

Literature. &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

SLEEP.

BY FRANCIS P. BRODERIP.

When in the silvery moonlight,
The lengthened shadows fall,
And the silence of night is dropping
Like the gentle dew on all;

When the river's tranquil murmur
Doth lulling cadence keep,
And blossoms close their weary eyes,
He giveth all things sleep.

From the little bud of the daisy,
And the young bird in the nest,
To the humble bed of the peasant child,
All share that quiet rest.

It comes to the poor man's garret
And the captive's lonely cell,
On the sick man's tossing, feverish couch,
It lays a blessed spell.

And the holy one who sends it down,
For a healing and a balm,
Doth bless it with a mighty power,
Of peacefulness and calm.

He counts the buds that fade and drop,
And marks all those that weep;
And closes weary, aching eyes
With the holy kiss of sleep.

The truest comfort He has given
For all earth's pain and woe,
Until that glorious life beyond
Nor tears nor sleep shall know.

From Household Words.

A DAY OF RECKONING.

It was a long irregular knocking at the street door; Robin looked up at his startled wife and said:

'It can be nobody but Carl!'

It was Carl. He came groping in, dazzled by the change from the darkness in the streets, to the glowing brilliance of the parlor. Robin grasped him heartily by the hand and bade him welcome. Carl stood for a minute looking from one figure to the other with a bewildered air, moving his hand uneasily over his face, as if to clear away some mist. His appearance was dejected in the extreme; his clothing was drenched, his heavy cloak literally clinging to him with the wet, and his hair lay 'dabbled in gray streaks upon his forehead. His face was white and worn, as if he had risen from the bed of tedious and painful disease; his voice, when he spoke in answer to his brother's greeting, came up out of his chest, hollow and uncertain, like the voice of a man who has kept long and enforced silence. Alice made him sit down in her own chair.

'You have come off a journey, Carl, and are quite worn out: you must not try to talk yet,' said she. He looked into her face for a few seconds, and then asked:

'Why have you put your hair away from your face? You do not look like yourself; the long curls were prettier—the curls were prettier, Robin, were they not? Yes, a great deal prettier.' And folding his hands one over the other, he went on repeating 'Yes prettier, a great deal prettier, like one in a dream.'

Robin seemed not to observe his odd manner, and after a little while Carl, in watching Alice as she moved about the tea-table, recovered himself somewhat.

'I have come home for good, Robin, now,' he said more collectedly: 'I have bought a place in Yorkshire, and am going to settle down there and lead the life of a country gentleman—a country gentleman!' and he laughed.

'That will be very nice, Carl; you must be sick of wandering by this time, are you not?' asked Alice.

'Sick of my life—sick of everything! You must come—all of you—and keep me company; the more the merrier. Those are your boys, Robin?' The three children had dropped their several employments on the entrance of their stranger uncle, and now stood at a respectful distance watching him with intense curiosity. At his mention of them Frank drew a step or two nearer, tightly grasping the key of his puzzle, the pieces of which were strewn on the hearth rug.

'Have you been in a desert island, Uncle Carl?' he asked sturdily.

'Yes, I have lived in one all my life.'

'Who do you think Frank is like in the face, Carl?' said his mother, to stop the boy's questions, which he was evidently going to propound with great earnestness. Carl looked at him a few seconds, then averted his eyes to the fire, and said he could not tell.

'We all think him very like his grandfather,—don't you see the resemblance? Look again,' persisted Alice, laying her hand affectionately on the boy's head, and raising the hair from his forehead, which was of noble expanse. Carl glanced up peevishly; 'I see no likeness at all unless it be to you,' he replied, and turned his head.

'Uncle Carl, were there any savage beasts in the island you have come from?' demanded Frank, going up to his chair.

'Savage beasts in plenty—there are nothing else, in fact, where I live.'

'And were you alone uncle?'

'No.'

This monosyllable was ejaculated in so fierce a tone, that the lad was glad to draw back to his mother, and contemplate his eccentric relative at a distance. After a pause of several minutes Robin asked his brother from what place he had travelled last. 'From Rome,' was the reply; 'it is a fine city, but dead—dead and dug up again.'

The way in which Carl Branton enunciated his words was of the strangest. If you could imagine a mechanical imitation of the human voice you would have it; each sentence came out sharply, distinctly, but disconnectedly, as if the speaker were groping in the dark for ideas and memories which he could not seize, or which, having seized he could not fit with words enough. Robin's nature was not to remember wrongs, or he might have taken a cold satisfaction in the view of his brother's misery; instead he regarded him with deepest commiseration, and Alice, who had never loved him, could scarcely refrain from tears. Carl said 'Your heart was always soft, Alice; but do not waste any sympathy on me. You only see a man who has not slept in a bed for the last week. Give me some tea, and I'll go back to my inn.'

'Certainly, Carl, you will not leave us to-night, and Christmas time, too?' cried Robin: 'think you have come home—you are welcome, heartily welcome, and it is not fit you should stir from the fire again. Alice has a room for you.'

'Well, so be it,' replied Carl; 'I will be your guest for to-night, and to-morrow you must be mine.'

Frank had gradually crept back to a position in front of his uncle, and stood gazing steadfastly into his countenance with a solemn earnestness and childish curiosity. 'Uncle Carl,' he began deliberately, 'you have lived on a desert island;—have you seen any ghosts also?'

Alice laughed, and drew him away, calling him foolish boy, and bidding him not to tease his uncle, who was tired.

'Seen ghosts! what does the lad mean?—ghosts, what are ghosts?' said Carl passionately, and with lividly blanched lips. 'Ghosts! who says anything about ghosts? I know nothing. Why should I see ghosts? Go away, go away!'

Frank hid himself behind his mother, but it was not him that Carl's clenched fist menaced: it was some shadow-form in the air at which he glared, and which he bade begone. This fit of agitation lasted two or three minutes, and then he sank collapsed and groaning in his chair, with his face buried in his breast. Alice hurried the children out of the room and sent them to their beds. When she returned, Carl was telling his brother how ill he had been at Rome, and that he had not recovered his tone yet. 'You see, Robin, I have led a hard life; O, my God, what a miserable life!'

'Our father's death, occurring so suddenly, was a dreadful shock to you, Carl!' said Alice, gently. There was no answer. Carl sat staring into the fire for several minutes; at last he said, very suddenly:

'Go you away, Alice; I have something to tell Robin—go away.' As the door closed after her, Carl leaned forward towards his brother, and said in a hoarse whisper, 'Robin, I murdered my father!—and—and Margery Pilkington! Robin started back and stared at him; their eyes met.

'Yes—I poisoned them both, and they—died—died, and I am— How wild you look, brother! what ails you?'

'Have done with these foolish tales, will you?' cried Robin fiercely; 'you have command enough to keep in lies, have you not?'

'I put three times the quantity in the glass, and he took it out of my hand;—if I had waited three hours I should have saved my soul—the doctor said he could not have lived longer, but the devil was there tempting me—Margery Pilkington found my secret out the first evening she lived with me, and the persecution I underwent from that woman was awful—and one night she threatened me and she died. Well, what of that? They said she had disease of the heart—'

'Carl, are these fables conjured out of a sick brain?—they are, surely!' said Robin in an awful tone.

'Devil's truth, every one of them!' returned Carl, with an insane glee: 'devil's truth, I tell you. If you don't believe me, ask Margery Pilkington—there she sits in your wife's place. You won't tell Alice—swear! he sprang up and laid his hand on his brother's shoulder. Robin thrust him back into his chair, and held him with a grasp of iron.

'You are stark mad, Carl! and do not know what you say.'

'I do know what I say. Let me be!' he shook himself roughly, but Robin did not move his hand, for there was a dangerous glitter in Carl's eyes as if he longed to spring on and throttle him. At this instant a second knock

was heard at the street door, which caused Carl to cower down pale and trembling, as if he would hide himself. Some one ascended the stairs, Alice opened the door, and a large foreign looking man entered.

'Mr Carl is here?' he observed; then whispered to Robin that he had a word for his private ear. 'You will stay here a minute, Mr Carl,' he added, lifting a forefinger in a menacing way; 'Madame will keep you company till we return.' They passed into the adjoining room.

'Mr Carl escaped us yesterday, sir. You will have discovered that he is mad?' said the stranger; 'you will allow us to remove him?'

Robin looked disconcerted. 'Mad! yes, I suppose he is—indeed, of course he is. There can be no doubt of it—' he replied, hesitatingly.

'O, he cannot be with any one an hour without betraying it unmistakably. It is possible that he may have told you his fancies?'

'Yes,' said Robin, and paused. The man was watching his countenance closely.

'Absurd self-accusations, eh?' questioned the man, who, spite of his foreign air, spoke English with the native accent. 'Hee, he has startled you, sir; you were inclined to believe that he really did murder his venerable father and that woman? It is his mania. I have heard him confess all the imaginary circumstances with a wonderful air of reality; but just in the same way I have heard him confess to other deeds, to killing you, for instance, and a girl called Alice, and a variety of thefts, in the most circumstantial manner. His mind—what he has left of it, at least—runs perpetually on murder.'

Robin drew a long breath. 'How is it that he is under your care?' he asked the stranger.

'Sir, I am a physician; some time since—two years—Mr Carl Branton placed himself in my hands, and I undertook to protect him against himself. His lucid intervals are few and short. Yesterday morning he was tolerably well, and, while walking in the grounds of my house, must have suddenly conceived the design of an escape; but he was easily traced.'

'It will be a satisfaction to me to have him near London,' said Robin; 'I should like to see that his unhappy condition is as much ameliorated as it can be.'

'Naturally, sir; but there would be risk of his babblings—marvellously truthful they sound sometimes—rousing scrutiny. On the whole, consider it carefully—on the whole, it would be as well that you should let me remove him abroad,' replied the doctor.

'Let us hear what he says himself,' said Robin.

'I am sure he will be of my opinion,' returned the stranger, and they went back, into the first room. Alice had brought in Carl's cloak, thoroughly dry, and he was busy putting it on.

'I am almost ready, doctor,' he exclaimed, eagerly.

'You will go with me, will you not? You feel safe?'

'Yes, much safer. Come away.' He took no notice of Alice's hand held out to him, or of the tears that she could not restrain, but hurried down the stairs holding the doctor's arm. Robin followed. At the door waited a carriage with another man in it like a keeper. Carl got in; then cried out, 'Good night, Alice, you'll come to see me; you too, Robin, and the boy's!'

'Yes, Carl, poor fellow,' replied his brother, wringing his hand.

The window of the carriage was pulled up, and it drove rapidly away down the street, through the pouring rain and howling wind. Robin returned slowly to his wife. She was crying over the fire.

'O, husband, what a Christmas guest! what a coming home!' cried she.

'Sad! Marston must have known of this,—I wonder why he never told us,' replied Robin. 'What did he say to you while I was out of the room with the doctor?'

'Nothing.'

'Let us get to bed. Poor Carl! he is not in bad hands seemingly, but I'll go and see after him in a little while. It is like a dream, is it not? Come and gone already!'

The summer following Carl Branton's visit to his brother's house in London, was one of prolonged drought; the shrubs and flowers were shrivelled and burnt up, the earth yawned in thirsty cracks all over its surface. Robin had seen Carl twice, and had been convinced by what he himself observed, as well as by the doctor's arguments, that he could not be in kinder hands and he left him where he had at first voluntarily placed himself. Having seen him, Robin was satisfied that his delusions were incurable, and by and by, happy in his own home, in his wife and his beautiful children, the remembrance of his awful visit ceased to weigh upon him.

As for Carl, when he passed out of the dusty arena of business life, his place was filled up, and he was forgotten, as much as if he was already dead. His money accumulated untouched; his fate had evolved itself step by step from the crime which his paroxysms of remorse con-

tinually betrayed. From that moment mists of vague dread confused him, then a twilight of distinct fears which made themselves ghastly shapes to his bodily eyes, and finally madness fell upon him.

It was on the seventeenth day of August that he escaped a second time from the house in which he was guarded, and on this occasion he was more successful in eluding pursuit than he had previously been. Ten days elapsed and he had not been traced. It was known that he had money; it had never been withheld from him since his confinement; for he loved much to enter into imaginary sales with his keepers, and would not be put off with anything but the gold which he had, so far as he was himself concerned, succeeded in turning into withered leaves.

On the twenty-seventh of August, then, the anniversary of his father's death, he towards nightfall entered a thick wood, a narrow bridle-path across one angle of which led towards an extensive flat of furze and ling-covered moor. The trees, closely planted, and still in their full summer foliage, excluded all but the rarest glimpses of sky. One may imagine this God-forgotten man wandering aimlessly forward in the gloomy silence, hungry and thirsty, trembling at the rustle of a leaf, hearing in his own muffled footsteps echoes of the pursuers' tread, and panting hastily on with many a backward glance along the blackening path. One may imagine him stumbling as his eyes rove from one of his phantom companions to another, cursing them under his breath, and then laughing insanely till the hushed words thrill again—imagine it but faintly.

Presently he became aware of singular glares of light through openings between the trees, and patches on the ground. What could this appearance be? Not lightning, for moon and stars were shining overhead; the effect of these sudden breaks in the shadowy darkness of the undergrowth of bushes was wild in the extreme, to Carl Branton it might have seemed like the horrid approach to the mouth of hell. Soon night was changed into hideous and lurid day; the stars paled before its glare; a low hiss, like laughter of triumphant fiends, seemed to move the air all around him, and hot, quick breaths waft against his face. He must have now lost all the faint glimmer of sense which had directed his wanderings hitherto, or what met his view on coming to the verge of the wood might have been comprehended, and its danger avoided. The furze and ling were on fire throughout an immense tract, the excessive dryness of everything causing them to burn with marvellous swiftness. To Carl it was only a continuation of his awful fancies, no more real or unreal than they. He was bewildered, mazed, lost!

Straight on he ran. No visible outlet; he turned; the fire had crept behind him, and was rushing for the wood. To the right; to the left; the flame was there before him,—no escape! He was literally hemmed in within a momentarily narrowing circle; the red tongues came leaping and dancing over the furze, leaving black smoking desolation in their track, straight towards him!

O calm summer night! what a scene was this on which you looked down! What horrible despair! What deadly fear! Went there up no prayer for that doomed and miserable man in his extremity? No cry for mercy or pardon,—no outbreak of repentance? No. That is your secret and heaven's. His hour of reckoning came to him then, and such as his account stood it must have been given in to the just Judge who, sooner or later, brings every man's sin home to him.

Carl Branton's wretched remains were found and identified not many days after.

The Doctor from whose house he had escaped, brought the news of the catastrophe to Robin and his wife. With the former and Mr Marston he had a long private conference. The disclosures and explanations then given and received, never transpired further; even Alice was not permitted to share them; but that they were of a dark and awful character she might conjecture from the fact that notwithstanding the vast accumulated fortune that Carl left behind him, her husband still continued a poor and hard-working man. Some years later, when their children's education became expensive, and money would have been of solid benefit to them, she ventured to ask how the property had been applied, and why it was diverted from them? For the first time in his life, Robin spoke briefly and sternly to her: 'Alice, if my children were barefoot, and wanting bread, not one sixpence of Carl's money should go to relieve them,' he said.

In process of time, however, fortune turned a more lightsome countenance on Robin's home, and though not likely ever to be rich, necessity ceased to press upon him. His boys grew up fine, intelligent, honest men, and made themselves a way in the world both honorable and famous: thanks to the strong, upright principles and straightforward system of conduct in which Alice and he had trained them.

The love of money is the root of all evil, was a proverb impressed on them very early in life. Though in perfect ignorance of the reason, the lads say, to this day, that their father was the only man they ever knew who had an unfeigned and undisguised abhorrence of money.