Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

THE TWO VULTURES.

Two hungry vultures sat on a tree,
Large and fierce as fierce may be;
The one was solemn, plump, and sleek,
Black was his heart, though his look was meek;
The other a haughtier aspect bore,
And his greedy beak was red with gore.

And the haughty bird to the sleek one said,
"Brother, where is thy banquet spread?
Say, my brother, I prithee, say,
Where shall we go and dine to-day?
Is there no sustenance for thee?
Is there a lack of flesh for me?"

"Dost doubt?" said the vulture, plump and sleek,
"Fear not, there's plenty for claw and beak;
For let us travel west or east,
We're sure ere long to find a feast;
Human folly caters for thee,
And bigotry provides for me.

"Thousands and thousands of human bones,
Have I picked dry and bare as stones;
And of warm and reeking human blood,
Thou, my brother, hast drunk a flood;
And, let us seek where'er we will,
We'll find a great abundance still.

"Why should we fear that we may starve,
When men themselves our banquets carve?
Good providers, I ween, are they,
And well they feed us night and day:
Fighting and slaying up and down,
Whether they live in field or town."

Away these bloated vultures flew:—
I wonder if what they said be true?
And whether the name of the vulture sleek,
May have been INTOLERANCE, looking so meek?
And whether the other, haughtier far,
But not so cruel at heart, was War?

From Household Words.

A DAY OF RECKONING.

FOUR months elapsed, and in the midst of the dark winter days Alice's son struggled into the world. Privation had come into Robin's home before this; the photographic business did not prosper, and a stray guinea for a caricature on passing events was all that found its way into the household purse; but both Alice and her husband were marvellously cheerful under the circumstances. At last Robin determined to apply to his father for the restoration of his bachelor allowance, and, in that intent, he went early one morning to his office. Carl was there, and received him with ceremonious contempt; but when Robin opened his business, and the father seemed inclined to relent, he interposed with sneers and threats, and a stormy quarrel ensued, which resulted in the younger brother's being forbidden his father's presence.

That evening Ike and his favorite son sat longer than usual over their wine; not that either drank much, for both were abstemious men, but that each had a mind pre-occupied. Ike had been considerably disturbed by the scene at the office, and his face now wore a gray, anxious look; his hand was often lifted uneasily to his head, but Carl was so absorbed that he did not notice the gesture. At length the old man rose and walked unsteadily to the fireplace, against which he supported himself. When he spoke his utterance was indistinct and slow; evidently some strange influence was upon him.

'We might have left him that paltry three hundred, Carl: it was not much,' he said, anxiously and deprecatingly. A cold sneer curved Carl's lips, but he neither stirred nor looked up. Ike continued in the same tone: 'I think I shall tell Wormsley to let him have it—the lad seemed disheartened to-day; Alice ill, and the child to look to. Do you think Marston will have left the office?'

Carl started up. Marston was his father's confidential clerk, a man who had always stood Robin's friend. 'Wait until to-morrow, sir, and you'll think better of it,' he said shortly. Ike moved a step or two forward, stretched out his hand, tried to say something, and fell upon the floor stricken with paralysis.

About a quarter-of-an-hour afterwards, a breathless messenger arrived at Robin's door, and rang the photographer's bell. It was too late for business, but he went down from Alice's room to see what was wanted, and was told that he must go home immediately, for his father had had a fit, and was not expected to survive the night. He returned for a moment to his wife, bade her not wake for him as he might be detained, kissed her and the child, and then accompanied the servant to his father's house in all haste.

His brother Carl, Marston the clerk, a physician, and the housekeeper, were in the chamber as he entered. The old man was making a frightful effort to speak, but could not articulate a word. This continued for some time; then the stupor of insensibility seemed to shroud all his faculties. Poor Robin held one of the powerless hands, and wept as bitterly as if his father had been to him what he had been to Carl, while his brother stood quite phlegmatic and unmoved; Marston and the female servant were also deeply affected. The physician tried all the usual remedies without effect, and delivered oracular sentiments in a professional tone, Mr Barnston might rally and live for months, or it might be years; or another fit might supervene and prove fatal. For the present, nothing more could be done, but if the patient revived, he might have a few drops of a certain medicine, for which a prescription was given—a very few drops, in water—and then the man of physic departed, pretty well aware that Death was lying in wait to take possession of what he had left.

Ike being fallen into a sort of lethargy which seemed likely to continue, Robin ran home to re-assure his wife, promising to come back in a few hours. Marston lay down to rest in an adjoining room, and the housekeeper went to her bed. Carl, being left alone in his father's room, sat down by the bed-side to keep his watch; it was the first time such a vigil had fallen to him, and the deadly stillness of the house at midnight weighed on him like a nighthorse. This man never had the company of good thoughts, but often a throb of fear came to him in the silent hours. It came now. He got up and lifted the curtain from the window. There was starlight in the sky, clear and pure, and in the room a dim lamp burning under a shade. On the mantle-shelf where it stood were ranged bottles, full, half-full, and empty, and at the end the prescription brought from the chemist's that night. It was plainly labelled, and Carl's eye, dropping from the lamp, fell on it and fixed there; wandered away; returned stealthily, as if afraid of the thought it pointed, and then glanced at the gray old head under the crimson drapery of the bed. Carl shuddered, as if chilled to the bone, walked to the door of the room where Marston lay; put his hand upon the handle; drew it back; halted irresolute. A slight moaning noise called him to his father's side; he was struggling to speak again. Carl bent his ear close to his mouth, and distinguished a few disconnected words: 'Robin—wife—my will—Marston—at once;' he seemed to be in an agony of haste.

Carl stood upright for a moment, and looked at his father's working countenance: then, half filling a wine-glass with water, poured into it some of the contents of the medicine. Once he stayed his hand; then, swift as thought, poured on, and presented the draught to the old man's lips. He swallowed it all, and lay back with his son's arm under him. Carl drew it away, and went behind the curtains, and looked up at the starlit heavens with a ghastly face.

When Robin returned in an hour or two later, his brother met him at the chamber door. Their father, he said, had had a second seizure and was dead: and the two brothers went down stairs together.

Old Ike Branston's funeral was over; the shutters were opened, the blinds drawn up. Carl was by himself in the house—his own house now; and the servants in the kitchen were talking of 'master's father—old master,' whom they had buried ceremoniously that morning. True to his profession to the last, Ike's will was redolent of charity and twenty pound bequests; but the great bulk of his gains went to his darling Carl; to Robin, nothing—not a shilling. Robin, though greviously disappointed, neither reproached his father's memory, nor complained of his brother's greed. He merely remarked: 'If he had lived he would have altered his will; he was more than half-disposed to forgive me the last time I talked to him, if you had not come between us, and you know it, Carl.'

Carl did know it; and not finding it convenient to make any asseverations of his good will, the brothers parted with a very cool handshake, soon after the other people, who had paid Ike Branston the respect of following him to the grave, had dispersed.

The day got over slowly. Dinner-time came, and Carl sat down to his solitary repast, with the white-headed butler, who had served his father ever since his marriage, behind his chair, and a feline-footed man in livery to wait upon him. Not that he was a man who loved state or show, but that he did not like to be alone, was he thus attended. He dragged the ceremonial of dining over a long hour and a-half, but it was ended at last, the round table with the decanters placed by the fire, and the servants gone out. He drew a long breath so as to free his chest from some laboring weight, stirred up the fire till every lurking shadow was chased out of the room, and sat down in an easy chair by the hearth—its master.

Its master. He had coveted the place long; he had drawn plans of what he should do when he got it; how important, how respectable, how powerful he should be. These plans recurred to him now very vividly, and there was no more interest or beauty in them than in the handful of white ashes scattered under the grate. He shifted his seat restlessly from side to side, and his face, usually so calm and self possessed, was of a cold gray pallor—an awful look he had, as the servant remarked to his fellows in the kitchen, after he had been rung up stairs twice to replenish the blazing fire.

Contrary to his usual custom Carl drank glass after glass of wine, then rose and paced the room heavily, as if the companionable sound of his own footsteps was better than the vault-like silence.

'No wonder,' said the housekeeper, 'no wonder he felt lonely and lost—his father had doted on him; nay, she did believe that, close-handed as old master was known to be, he would have coined his heart for young master.'

Suddenly he paused in the centre of the room, and his eyes settled on the great mirror which towered between the mantel and ceiling. He seemed to see in its depths the heavily-draped crimson bed in which his father died, and between it and the light stood a tall figure like himself pouring a liquid from a phial into a glass of water; a dim lurid glare was on the face of the glass in which the object wavered shadowy, and then gradually faded, until it reflected only the sweep of the window curtain behind and his own stony face.

'It is only a delusion,' he said aloud, but his limbs shook as if palsy-stricken, and his heart beat like a hammer. He rang the bell, and when the servant appeared he held him in talk some time, asking trivial questions, and giving as trivial orders, until the man wondered what had come over him, and suggested that, perhaps, he would like to see his brother, Mr Robin.

'No not him. See that this great looking-glass is taken down to-morrow, Stevens; I am going to have a picture in its place,' his master said; that is all—you can go and tell Blundell I want to speak to him.'

Blundell, the white-haired butler, came and stood some five minutes with the door open before Carl spoke, and when he did at last raise his head, he appeared to seek in his mind for what he had intended to say, and not remembering it, he dismissed the old servant, recalled him, asked for a chamber candlestick, and went up stairs to his bed-room. Blundell remarked that he never in his life did see a man so shook as Mr Carl by his father's death.

In the office during the daytime, when he was surrrounded by business, Carl Branston recovered himself; but night after night this fear of solitude returned upon him. Marston observed that while his temper grew more irritable his hardness of character relaxed, and often he manifested a total indifference to opportunities of gain which would once have enlisted all his bad and selfish energies. Carl had made the discovery that a man may be rich, respectable, important, and powerful, while he is utterly and homelessly wretched. He would have changed places with the bare-footed tramp in the streets, with his miserable debtors, with anybody. In his harrassed and dejected state he was often visited by the doctor who had attended his father, and who now recommended him either to travel a while or to have company in his own house. Carl did not like to stir from home, and could think of nobody for a companion but Mistress Margery Pilkington; so he sent for her, and she came. He had society enough now. O! it was a blissful household where Margery Pilkington ruled.

Ere long, Carl grew more afraid of his cheerful companion than he had ever been either of himself or his solitude. The glare of her eyes pursued him, watched him as steadfastly as if she were his fate patiently biding its hour: she dictated to him on all occasions, great and small, and took complete mastery of him; if he resisted, she menaced him, and there was that in her hard voice and glittering cold eye which said he had better not quarrel with her! And Carl did not quarrel with her; but, after enduring a two years' tyranny—to which old monkish discipline must have been a trifle—Mrs Margery Pilkington was one morning found dead in her bed, and he was free again.

It was after this event that the house was sold and pulled down; an institution for charitable purposes being built on its site. Carl Branston gave the money, and laid the foundation stone. Afterwards, he went abroad. It is but imperfectly known what he did there. Marston conducted the business at home on his own responsibility. From time to time rumors reached him that Carl had become a papist, and member of a severe community of monks; then, that he was living under some new medical regimen in an establishment near Paris; then, that he was gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem—that he was an attendant at a public hospital—a volunteer with the French army in Algiers—fifty things, of which the brief business letters—'do this, do that'—gave no hint whatever. So Marston believed none of them. His master loved travel, it appeared; let him have it, then; he would find all right whenever it pleased him to come home again.

A merry heart and a good temper will carry their owner blithely through the trials and difficulties of this troublesome world, when a body who lacks their pleasant buoyancy will sit down in doleful dumps and let his cares ride over him just as they will. Robin Branston and Alice his wife were always poor, struggling, and hopeful: the one cheered and upheld the other, and while their family anxieties yearly increased, their natural cheerfulness increased too. The photographic business was poorly remunerative, but Robin was a quick wit at a caricature, and when times were dull he was not superior to lithographing a music title, a circular, or a bill-head; indeed, he could turn his hand to anything in the draughtsman's way and did: with three curly-pates, each a step above the other, and six of the brightest blue eyes in the world looking to papa's hands for all manner of things, he was not—being of a sound heart and head—likely to stand idle in the market-place waiting for something to turn up. Alice was a very comfortable helpmate for him; she always looked bright and pleasant, and prettily dressed in the simplest materials, and her children were daisies for bloom and health; Robin, spite of precarious work and precarious pay, was a happy man in a very happy home. His father had been dead now seven years: his brother Carl, with whom since that event he had held no communication whatever, had been absent from England upwards of five; and his bachelor friends had been drifted hither and thither, until, beyond his fireside, Robin had no very strong interest remaining.

By this fireside, he, his wife and his children, were spending a cheerful Christmas eve. It was stormy out of doors; the wind and the rain were holding high holiday amongst the chimney tops and church steeples; and there was just that sound of hopeless drenched discomfort in the streets that made the crackling fire look the very shrine of household ease and happiness. Robin had the youngest boy on his knee, taking repose after four and twenty journeys to Banbury Cross and back; the eldest had retired to private life under the table to enjoy at peace a new picture-book; and master Frank was lying on the hearth-rug with his shoe-soles in the air, setting out a Robinson Crusoe puzzle; Alice had idle fingers for once, and softly reflective eyes, which looked as if they were seeing pictures in the fire—pictures, perhaps, of a great future for her children, and a calm autumn time for Robin and herself, after their working season was past and gone.

At last she spoke:

'So Carl has come back to England. I wish we were on good terms Robin; it is unchristian to quarrel for years.'

'So it is, Alice. What made you speak of him just now?'

I was thinking of him, poor fellow. I wish he would come home for a month or two, we should do him a world of good. He has never thoroughly got over his father's death.'

'How strange our minds should touch the same point. That was just what I was saying to myself. Listen—what is that?'

(To be continued.)

LONDON.

LONDON, with its suburbs, contains a population not far short of three millions of souls; and that portion which may be called the old and new city of London may be fairly set down at the census of two millions of human beings. This is the metropolis of England, the heart of the British empire, the principal seat of the Court: here the Parliament assembles, laws are made for territories on which the sun never sets: and between India East, India West, and our Islands and dependencies, and England, Ireland, and Scotland, the Government of this great centre of power extends its impartial rule over one hundred and sixty millions of souls. In this vast town, public libraries are established almost in every parish, galleries filled with works of the fine arts, are built at enormous expense for public inspection and for the improvement of the public taste. Printing of every description is executed in London to fabulous perfection; the Times newspaper alone, between subscribers, and readers in hotels, taverns, &c., is calculated to pass through the hands of three millions of persons every day.—The number of journals, histories, repertories, pamphlets, magazines, manuals, travels, gazettes lectures, exhibitions, are set down at thirty thousand publications per week, exclusive, of course, of the millions of the daily issue of all the metropolitan newspapers. Almost in every street there is a literary society, or a historical club, or a scientific reunion, or a self improvement meeting, or some other assemblage, having for its object, the cultivation of the English London intellect. The wealth, too, of this emporium of arts, science, literature and history, is so great, that on the mere word of honor of the Government (national credit) the Ministry can borrow tens and hundreds of millions sterling, whenever any national necessity demands the money: and although this Government owes at the present moment to its own subjects the incredible sum of nine hundred and eighty-nine millions of money, (exclusive of the expenses of the late war), still the nation, all classes are ready at a moment's notice, to lend double that amount whenever the finances of the Empire, the prestige of Great Britain, or the honor of the throne, require their assistance.—*Dr. Cahill.*

GROUND SHARKS IN AFRICA.

THE inhabitants of Bonny, worship this very sagacious and agreeable monster which they call their 'jewjew,' and seem to consider that the nearest way to heaven is through the digestive organs of a ground shark. In consequence of this devotion paid to the shark, it is considered a great crime to kill them; for they say, 'Who kill jewjew, him go dam; but who jewjew eat,