

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Chambers's Journal, for December.

AT THE LINN-SIDE.

O living, living water,
So busy and so bright,
Up-flashing in the morning beam,
And sounding through the night—
O golden-shining water,
Would God that I might be
A vocal message from his mouth
Into the world, like thee!

O happy, happy water,
Which nothing e'er affrays,
And, as it pours from crag to crag,
Nothing e'er stops or stays.
But past cool heathery hollows,
Or gloomy deeps it flows,
By rocks that fair would close it in,
Leaps through—and on it goes.

O freshing, sparkling water,
O voice that's never still,
Though Winter her fair dead-white hand
Lays over brae and hill.
Though no leaf's left to flitter
In woods all mute and hoar,
Yet thou, O river, night and day
Thou runnest evermore.

No foul thing can defile thee;
Thou castest all aside.
Like a good heart that midst the ill
Of this world doth abide.

O living, living water,
Still fresh and bright and free,
God lead us through this changing world,
For ever pure, like thee!

From Chambers's Journal for November

LIFE'S UNDERCURRENT.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAP. I

MANY years have come and gone since I first formed the resolution to narrate the events of my obscure life; but I have been prevented by doubts and fears. Would the world care to know anything about Charles Graham, his privations or sorrows; one who never left his native country, and never mixed in events of startling interest; whose days and years were passed in the undercurrent of society, unheeded and unknown?

The first four years of my life are dimly impressed upon my memory; I had then a home and parents. My father's image is but faint; not so my mother's. Even now, in my dreams I see her, and sit upon her knee; she playing with my yellow locks, that are now gray and scant. There is one scene in my father's house no time can ever efface: my mother in her shroud, my father weeping over her, and, by and by, a number of strangers carrying her away. I wept because my father wept: I knew not the sad loss I had sustained. In a few weeks after, he followed her to the grave himself, and I was left alone in the wide world.

Relations I had none, that any of the neighbours had ever heard my parents speak of: they were from a distant part of the country, and poor. He was but a labouring man, who had no trade; his abode was in a garret of an old decayed house, where poverty finds a shelter while any feeling of independence remains, and all privations are endured to shun the work house. Among the neighbours that inhabited the same flat of garrets, there was one called Annie, a poor old woman who had been most kind and attentive to my parents in their illness, and was most kind to me. When the others proposed to throw me upon the parish, the good Annie would not hear of it, but said: 'I will look to poor Charlie while I live; and at my death it will be time enough then. The others took no interest in the disposal of me, so long as I was not a burden upon them; and Annie got her own way. With her I lived for six years: I shared her bed, and often scanty meal; but she always gave me the larger share. She loved me as her own child; and I loved and obeyed her as if she had been my mother, and still revere her memory.

Poor Annie's was a common lot. Born of poor but respectable parents, she had been sent in early life from her father's home to service, in which she continued, with a fair character, for many years. With strict economy, she had saved out of her wages a good sum of money for her station, and became a prize worth winning to young men in her sphere of life.

In an evil hour for her, she was won, and became the wife of one who proved unworthy of her. Short was her dream of happiness. Her husband, who had no money of his own, got all she had to commence business for herself; like many others, he could be a servant but not a master. With money in his power he had not toiled for, he became improvident and dissipated; in a few years, all was gone. Peace and comfort had long before fled poor Annie's fireside; now care and want had become its constant inmates; still Annie struggled on to stem the flood of poverty. At length dissipation did its work: her husband died and left her destitute. After his death, she maintained herself by labor, until old age rendered her unable to

perform a whole day's work, and reduced her to her present low estate.

How strong is woman's love! Young as I was, I remembered how her eyes brightened when she spoke of her husband—her favourite theme—of his good looks; then all his evil doings were forgotten and buried with him; his good alone survived. Then would she weep, and say, 'Save a few faults, he was the best of men.' I never heard her murmur at her lot. She often said to me: 'Charlie, put your trust in God, and He will never forsake you. I am now old, and He has supported me through many trials, for my trust was in Him. I am now far happier, a poor gatherer (chiffonniere), than I was before; for when I was adding to my wealth, I was full of care; and when my husband was squandering it, I had both care and sorrow. Now I can lift my heart in humble dependence on One who is stronger than I; no care for the morrow disturbs my mind. I can say in sincerity of heart: "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."'

I was too young for many months to accompany her through the street and lanes of the city at the first peep of dawn: I remained in bed until her return. Very soon, however, she taught me to be useful to her. I kindled the fire before her return, and ran messages for the neighbours, and threw apace, and became sharp and active for my years. At length, I sallied forth with Annie, my little basket on my arm, to wander with her in the gray of a summer morning; searching among the ashes and rubbish for anything we could turn to account, trifles that had been thrown into the streets by people a few grades better off in their circumstances than poor Annie. Again we wandered forth in the evening on our weary rounds. During the intervals between our wanderings Annie plied her wheel and spun, and I sat by our little window, and learned my alphabet; for she had got some teaching in her youth, could read her Bible, and scrawl a few lines—not very easy to decipher. Such was my teacher, and I made progress.

For weeks and months I sat at her side, and was patiently taught by her, until I could read my catechism, and answer every question it contained. Her well-thumbed Bible next she made me read aloud to her. The first feeling of pride I ever felt was when she said; 'Charlie, you read the blessed book better than I can.' I had toil and privation; yet I looked back on these as happy days.

Our quiet hearth was often disturbed by the brawls of our neighbours; for dire necessity compelled Annie to live among the offences of society, where intemperance and profanity prevailed; still the most abandoned of our neighbours respected Annie. Such is the homage vice pays to virtue. Even in this retreat of abject poverty, there were different grades of character, and some free from any stain save poverty. Of such was one we used to call the Mourning Lady.

In the next room to Annie lived this mysterious female. No one knew her name; the neighbours in the garret called her the Mourning Lady, for she was always in deep mourning; but not that of a widow. From her manners and dress, she could not, in former years, have been the child of poverty. She was not an old woman. Her face was finely formed, but very pale, and she looked sad, and spoke habitually low in her pleasant English accent. Compared with the others, her voice was music to my younger ear. She held intercourse with none save Annie, and Annie loved and respected her. Neither of us was ever in her room—the lady seldom ever left it, and then only after nightfall. Once or twice, she was absent from her room for a few days, and was always sadder when she came back. She appeared to us to have no mode of living; for she neither spun nor sewed, yet never wanted food as others did often. It was only on the sabbath evening that she came to Annie's room, when we went to church together—I under Annie's cloak to hide my rags. On our return, she never spoke of anything but religious subjects. After a short stay she would retire to her room until the following Sabbath.

One afternoon, a short time before Annie and I set out on our rounds, the lady came into our room, and asked me to carry a letter to a hotel in town, and wait an answer. Away I ran. It was with difficulty I could get the proud waiter to take the letter from me, and deliver it; but at length he did. I waited only a short time on the steps outside the door—I was too ragged to stand in the lobby. When a letter was given to me I ran home with it. The Mourning Lady was still with Annie: she opened it. As she read, I saw the tears run down her pale face. She spoke not one word, but 'Thank you, Charlie,' and retired into her own room.

Next forenoon, after our return from the morning's gathering, she took Annie into her room: I was by her side. The lady was more composed. A small bundle in a black silk handkerchief lay on a little table. 'Annie,' said she, 'I am going now to leave you, I would reward your kindness, but I have not the power. Whatever is in this room, I leave to you; it is not much. Farewell, good Annie; we shall never meet again until we meet in heaven.' Her voice faltered; both were in tears. I got the little bundle on my head; 'God comfort you, poor lady,' said Annie as we went out.

When we came within a few doors of the hotel the lady took the bundle from me and gave me a piece of silver. There was a post-chaise at the door; a gentleman handed her in, and it drove away. I returned to Annie, and showed her my riches, elate with joy; but Annie was weeping.

That day, we removed what was of use to Annie, and she disposed of the other articles. There was not much; but it was a treasure to poor Annie, and enabled her to procure several little comforts, and me a cheap second-hand dress.

Of a very different character was Miss Jane, who exhibited, in the room on our left, a melancholy specimen of human frailty; her life was a series of broken resolutions, sin, and repentance. Her relations were wealthy and respectable, but she had worn out their endurance by her evil habits, and she was disowned by them the last for ardent spirits was her bane. She was not always, however, under the influence of this passion; but would for weeks be sober and industrious. She was expert at needle work of the highest quality, and could maintain herself genteely and comfortably.

In her lucid intervals she was all penitence and self upbraiding; she was even religious, and attended church regularly. At these times Annie would say: 'I trust Miss Jane is at last a reformed woman.' Vain hope! Perhaps next morning, as we went out, we would find her asleep at her door, in a helpless state of intoxication. Then she would continue a new course of drinking until all her former earnings were gone, and any clothes she could spare in pawn, to be redeemed again by toil and in penitence. Such was this victim of a low passion—still young and handsome, when dressed and in her sober periods. Annie often remonstrated and exhorted with her. She would say: 'Poor lost woman! Lost in this world and the world to come; for the scriptures say again and again: "No drunkard shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven."'

Miss Jane would tartly reply: 'Annie, I am not a drunkard—I only take a ramble at a time, but for weeks I never taste or care for it; not like some of our neighbours, who are never sober when they can get drunk. I scorn the name of drunkard!' Such was Miss Jane.

After the Mourning Lady left us, the room soon got a new tenant. Like her, he had not the appearance of the usual occupiers of these wretched dens, for rooms they could scarcely be called—they were low and campeiled, the windows small, and looking only on the sky, or the roofs of the opposite buildings. The new tenant's appearance was gentle and subdued; but there was a fire in his eye at times, as it glanced from under his high pale brow. His clothing was genteel, but bare, aged, and well-kept. I soon learned that he was an unsuccessful artist, who had come to the city, unknown to fame, to court he favours in a new sphere of action. When not reading to Annie, I spent my time in his room, gazing in wonder on the creations of his pencil—the beautiful forms that, to my young mind, he made to rise out of nothing, and remain permanent on the panel. I saw them assume their forms, but I could not comprehend how; I thought it was something more than human.

Beautiful as they were, he could not live upon them, scarcely by them. I was his agent in the sale of his pictures, and carried them to the pawn or the dealers, asking a small sum, but often taking what I could get for them.—He had no choice, however: one I was told to ask five shilling for, brought me an offer of only two shillings and six pence; this was among his first. I carried it back to him, and told what I had been offered. I knew he had not got his breakfast, and had nothing in the house. With a desponding look, he said: 'Charlie, I have no choice; go, take the money; but it is far too small a sum for such a picture.'

Away I ran back to the dealer; but he would now only give me two shillings, and I took them. The artist sighed when I gave him the pittance, and sent me for bread and cheese with the half of it.

Thus he struggled on, taking for his works what I could get. At times, I was told to come back with another. The artist never went himself: he was too bashful—a feeling I knew nothing about at this time. For several months, he had struggled on, and was getting lower and lower in spirits. His pictures did not, by the prices I got from the dealers, appear to rise in the public opinion, and want was pressing hard upon him. 'Charlie,' said he to me, 'I will make one effort more. I have a favourite sketch I have kept for happier times: I will try it at my utmost need. If it fails, I will forsake my art for ever, for I cannot live by it, and I must have mistaken my talent.'

The picture was taken to a dealer: he gave me five shilling for it, and bade me call again in a day or two with another. I returned to the artist rejoicing, and told what the dealer had said; but I never saw him so much depressed. He wrought none for the next two days. At length hunger pressed: I got one that he had by him, and ran to the dealer. 'I do not care for this,' he said; 'bring me a companion to the last, and I will give you the same sum for it.'

I begged him to take the one I brought, and he gave me two shillings for it. I ran to the artist with the money, and told him the order I

had got, thinking he would rejoice; for five shillings seemed to me a large sum.

I expected to see him pleased—not so; he groaned, and buried his face in his hands. 'Is it come to this?' said he. 'How can I have mistaken my vocation so much?' At length he raised his head—his eyes were damp: 'My poverty, and not my will, consents.' The picture was finished, true to the time, and I was despatched with it. It was on a small panel, for the artist was too poor to paint a large one, or time from his wants to spare: he painted for bare life.

When I reached the shop, almost breathless with the haste I made, there was a gentleman in conversation with the dealer. I have said I was not bashful; so I went boldly up to the counter, nor heeded the gestures the dealer made me to keep back and leave the shop. I was too anxious to get the money, and carry it to the artist; and placing it upon the counter before him, said: 'You promised me five shillings; it is the same size as the other one. He would have covered the picture, but it was not yet dry. I pertinaciously stood by the counter and insisted upon having the money. The gentleman looked at the picture, then at the dealer.

'Why,' said he, 'this is the companion to the one I bought from you the other day, for which you charged me two guineas. What is the price, boy?'

'Five shillings, sir,' was my answer. He looked at the dealer, who was looking at me as if he could have killed me on the spot.

'For shame,' said he to the dealer. 'I will deal with the artist himself. Here, poor boy, are the two guineas I was to have paid for it, and a shilling to yourself. Give this card to the artist, and tell him to call on me. I ran out of the shop, and reached home breathless from joy and the speed with which I had run up the long turnpike stair to our garret. I ran first to Annie to give her my shilling,—a great sum to her, for she was now in bad health and very frail, and unable to wander far at night or morning. The anxious artist heard my joyous voice as I told her my good fortune; he came in hastily, and I gave him the two pound notes and the two shillings, with the card, and told him what the gentleman said.

He leaped for joy, then sank into a chair, and remained silent for some time, gazing on the card. The money he seemed not to care for—it remained in his hand unlooked at; he seemed to me as if he cared not about the money—the small bit of card engrossed his whole thought. When he rose to go into his own room—'Charlie,' said he, 'here are the odd shillings for you: I am still your debtor.' This was a white day for us all.

That same day, the artist's garb was improved, and he came home with a larger canvas than I had ever seen him use before. He was in great spirits; and he set to work, and whistled or sung from daylight until twilight: the canvas glowed under his brush as I stood by his side gazing in admiration. At length the picture was finished, and taken home. On his return, joy and hope shone in his countenance: he was most liberal to me. He painted only two or three more pictures in the garret which he left for a more respectable lodging. He was at length known to fame, and no longer at the mercy of the dealers, who would now have offered pounds for the shillings they had given me.

It will seem surprising that in a community like ours there was a miser! There was, indeed, a revolting character, a neighbour in the garret, the poorest of the poor inmates, for he was haunted by the demon of poverty, in the spirit of greed. He was always whining and complaining, yet the inmates affirmed that he had money, and could live better than he did. He was not an aged man, yet lean and haggard in his appearance, as if bowed down by years. He was always begging from the other inmates, he denied himself even necessary food. He had a box of hardware, spectacles, and other goods; but, if we could believe him, he never made any sales: he begged from his neighbours a share of their scanty meals, and sat by their firesides until he was unwelcome. But he cared not for their hints to retire—even insult fell unheeded on his ears, so long as he enjoyed the comforts of a fire, a thing he never had in his own room.

Yet this miserable man had once lived in affluence, and was liberal and humane, until, by some mishap—I never knew of what nature—was sunk to beggary, when his whole nature changed. He had one daughter, who had been for a time the companion of his misfortunes. In his most abject want, she had been married to an industrious tradesman, depending only on his labour, and having little to bestow on her father. Several times she came to visit him, and bring a few comforts, such as she could spare from her poor home—her father accepting everything, yet grumbling. He was always in want—the pest of the whole garret. I will not dwell much longer on him.

At length, after four days of continued absence, Annie and the neighbours became anxious to know what had become of this miserable being, for no one had heard him go out. I was sent to his daughter, and brought her with me. When the door was forced, I shall never forget the sight that presented itself. Upon the al-