out worthless I thought my heart would have broken, though I carried it off with a high hand to him for I was bitterly incensed against him. Then came Walter Grame with his insinuating whispers, and his handsome person, and talked me, into a liking for him. And then into a marriage—'

'Selina,' interrupted Miss Sterling, 'you should not speak so of your husband even to me.'

'I shall speak to the world, perhaps, by and by; he goads me enough for it. Night after night, night after night, since from a few months after our marriage, does he spend away from me. In what society think you? He comes home towards morning, sometimes sober, and then I know where he has been, FOR I HAVE HEARD; but oftener he comes staggering home from the public house, primed with drink and smoke. Beast!'

Miss Sterling wrung her hands, but she could not stem the torrent of words.

'I should not so much care now, for I have grown inured to it, and my former reproaches—how useless they were!—have given place to silent scorn and hatred, were it not for the money these habits of his consume. Circumstances have grown very bad with us; of money there seems to be none; and it is with difficulty we provide for our daily wants, for trades-people refuse us credit. How then can I bring another servant into the house, when we can hardly keep the one we have?'

'This state of things must be killing her,' thought Anne Sterling, as she listened and shivered.

'What it will come to I don't know,' proceeded the invalid, 'but a break-up seems inevitable, and then he will lose his situation as postmaster. In any case, I don't think he will keep it long, for if he could stave off pecuniary ruin, his health is so shattered that he is unfit to hold it. I now thank my dear aunt that she was firm in having my £1500 settled on myself. The interest of it is not much, but, if the worst comes to the worst, it may buy dry bread to keep me and these poor children from starvation and pay for a garret to lodge in.'

'Oh, Selina!' uttered Miss Sterling, as the tears ran down her cheeks, 'how terribly you shock me!'

'I have never betrayed this to a human being till now. You may have thought me grown cold, capricious, ill-tempered,—no doubt you have, Anne, often, when you have come here. Not long ago, you said how marriage seemed to have altered me. But now you see what I have had to try me, the sort of existence mine has been.'

'What can I do for you? how can I help?' inquired Anne. 'Were my father well I would take little Walter home with me, and relieve you of him for a time, but his state demands perfect quiet in the house. Money, beyond a trifle, I have not, of my own to offer: perhaps my mother, when she knows, will—'

'She must not know,' vehemently interrupted Mrs Grame. 'I forbid you to tell her, Anne—I forbid you to tell any one. As to money, if you were to put a hundred pounds down before me this minute, I would say, throw it rather into the first ditch you came to, for it would only be squandered, by him, on his orgies and his debts. No, let the crisis come; the sooner the better; things may be smoother after it, at any rate quieter; for, as it is, the house is dunned by creditors. Oh, Anne! if it were not for my children I would come back and find peace at the farm, if you would give me shelter. But now—to go from my own selfish troubles—tell me about my uncle. To think that it should be John Ledbitter, of all people, who came in to his help! Walter went on in a sneer about it in one of his half-tipsy moods. He has an unconquerable hatred to him, as powerful as it is lasting. I suppose it arises from knowing I was once so attached to him.'

'Selina,' returned Miss Sterling, lowering her voice, 'you will say it is a strange fancy of mine, but from a few words John Ledbitter spoke to me, the evening of my father's attack, I have been doubtful whether he was guilty.'

'What can you mean?' demanded Mrs Grame with startling fervor; 'what grounds have you? did he assert his innocence?'

'On the contrary, he seemed rather to let me assume his guilt. He said, that of course I believed him guilty, like the rest of the world did, and then followed a hint that he could assert his innocence. But his manner said more than his words. It was so peculiar, so haughtily independent, betraying the self-reliance of an innocent man, smarting under a stinging sense of injury. I do believe—'

'Don't go on, Anne,' interrupted Mrs Grame with a shudder. 'If it should ever turn out that Ledbitter was accused unjustly, that I, of all others, helped to revile and scorn him, my sum of misery would be complete, and I must either go mad or die. I suppose you have seen him—but that once?'

'Indeed I have. He called the next day, and Molly let him go up to see my father.'

'In his smock-frock,' interposed Mrs Grame, in a half derisive tone.

'We have never seen him in anything else, except on Sundays, and then he is dressed as a gentleman. He comes every day now.'

'Ha!'

'He proffered his services to me and my mother, if he could be of any use about the farm. We were at terrible fault for some one to replace my father, and a few things he undertook were so well executed that they led to more.—Now he is regularly working for us.'

Mrs Grame leaned her head upon her hand and mused. 'Is he much altered?' she asked.

'Oh yes. His hair is going grey, and his countenance has a look of care I never thought to see on one so smiling and sunny as was John Ledbitter's.'

Miss Sterling returned to Layton that evening with sad and sorrowful thoughts; the more so, that she was forbidden to confide them; even to her mother. But she had little leisure to brood over them in the weeks ensuing, for a change for the worse occurred in her father's state, and it was evident that his thread of life was worn nearly to its end. The farmer held many an anxious conversation with his wife and daughter, touching his worldly affairs. It was intended that the farm should be given up, after his death, but several months must elapse before that could be effected, and who was to manage the land in the meantime? On Sunday evening, in particular, the farmer seemed unusually restless and on this score. His wife in vain besought him not to disturb himself—that she and Anne should manage very well.

'I should have died more at ease, I tell ye, if I could have left ye with a trusty bailiff and overlooker,' persisted the farmer. 'Anne has got her head on her shoulders the right way, I know; but women can't see much to out-door things. If that John Ledbitter had not got the mark upon him, there's not a man I'd so soon have left as him. He's a down right good farmer.'

Anne cleared her throat and spoke up timidly. 'Father,' she said, 'I by no means feel sure, now, that John Ledbitter was guilty. A few words he let fall, the night he was taking care of you, gave rise to a powerful doubt of it in my mind.'

'Eh, girl?' cried Farmer Sterling, in bewilderment.

'It would not surprise me to find that he was innocent. Of course—There he is,' broke off Anne, seeing John Ledbitter advance, from her seat by the window. 'I dare say he is coming here to enquire after you.'

'Let him come up,' rejoined the farmer.

Mr Ledbitter entered. None, looking at him now, could suppose he had the brand of a thief upon him, still less that he was a common day-labourer. For he bore the stamp of a gentleman in his dress and manner—in his superior black clothes and his manly form and countenance. Mr Sterling asked him to take a chair,