

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From the Dublin University Magazine.

DEATH.

ANON, who treadest in the track of Time,
Guarding the entrance to that unknown clime
Whence come no whispers to the world
below,
Whence not a song we hear
Of triumph or of cheer,
Or sound of happy footsteps passing to and
fro.

Pale as the Maybell trembling in the breeze,
Thou makest youthful cheeks. The summer
seas
Lose their calm blue beneath thy waving
wing;
Fierce storms thou summonest
From the deep mountain breast,
To be thy pursuivants when thou art wander-
ing.

Thy name is terrible, thine icy breath
Stern order to the War-Fiend uttereth,
Who stains the pleasant turf a fearful red,
Or dashes in the wave
A myriad spirits brave,
For whose eternal rest no saintly song is said.

Yet I have known thee. Death, with gentle
hand
Lead some poor wanderer to the heavenly land
Amid the purple light of autumn eves;
While to the harvest moon
Arose a rustic tune
From sunburnt lusty reapers, binding up their
sheaves.

And even if, in some too cruel mood,
Thou didst neglect the multitude,
To clutch the fair bride in her orange-bloom
To dim her eyes of light
Upon the marriage night,
And bear her pallid beauty to the marble tomb.

Or the sweet child who prattled all day long
Didst touch with chillness 'mid his cradle song,
Yet unrepining, let us hope and pray,
The Master calls his own
Up to his golden throne,
When they are gathered there, thou, Death,
shalt pass away.

From Chambers's Journal for November.

LIFE'S UNDERCURRENT.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAP. II.

At length Annie's room was taken possession
by a new tenant; an old blind fiddler, with his
aged wife. I begged them to allow me to re-
main with them; and they cheerfully agreed to
my request, for she was frail, and he required a
boy to lead him forth and extend his rounds.—
With pleasure I undertook the task: I felt I
had advanced a step in life; poor Annie's had
ended where mine began. I was no more ur-
ged forth before the dawn, winter and summer,
to grope in the garbage for bare life.

I commenced my task next afternoon. I had
no bashful feelings to subdue; I rather felt proud
as, barefoot and in rags, I led Willie through
the streets. We never begged, but took all
the coppers that were given us as he played
through the streets. He had a double object
in view; for, blind as he was, he was an excel-
lent violinist, and was often engaged for even-
ing parties, where they wished a dance. As we
wandered through the streets at night, we were
at times taken away in haste to tradesmen's
houses, where parties of young people were as-
sembled, and who felt their enjoyment incom-
plete without a dance.

I had now made a change, from want and
suffering to luxury and comfort. As I led
Willie home, warm, well-fed and comfortable,
the contrast was forced upon me as we walk-
ed along the same streets where Annie and I
had a short time before, at the same hours,
wandered cold, hungry, and dejected. These
parties were our windfalls, and pretty frequent
at New-year's time.

Willie, after I had been a few weeks with
him, was so pleased with me, that he bought
me a suit of second-hand clothes. I was no
more clad in rags; but my old clothes were
carefully kept as a check upon me, to be at
once reassumed in the event of my misbe-
having. We never went out until towards the
afternoon; in the forepart of the day, he
taught me to sing to his fiddle. My voice was
not powerful, but sweet and flexible; and my
ear was correct. I was now a great acqui-
sition to him, for he took up the ballad trade. I
sang, and the ballads went from us thick as
snow-flakes for a time; but by and by the
business slackened; yet it was still remunera-
ting. In the winter months, our harvest lay in
the city; but as soon as the month of June or
July came round, we set off on our country
rambles.

It being war time, we selected our songs
accordingly; there is tant even in ballad-sing-
ing in the city. We sang as such—There was
a Gallant Soldier, on Sentry he did stand;
Fullerton's Light Horse; Come all ye Gallant
Sailors bold; Behold Poor Will, just come
from Dril; Hey, Bonny Lass, will you lie in
a barrack: these took well, relieved with a love

song now and then, Up among yon Clifty
Rocks; The Broom o' Cowdenknowes; Logie
o' Buchan; and Come under my Plaidie—a new
song, and a favourite. Such as these were our
town stock, and we thrived on them. Willie
told me, that within his recollection the taste
of the people had completely changed, for at
one time it was only garlands and long stories
of ghosts that attracted; now, these did not
sell. In the country, however, such ditties
were still popular, and they sold well; such as
—It is a Sailor of whom I write; Gregor Ghost;
Molly Bawn; The Douglas Tragedy; The
Bonny House o' Airlie; Edom o' Gordon. The
love-songs were the same as in the towns, but
the tragical ballads sold best. This was the
happiest period of my life; I had no care, I had
no want: yet I have sung for hours with no
heart to sing, but compelled by the certainty of
a sly blow on the head from the end of Willie's
bow, if I slackened. He made me always stand
at his right side, and he struck so dexterously,
no one could see the blow; for he only drew a
longer bow, that the end of it might reach me.

Blind as he was, he was sharp as a hawk: I
dared not leave his side for a minute; and at
night he would hold my two hands in his, while
he searched my pockets, lest I had concealed a
halfpenny, and made me chew a piece of bread,
lest I had one in my mouth. He was not cruel
however, although he was jealous. I was
strictly honest to him; and mechanically said
my prayers night and morning; the old man
listened, and called me a good boy, but never
prayed himself. The strange associates with
whom we were often forced to mix in the
low lodging-houses often scoffed, but never in-
terrupted me.

We were in our wanderings through Fife; it
was a summer evening; the clothes Willie had
given me I had much outgrown, and they had
been sorely pieced and patched by Mary his
wife. I was singing away—a crowd of people
stood around—I was selling fast, for I had just
finished the Guidwife o' Auchtermuchty, and I
now began The Hunting of Cheviot Chase. For
this, Willie had a tune peculiarly his own: as
the verses occurred, his music was fierce, and
again it wailed—every note was an echo of the
song: no one could give its spirit-stirring strain
better than he. All stood admiring; but I
noticed a very genteel little boy, about my own
size and age, who was close by me. His whole
mind seemed engrossed; his features and arms
were all in action unconsciously; he expressed
every sentiment of the ballad; and when I fin-
ished, his eyes were filled with tears, while his
face was flushed and his hands clenched. We
were going to give over for the day, and were
about to leave the place, when he said; 'please
do not go, until I bring mamma; you must
sing that song to her, for I love it, and she will
pay you well.'

In a few minutes, a servant came for us. I
sang the song twice; the boy hanging on his
mother's gown, and she pleased and smiling at
his enthusiasm. When I finished the second
time, he began to whisper, and I heard the word,
'Dear mamma, you don't know that he is un-
deserving. Oh! mamma, he sings so prettily
and he is so poor; pray do, mamma.' She was
a widow; this her only child.

We were taken into the kitchen, and plenti-
fully regaled: after which she called me to her
and questioned me. I told her my sad tale,
and everything about good Annie, and all her
kindness to me. The lady put some questions
from the Scriptures, which I answered readily;
repeating, likewise, a psalm to her. Thanks
to Annie, my mind was stored with such mat-
ters; although at this time the psalms and the
ballads held equal rank in my mind. I was re-
peating a second psalm, when the boy inter-
posed: 'Oh! mamma' said he, 'let him sing the
song again; I love it better than psalms: and
give him the last dress I wore. Pray do, ma-
ma, and I will be a good boy for a very long
time.' She kissed her son, and I was dressed
in the cast clothes from shoe to cap, equipped
like a butterfly new out of its chrysalis, and as
proud as boy could be.

I have always found that there is no pleasure
without some pain, for until this hour, I never
had had a shoe upon my foot; my first pair, al-
though they went easily on, pinched me sorely
for a time, and caused me great uneasiness; van-
ity, however, enabled me to bear it, for vanity
feels no pain. I had another ordeal to under-
go; for Willie was much displeased, and said
my vanity would ruin him. He carefully pro-
ped me all over, and in anger ordered me to go
back for my old dress and resume it, or I should
be his destruction. For the first time I rebel-
led, and he grew warm; but I kept out of his
reach, and threatened rather to run away and
leave him, than relinquish my new dress. He
murmured, but was forced to yield. He soon
grew reconciled, for my smart dress rather in-
creased his gains; the people pitied us more
when they saw so well dressed a boy forced to
sing ballads with his aged father. I was so
docile and obedient, everybody took me for
his son.

Willie himself was not in rags; his dress was
plain, but not patched, for the fiddler scorned
the name of beggar, and the idea of charity. I
often heard him say, when roused by the
taunt, his head erect, and his white sightless
eyes rolling as he spurned the epithet: 'I am
no beggar, I am a musician; I give value for
all I get; music is worth gold. If I am not paid

with gold, the fault is not mine; merit is not
always rewarded. Foreign music I have no
taste for; but name any tune, reel or strathspey
or any lit from Jonnie's Gray Brecks to Logie
o' Buchan, and I will give them in true Scotch
style.' Such was his opinion of himself; and,
I must own, he had a wild melody in his play-
ing that charmed his hearers, although a taught
ear might have found many faults. At wed-
ding, kirk, or banquet, Willie would have been
preferred by the guests to a more correct per-
former without his spirit.

These displays of temper took place only
when circumstances compelled us to stop at
night in the low haunts of vagrants, where I
witnessed the same scenes as in our garret—
Many of them were lazy imposters: others
were objects of charity, aged or maimed, unfit
for work; but all were improvident, for to-
morrow seldom found them possessed of any
part of what they had obtained the day before.
Meal in the country, their chief aim, they
found means to dispose of to the industrious
poor, who scorned to beg, but were pinched by
want: In the towns, they get in general money,
but all complained that the begging trade had
much fallen off since they first knew it.

One day we got scent of a wedding that was
to take place in a village a few miles from where
we were performing. This was an occasion not
to be let slip; so away we went, and arrived in
the village the day before its occurrence, and
were fortunate enough to be engaged. It was
a pay or penny wedding—a golden harvest for
Willie, as well as for the young couple—for the
object of a pay wedding is to raise a sum of
money for the bride and bride-groom. The
admission to the wedding feast was two shillings,
the dancers paying the fiddler, and anybody
who chose to come on these terms was made
welcome.

We reached the place on Thursday afternoon;
all was prepared, and a large barn fitted up
with benches and tables for the guests, a space
being cleared before the barn for the dancers.
Here, as the evening came on, Willie fid-
dled vigorously, for he was in high spirits, and
the dancers seemed never to tire. The ale and
whisky were not spared until it was growing
late; I daresay they would have danced all
night, but for the eccentricity of Willie's fid-
dle, which gradually began to emit strange
sounds—a mixture of discords, without tune or
time. Willie, however, was in general a strict-
ly a sober man.

Next morning I was up betimes; all the vil-
lage dames were in full employment, cooking
the wedding feast or preparing for it. All was
joy and gladness, and my vocal powers were in
full requisition. I sang, Fly, let us a' to the
Bridal, for there will be liting there; The Bride
came in frae the Byrs; Screw up your Pipes;
Johnny Cooper, and my other wedding songs.
I was feasted, and got pence besides. It was
far in the afternoon before my master awoke
out of a death-like sleep, sick and oppressed
with headache; but I got him breakfast, and he
began to recover. The bride was to be con-
ducted home at three o'clock; the strangers
had begun to arrive long before the hour, and I
was set to sing, Willie accompanying me. I was
singing If I had a wife was round as a Plum—
when a shout arose from the audience of 'The
bride! the bride!' I took my master's hand,
and led him forward a few paces, when we
struck up Fly, let us a' to the Bridal, for there
will be liting there, and advanced until we
reached the front of the procession. Close be-
hind us came the cart with the bride's plenish-
ing, laden high, and on the top of all was her
spinning wheel, decorated with gaudy ribbons
streaming in the breeze: the horse was also de-
corated. Next followed the bride, led by her
maidens and relatives. When the procession
reached the door of the bridegroom, his mother
broke the bridal cake over the head of the bride,
kissed and welcomed her home amidst loud huz-
zas and the firing of fowling-pieces.

The tables were soon loaded with the feast:
and the guests sat down after grace was said,
and a long one it was, for the aged elder who
spoke it, touched on many subjects. At length
the Amen came, and the clatter of spoons, kni-
ves and forks was the only sound heard for a
time. Willie and I were not overlooked. We
sat in a corner, and had of the best as soon as
the company were satisfied; and that was very
speedily, for everybody ate as if it had been for
a wager. The tables were then cleared, and
preparations for a dance commenced; while the
old people retired to another house, to enjoy
themselves over their cups.

Willie and I were perched upon a table-top,
and the dancing began with vigour: two reel
on the floor at once. It was a stirring scene;
such shouts, such whoops, such cracking of fin-
gers, such noisy beating of time, and stamping
of feet can only be heard at a harvest-home or a
penny wedding. But towards the termination
as the drink began to take effect, jealousies a-
rose, and high words, and even blows were ex-
changed; so Willie and I slipped off, and left
the tumult behind.

For more than two years I led blind Willie
and was happy and content, singing in the streets
of my native city in winter and in spring, and
wandering in the country during the summer
months; yet our gains were not great. We
never wanted, but we never had much to fall
back upon. It was in the second winter after

our return from our wanderings, poor Willie
sickened and died; and Margaret, his wife,
aged and frail, was removed to the workhouse.
Poor Willie Scott, he was always kind to me,
and I loved him and Margaret for their kind-
ness; but not as I loved Annie. He taught me
to sing for his own sake; Annie taught me for
mine. He was not religious, neither was he
profane: like thousands of others, he neither
believed nor disbelieved; his mind was a blank
as dark as his eyes, stored only with songs and
ballads, which he sang unconscious of their
beauties.

I was again alone in the world, and felt my
desperate condition more keenly than at Annie's
death. I had more knowledge of the world; yet
I knew not how to earn a morsel of bread. I
was averse to return to the gathering—indeed,
the thing was hopeless; for it could not possi-
bly do more than sustain me in life, and I had
now no home to sleep in and no means of pro-
curing clothing. The dress I had received from
the lady was greatly worn; but this was not
the worst. I had outgrown it much; it stuck
to me and hampered all my motions. My
cuffs did not reach my wrists by more than an
inch, and my trousers had long bidden my an-
cles farewell. Stockings or shoes, I had none;
a shirt I did not possess; neither did I miss it.
Such, at this period, was poor Charlie.

I lurked about the old garret, and must have
starved, had it not been for some of the inmates,
who at night gave me a small portion of their
scanty fare. Miss Jane had gone; so had
Tom; but where they were I did not know.
nor was it of much importance, for slender are
the ties that bind the poor; their sympathies
are strong when in contact; but when dis-
persed, their own necessities absorb all their
cares.

I felt this could not last long. The new in-
mates of the garret were strangers to me.
The one that occupied the Mourful Lady's
room, the best in the front, was a woman at the
farthest verge of middle life. She had two
sons about my own age, and gained a livelihood
by fortune telling; living well, in general, upon
the credulity of others. Among her visitors
were many well-dressed females; in appearance
far above the rank of the low and ignorant; she
read their tea cups, cut the cards, and interpreted
ted-their dreams. I never was present, neither
was her sons, at any of these consultations;
when a knock at her door was heard, we disap-
peared until the visitors took their departure.

When visitors were few and far between, she
used to go out with a basket containing some
articles, on pretence of selling them at the doors
of gentlemen's houses where she imposed upon
the servant girls. She was improvident and
dissipated, and, with all her gains, was often as
poor as any inmate of the garret. Her boys
were without education; they could not read
and scrupled not to pilfer. Their mother never
checked them for anything they either did or
said; she had been herself well instructed in
all the branches of female education, and was
well connected; but, having made a foolish and
ill-assorted marriage, against the wishes of her
parents and relations, had gradually sunk,
along with her husband, from stage to stage, at
each stage leaving behind them a little of any
good principle they had. After her husband's
death, she became quite debased.

There were other two aged widows, basket
women, struggling with honest pride through
the last scenes of life. The earlier period of
their life, although not wealthy, had been calm
and happy—sad reverse!—yet I never heard
them murmur at their present want; they
were sober and pious. They were my friends,
and gave me shelter, for the weather was very
severe. One fire in the evening served them
both; for they could not afford two. There
was another shared the same fire with me; I
may say he was in the garret, but not of it.—
Poor man! he had mistaken his calling. He
was about fifty years of age, tall, and thin; his
hair, scanty and grizzled, fast verging to gray;
his clothes, of an antique fashion, clean and
threadbare; he was humble and mild in address
but his figure was uncouth. His father was
a small farmer, whose ambition was to see his
son a minister, and while he lived, he had with
great difficulty contrived to get him educated
and passed; but the poor dominie had not the
least talent for oratory, and his voice was thin
and weak. What his abilities were as a scholar
I cannot say; but for years he had obtained a
scanty living by private teaching, though latter-
ly, even this had nearly failed him, and he must
have starved, save for the Ginners and suppers
he got from old acquaintances. He was not
dissipated; he was sinking fast to his grave
through heart-sickness, brought on by want and
blighted hopes.

I could not be a burden on the poor widows,
for I could aid them in nothing; I often wished
I had only five shillings, to buy a box and fur-
nish a small pack. I had heard of small begin-
nings; but where was I to get one?—how was
I to earn it? Once I mentioned my wish to
the fortunes-teller's sons; they urged me to
join with them, and go a-pilfering, and I would
soon get more than five shillings. The tempta-
tion was great; but there was something with-
in me that made me revolt at the thought of
dishonesty; it must, doubtless, have been the
result of good Annie's teaching. I went out
for a few days, and sung in the street; but all