Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

FLOWERS.

BY PROFESSOR LONGFELLOW.

Spake full well, in language quaint and olden,
One who dwelleth by the castled Rhine,
When he called the flowers so blue and golden,
Stars, that in earth's firmanent do shine.

Stars they are, wherein we read our history,
As astrologers and seers of old;
Yet not wrapped about with awful mystery,
Like the burning stars, which they beheld.

Wondrous truths, and manifold as wondrous,
God hath written on those stars above;
But not in the bright flow'rets under us
Stands the revelation of his love.

Bright and glorious is that revelation,
Written all over this great world of ours;
Making evident our own creation,
In these stars of earth,—these golden flowers.

And the Poet, faithful and far-seeing,
Sees alike in stars and flowers, a part
Of the self-same universal being,
Which is throbbing in his brain and heart.

Gorgeous flow'rets in the sunlight shining,
Blossoms flaunting in the eye of day,
Tremulous leaves with soft and silver lining,
Buds that open only to decay;

Brilliant hopes, all woven in gorgeous tissues,
Flaunting gaily in the golden light;
Large desires, with most uncertain issues,
Tender wishes, blossoming at night!

These in flowers and men are more than seeming
Workings are they of the self-same powers,
Which the Poet, in no idle dreaming,
Seeth in himself and in the flowers.

Everywhere about us are they glowing,
Some like stars, to tell us Spring is born;
Others, their blue eyes with tears o'erflowing,
Stand like Ruth amid the golden corn;

Not alone in Spring's armorial bearing,
And in Summer's green-emblazoned field,
But in arms of brave old Autumn's wearing,
In the centre of his brazen shield;

Not alone in meadows, and green alleys,
On the mountain top and by the brink
Of sequestered pools, in woodland valleys,
Where the slaves of nature stoop to drink;

Not alone in her vast doom of glory,
Not on graves of bird and beast alone,
But in old cathedrals, high and hoary,
On the tombs of heroes, carved in stone;

In the cottage of the rudest peasant,
In ancestral homes, whose crumbling towers,
Speaking of the Past unto the Present,
Tell us of the ancient Games of flowers;

In all places, then, and in all seasons,
Flowers expand their light and soul-like wings,
Teaching us, by most persuasive reasons,
How akin they are to human things.

And with childlike, credulous affection
We behold their tender buds expand;
Emblems of our own great resurrection,
Emblems of the bright and better land.

From Dicken's Household Words.

THE OPAL RING.

An old street, which we shall name the Rue des Truands, in old Paris, in times not old to us. To call it a street is a little more than a form of speech; it is rather a narrow, black, squalid passage that divides the tortuous rows of high, dark, rickety, houses, irregularly pierced with windows that breathe an atmosphere the nature of which may well account for the unwholesomeness of their complexions. The place has evidently a guilty consciousness of its vileness, but not the least intention to repent and reform; for it crouches there in its filthy obscurity, shrinking from the light of heaven and spurning the sunshine, well knowing what his last ray would bring forth of shame and loathsomeness and ignoble squalor. There is no flag-way and the pavement's rough, irregularities are nearly concealed by the smooth, liquid, black mud that not winter or summer ever dries there—that has spattered the houses for so many, many years that their fronts, for six or even feet high, are cased with it—that when thunder-showers come, streams, yet more diluted, in murky torrents into their low door-ways

It was always cold there, and the atmosphere is always charged with a deadly damp and nausea. On the ground floors of the houses are some shops that have no aspect of containing anything saleable, or of being the scenes where commerce of any kind is carried on; for you always seem to see the same faded, untempting goods, of whatever nature or description they be, in the dark mud-splashed windows.—Lean, green, undersized children, some looking precociously and viciously intelligent, others stolid in their grimy misery, hang about the doorways or listlessly dabble in the mire; and towards evening, which falls early there, the rats come out and forage, little disturbed by their vicinity. The streets is very quiet in general, except on fete days, about some of the low cabarets, from whence there then proceed fierce oaths and savage roars, which are supposed to be songs of mirth and jollity; for even joy there wears a mask of vice and debasement and ferocity.

Narrow, creaking staircases, that never saw a gleam of daylight, lead upward to filthy, dingy rooms; some lined with the wooden panelling put up at the period of their building, and now so smoke-dried and dirt-stained as to bear no trace of its former aspect or color: others hung with shabby paper, no less undistinguishable.—All have innumerable closets in the walls, suggestive of concealment and mystery, and not a few secret staircases and strange, unexplained recesses behind chimneys and in the thickness of the walls. Here and there, an attempt has been made, long ago—probably by some newcomer to this God-forgotten place—to rear a pot of of mignonette or wall-flower, or those parasites of the poor, scarlet-runner and nasturtium, on the sill of the dim windows; but the poor things yellowed and sickened and dropped their leaves, and nothing remained but a brown, dried stem, or a few stiff, dead tendrils, clung round the stick or stretched twine placed to support them.

On a summer evening, when the right side of Paris had not yet lost the last beams of the sum that never fell upon the wrong, a woman turned from the gay quarter into the Rue des Truands. She was dressed in dark garments and closely veiled, so that nothing but her height was clearly distingishable; but she walked rapidly, and with the anxious air of one who is nervously conscious of being in a false position. She stopped at last before a closed door, examined the aspect of the house, consulted a little paper she held in her hand, and then knocked softly. The door opened instantly, and closed on her as she entered, leaving her in total darkness.

'Fear nothing, madame,' said the shrill voice of the invisible porter, 'give me your hand, and I will guide you safely.'

The visitor held out her hand in the dark, and felt it taken by a hand so cold, so lean, so extraordinary small, that she could hardly forbear shuddering at the strange, unnatural contact. Through a room or passage, dark and earthly smelling as a tomb, up a steep, winding staircase, through a long, creaking corridor, still in darkness, now and then faintly and momentarily broken by some invisible borrowed light, the guide and the guest proceeded together in silence, till at the end of the passage they stopped, and the former knocked at the door. Being bidden to enter they did so; and for the first time, the visitor looking down to about the level of her own waist. saw her conductor, a dwarf humpback of the female sex, but of an age perfectly undistinguishable, who after peering upward with a quick strange, sidelong glance that seemed to pierce her veil, noiselessly withdrew and left her standing before the room's inhabitant.

He was an old man of a pale, leaden complexion, with quick, keen gray eyes, that peered from beneath low, shaggy black brows, while his hair and long thick beard were white. He sat at a table, covered with venerable looking books, yellow vellum manuscripts, and various instruments of singular aspect, on which a shaded lamp threw a partial gleam. Signing to the lady with a lean, long hand, to advance to a seat near him, he watched her movements with a look of close and quiet scrutiny and in profound silence, till she had taken the chair.

'Excuse me. madame,' he said, 'but you must raise your veil. I can not speak to you without seeing your face.'

She hesitated for a second, then suddenly flung it up, and boldly and steadily met his eye. The action and the face accorded: both were proud, passionate, resolute—even defiant; the latter, though not in its first youth, handsome. Nothing of all this was lost on the old man; neither did he fail to perceive that the hand that threw back the veil was small and white, and that a jewel flashed from it in the lamplight.

'I come,' the visitor said, 'for a turn of your art.'

He bowed, without removing his eyes from her face. His silent scrutiny seemed to irritate and annoy her.

'Can you, and are you disposed to aid me? Fear nothing as to the extent and security of your reward;' and she laid a heavy purse of the table.

He appeared not to notice the movement as he said quietly:

'When you have stated the case to me, madame, I shall be be better able to answer your question.'

It was evident that there was a powerful struggle in the mind of the visitor; for her color rose, her nostrils dilated, and when, after a pause, she spoke again, her voice was thicker, and her words abrupt and hurried.

'I love, and would be loved again, which I am not. I would purchase love—that one man's love at—any price.'

'At any price to him, or to you?'

'To either, or both.'

'Is he heart-free—or does he love another?'

'He loves another—his affianced wife.'

'Hum! Complicated.'

'You have nothing more encouraging than that to say to me?'

The old man smiled a quiet, slightly contemptuous smile.

'Patience, belle dame; this is not an affair of yes or no in the first five minutes. I must consider it.'

She was obviously annoyed.

'How long a time do you require for consideration?'

'I require until the day after to-morrow at this same hour.'

'And you will tell me nothing till then? You do not know what it is to come to this place. If you doubt my possessing the means to reward your services, here is only a small portion of what I have both the power and the will to bestow, in the event of your aiding me effectually;' and she held the purse out to him. He waved it back quietly.

'Keep your money for the present. You have on your hand a jewel, which, if you choose to confide it to me, shall, in the event of my deciding to accept this task, be made the instrument of accomplishing your wishes, and shall, in any case be restored to you in safety.'

His eye was fixed on a ring she wore—a serpent studded with diamonds and bearing on the head an opal of singular fire and splendor.

'This ring? It belonged to my mother and grandmother, and I promised never to let it out of my possession. There is a family superstition attached to it.'

'As you will, madame. I have no wish to undertake the affair, and can only consent to do so on my own conditions.'

With fiery impatience she tore rather than drew the ring from her finger, and held it out to him. The opal and the emerald eyes of the serpent shot forth prismatic gleams, and the folds seemed to undulate as he turned it about in the light of the lamp.

'No common jewel this,' he said, contemplating it; 'the opal is a stone of peculiar influence in the occult sciences, and I can see that this opal is more than usually gifted with such virtues. You did well to bring it; it may aid the accomplishment of our desires more than any thing else.'

'Then you promise me ——'

'Nothing. Understand fully that to-day I in no way bind myself to any thing in the affair. The day after to-morrow you shall have my final decision.'

He rose. The lady followed his example, he rang a hand bell, and the dwarf again made his appearance to lead her through the intricacies of the house. When she got into the street it was almost dark, and as yet the few lanterns that at distant intervals were suspended across the alley by lines stretched from house to house, were not lighted. With uncertain steps therefore, she made her way over the slippery, filthy pavement, not unfrequently disturbing a large rat that was ferreting among the garbage flung from the doors, for some nauseous morsel, the refuse of some wretched meal.

More than once she was nervously conscious of attracting the suspicious attention of a denizen of this iniquitous haunt; despite her resolute nature, her heart beat high at the sensation of encountering a very real danger; and when she emerged on the broad open thoroughfares, still only in the light, a load of alarm and anxiety was removed from her breast. As she turned a corner she suddenly came on a group of three persons, an old and a young man, with a girl of about seventeen. She recoiled at the sight, as if something had stung her, and the young man fancying she was startled at finding herself in such immediate contact with them, drew back with a 'Pardon, madame!' standing out of the way, hat in hand, to let her pass.—She rushed passed him, and her dark veiled figure was soon lost in the dim light.

Meanwhile the little party strolled on, talking cheerily by the way. That Gaston de Montrouge and Genevieve Rouvieres were lovers, was a most unmistakable fact. They were, moreover, affianced. The elderly man on whom the girl leaned, was her father. He belonged to a family of the bourgeoise and had made a considerable fortune in commerce, from which he had not retired. His sister had married the Chevalier de Montrouge, and, by virtue of a family compact, it was agreed that her only son should gild the somewhat threadbare nobility of his father's race with the louis d'or of his uncle's only daughter, when both should arrive at years of discretion. At an early age, Gaston, through the influence of his paternal relatiens, entered one of the most brilliant regiments of the guard. Soon after, his parents died, and from thence, his uncle's house became his established home, when away from his duties—an arrangement which the worthy man in nowise objected to, as bringing the young people together, and tending to cement the contract already entered into between the senior members of the family, by engaging the inclination of the parties more especially concerned.

The result was eminently successful. Gaston found his pretty, gentle cousin, with her nut-brown hair and hazel eyes, entirely to his tastes and Genevieve thought—and not, perhaps, without reason—that the beau cousin was by far the most accomplished cavalier she had ever encountered. Unfortunately, though, other more experienced judges were of little Genevieve's opinion.

At a grand gathering of the great folks of the Faubourg St. Germain, the Marquise de Vaucrasson, a lofty lady who had just cast off the weeds she had put on and put off with nearly equal satisfaction, particularly distinguished the handsome young garde, and took every means short of declaring the fact, to make him aware of the favorable impression he had peoduced. Gaston was, however, sincerely and seriously attoched to his cousin, and he had, moreover passed the age when youths are given to fall in love with women some ten years their senior. Ha therefore showed himself less sensible of the great dame's condescension than might have been expected; and when on various subsequent occasions she renewed her advances, they were met with a coolness that at once drove her love and her pride to the point of some desperate resolved which the discovery of the position he and Genevieve held with regard to each other, put the finishing stroke to.

Hence her visit to the sage of the Rue des Truands, a man celebrated for his skill in the compounding of such devilish contrivances as suited the taste and spirit of the age, ever more ready to appeal for aid to the angels of darkness than to those of light, and having far stronger faith in the power of Satan and his myrmidons than in that of the Blessed Virgin and all the legion of saints.

On the day appointed, Madame de Vaucrasson, who had passed some hours of not very enviable anxiety, torn alternately between hope, fear, jealousy, and anticipated triumph, started once more for the dwelling of the man of magic. As before the door opened noiselessly at her knock, and the dwarf's cold little hand took her fevered one to lead her through the dreary labyrinth.

These details had, however, passed without her notice. Would the sage accord her desire? Might she hope through him to win Gaston? That was all her thought; and, on entering the room, her emotion was so strong that she could hardly command her voice to ask the question.

The answer filled her with a thrill of wild, fierce joy.

'I have studied the matter closely,' the old man said, 'and notwithstanding all the difficulties and dangers—for there are dangers, and to me especially in the work—I have decided on accepting your commission. Success I can promise you; but my reward must be in proportion to the labor and the risk.'

'Name your terms.'

He mentioned a sum that would have started an applicant less bent on the attainment of her desires; but the marquise, without a moment's hesitation, acceded to the demand.

'And the ring?' she asked.

'The ring, as I told you, shall be made the instrument of accomplishing your object. Return here this day week with an order for sum you have agreed upon; and the ring, charged with the power to perform the misson, is yours.'

She clasped her hands with a gleam of triumph in her flashing black eyes.

The evening of the seventh day found her once more on her way to the magician's. The old man took from a little box the ring, and handed it to her. Never had it looked so magnificent. A thousand gorgeous tints played through the opal, every diamond flashed and sparkled with increased lustre, while the emerald eyes of the serpent gleamed with a living light, almost terrible to look at. Madame de Vaucrasson turned it about, and contemplated it lovingly.

'Whatever man wears, or even has about his person that ring,' the sage said, 'must, so long as it remains in his possession, love you passionately, no matter what may have been his previous sentiments, or what the obstacles that lie between you. Beware, therefore, into whose hands it falls.

She gave him the order for the sum they had agreed upon, and prepared to depart.

'I expect, madame, that you will come and give me an account of your success. I shall require this.'

The tone was so quietly authorative,' that she felt herself compelled to make the desired promise; and, concealing the jewel in her bosom she hastened home with all speed.

How to convey it to Gaston? That was the next step. She thought of various expedients, but none wholly satisfied her. She resolved, at all events, never to separate herself from it, so that whatever occasion chance might offer, supposing she did not immediately hit upon a deliberate plan of action, she might profit by.

(To be continued.)