

Literature. &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Household Words.

THE MUSIC OF THE WIND.

O! many-voiced is that giant lyre
Swept by the viewless fingers of the wind,
And sounding Nature's, harmonies combined
In mood of joy, or sadness; love, or ire.

At noon, at eve, among the summer leaves
The gentle wind awakes a melody
That leniment to pain and sorrow gives,
Soothing the ear with lulling symphony.

When from the mountain-caves,
And from the ocean-waves,
A stormy choral chant is swelling,
How grand the harmonies that sweep
Across the foaming deep,
And through the swaying woods,
And flying mist, and rain-fraught clouds;
While the loud thunder tones are knelling
Around the Tempest-Spirit's lofty dwelling.

Streams o'er the mingled music, deep and shrill,
Streams o'er the sloping shoulder of the hill,
And, in the vale beyond, in silence dies;
While, from the cloud-barred western skies,
The setting sun a crimson glow
Pours on the sea-cliff's beetling brow,
And skimmers on each curling wave's white
crest,
And on dim sails of ships far in the louring
east.

The Music of the Wind is hushed around;
And, o'er yon valley where it died away,
Steal the long shadows of the fading day.
The darkening hills repeat no other sound
But the wild murmur of the flooded river,
And ocean's distant boom that ceaseth never.

From the National Magazine.

A LOW MARRIAGE.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF "JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN," ETC.

For an hour she lay on the schoolhouse floor quite rigid. We thought she would never wake again. When she did, and we, slowly made her understand that things were not as she feared, she seemed hardly able to take in the consolation.

'My bonnet, Martha, my bonnet! I must go to him.' But she could not even stand.

I sent for my father. He came, bringing with him Dr Hall, who had just left Mr Rochdale.

Our doctor was a good man, whom everybody trusted. At sight of him, Mrs Rochdale sat up and listened—we all listened; no attempt at cold or polite disguises now—to his account of the accident. It was a simple fracture, curable by a few weeks of perfect quiet and care.

'Above all, my dear madam, quiet,'—for the doctor had seen Mrs Rochdale's nervous fastening of her cloak, and her quick glance at the door. 'I would not answer for the results of even ten minutes mental agitation.'

Mrs Rochdale comprehended. A spasm, sharp and keen, crossed the unhappy mother's face. With a momentary pride she drew back.

'I assure you, Dr Hall, I had no—that is, I have already changed my intention.'

'Then she leaned back, closed her eyes and her quivering mouth—fast—fast!—folded quietly her useless hands; and seemed as if trying to commit her son, patiently and unrepining, into the care of the only Healer, He 'who woundeth, and His hands make whole.'

At last she asked suddenly, 'Who is with him?'

'His wife,' said Dr Hall, without hesitation. 'She is a good tender nurse; and he is fond of her.'

Mrs Rochdale was silent.

Shortly afterwards she went home in Dr Hall's carriage, and, by her own wish, I left her there alone.

After that, I saw her twice a day for five days—bringing regular information from my father of Mr Rochdale, and hearing the further report, never missed, which came through Dr Hall!—It was almost always favourable; yet the agony of that 'almost' seemed to stretch the mother's powers of endurance to their utmost limit; at times her face, in its stolid fixed quietness, had an expression half-insane.

Late in the afternoon of the sixth day—it was a rainy December Sunday, when scarcely any one thought of stirring out but me—I was just considering whether it was not time to go to Mrs Rochdale's, when some person, hooded and cloaked, came up the path to our door.—It was herself.

'Martha, I want you. No; I'll not come in.'

Yet she leaned a minute against the dripping veranda, pale and breathless.

'Are you afraid of taking a walk with me—a long walk? No! Then put on a shawl and come.'

Though this was all she said, and I made no attempt to question her further, still I knew as well as if she had told me where she was going. We went through miry lanes, and soaking woods, where the partridges started, whirring up, across sunk fences, and under gloomy fir-

plantations, till at last we came out opposite the manor-house. It looked just the same as in old times, save that there were no peacocks on the terrace, and the swans now never came near the house—no one fed or noticed them.

'Martha, do you see that light in my window?—O my poor boy!'

She gasped, struggled for breath, leaned on my arm a minute, and then went steadily up, and rang the hall-bell.

'I believe there is a new servant; he may not know you, Mrs Rochdale,' I said, to prepare her.

But she needed no preparation. She asked in the quietest way—as if paying an ordinary call—for 'Mrs Lemuel Rochdale.'

'Mistress is gone to lie down, ma'am.—Master was worse, and she was up all night with him. But he is better again to-day, thank the Lord!'

The man seemed really affected, as though both the master and 'mistress' were served with truer than lip-service.

'I will wait to see Mrs Lemuel,' said Mrs Rochdale, walking at once right into the library.

The man followed, asking respectfully what name he should say.

'Merely a lady.'

We waited about a quarter of an hour. Then Mrs Lemuel appeared, somewhat fluttered, looking in spite of her handsome dress a great deal shyer and more modest than the girl Nancy Hine.

'I beg pardon, ma'am, for keeping you waiting; I was with my husband. Perhaps you're a stranger, and don't know how ill he has been. I beg your pardon.'

Mrs Rochdale put back her veil, and Mrs Lemuel seemed as if, in common phrase, she could have dropped through the floor.

'I dare say you are surprised to see me here,' the eldest lady began; 'still, you will well imagine, a mother—' She broke down. It was some moments before she could command herself to say, in broken accents, 'I want to see—my son.'

'That you shall, with pleasure, Mrs Rochdale, said Nancy, earnestly. 'I thought once of sending for you; but—'

The other, made some gesture, to indicate that she was not equal to conversation, and hastily moved up stairs—Nancy following. At the chamber-door, however, Nancy interrupted her:

'Stop one minute, please. He has been so very ill; do let me tell him first just to prepare—'

'He is my son—my own son. You need not be afraid,' said Mrs Rochdale, in tones of which I know not whether bitterness or keen anguish was uppermost. She pushed by the wife, and went in.

We heard a faint cry, 'O mother, my dear mother!' and a loud sob—and that was all.

Mrs Lemuel shut the door, and sat down on the floor outside, in tears. I forgot she had been Nancy Hine, and wept with her.

It was a long time before Mrs Rochdale came out of her son's room. No one interrupted her, not even the wife. Mrs Lemuel kept restlessly moving about the house,—sometimes sitting down to talk familiarly with me, then recollecting herself and resuming her dignity. She was much improved. Her manners and her mode of speaking had become more refined.

It was evident, too, that her mind had been a good deal cultivated, and that report had not lied when it avouched sarcastically, that the squire had left off educating his dogs, and taken to educating his wife. If so, she certainly did her master credit. But Nancy Hine was always considered a 'bright' girl.

Andward she was still—large and *gauche* and awkward in that simple self-possession which needs no advantages of dress or formality of manner to confirm the obvious fact of innate 'ladyhood.' But there was nothing coarse or repulsive about her—nothing that would strike one as springing from that internal and ineradicable 'vulgarity,' which, being in the nature a much as in the bringing-up, no education or external refinement of manner can ever wholly conceal.

I have seen more than one 'lady,' of undeniable birth and rearing, who was a great deal more 'vulgar' than Mrs Lemuel Rochdale.

We were sitting by the dining-room fire.—Servants came, doing the day's mechanical service, and brought in the tray.

Mrs Lemuel began to fidget about.

'Do you think, Miss Martha she will stay and take some supper? Would she like to remain the night here? Ought I not order a room to be got ready?'

But I could not answer for any of Mrs Rochdale's movements.

In process of time she came down, looking calm and happy—O, inconceivably happy!—scarcely happier, I doubt even when, twenty-seven years ago, she had received her new-born son into her bosom—her son now born again to her in reconciliation and love. She even said, with a gentle smile to her son's wife:

'I think he wants you. Suppose you were to go up-stairs?'

Nancy fled like lightning.

'He says,' murmured Mrs Rochdale, looking at the fire, 'that she has been a good wife to him.'

'She is much improved in many ways.'

'Most likely. My son's wife could not fail of that,' returned Mrs Rochdale, with a certain air that forbade all further criticism on Nancy. She evidently was to be viewed entirely as my son's wife.'

Mrs Lemuel returned. She looked as if she had been crying. Her manner towards her mother-in-law was a mixture of gratitude and pleasure.

'My husband says, since you will not stay the night, he hopes you will take supper here, and return in the carriage.'

'Thank you: certainly.' And Mrs Rochdale sat down—unwittingly perhaps, in her own familiar chair, by the bright hearth. Several times she sighed; and that happy look never altered. It was now, wholly and for ever, passed away that sorrowful look of seeking for something never found.

I think a mother, entirely and eternally sure of her son's perfect reverence and love, need not be jealous of any other love, not even for a wife. There is, in every good man's heart, a sublime strength and purity of attachment, which he never does feel, never can feel, for any woman on earth except his mother.

Supper was served; Mrs Lemuel half-advanced to her usual place, then drew back with a deprecating glance.

But Mrs Rochdale quietly seated herself in the guest's seat at the side, leaving her son's wife to take the position of mistress and hostess at the head of the board.

Perhaps it was I only who felt a choking pang of regret and humiliation at seeing my dear, yet noble Mrs Rochdale sitting at the same table with Nancy Hine.

After that Sunday, the mother went every day to see her son. This event was the talk of the whole village: some worthy souls were glad; but I think the generality were rather shocked at the reconciliation. They 'always thought Mrs Rochdale had more spirit; wondered she could have let herself down.' 'But of course it was only on account of his illness.' She might choose to be 'on terms' with her son, but it was quite impossible she could ever take up with Nancy Hine.

In that last sentiment I agreed. But then the gossips did not know that there was a great and a daily increasing difference between Mrs Lemuel Rochdale and 'Nancy Hine.'

I have stated my creed, as it was Mrs Rochdale's, that lowness of birth does not necessarily constitute a low marriage. Also, that popular opinion was rather unjust to the baker's daughter. Doubtless she was a clever ambitious girl, anxious to raise herself, and glad enough to do so by marrying the squire. But I believe that she was a virtuous and not unscrupulous girl, and I firmly believe she loved him. Once married, she tried to raise herself so as to be worthy of her station; to keep and to deserve her husband's affection. That which would have made a woman of meaner nature insufferably proud, only made Nancy humble.—Not that she abated one jot of her self-respect—for she was a high spirited creature—but she had sense enough to perceive that the true self-respect lies, not in exacting honor which is undeserved, but in striving to attain that worth which receives honor and observance as its rightful due.

From this quality in her probably grew the undoubted fact of her great influence over her husband. Also because, to tell the truth—(I would not for worlds Mrs Rochdale should read this page)—Nancy was of a stronger nature than he. Mild tempered, lazy, and kind, it was easier to him to be ruled than to rule, provided he knew nothing about it. This was why the gentle Celandine could not retain the love which Daniel Hine's energetic daughter won and was never likely to lose.

Mrs Rochdale said to me, when for some weeks she had observed narrowly the ways of her son's household, 'I think he is not unhappy. It might have been worse.'

Thenceforward the gentry around Thorpe were shocked and really quite amazed every week of their lives. First, that poor Mr Rochdale, looking very ill, but thoroughly content, was seen driving out with his mother by his side, and his wife, in her most objectionable and tasteless bonnet, sitting opposite. Second, that the two ladies, elder and younger, were several times seen driving out together—only they two alone! Thorpe could scarcely believe this, even on the evidence of his own eyes. Thirdly, that on Christmas day, Mrs Rochdale was observed in her old place in the manor house pew; and when her son and his wife came in, she actually smiled!

After that everybody gave up the relenting mother-in-law as a lost woman!

Three months slipped away. It was the season when most of our country families were in town. When they gradually returned, the astounding truth was revealed concerning Mrs Rochdale and her son. Some were greatly scandalized, some pitied the weakness of mothers, but thought that as she was now growing old, forgiveness was excusable.

'But of course she can never expect us to visit Mrs Lemuel?'

'I am afraid not,' was the rector's wife's mild remark. 'Mrs Rochdale is unlike most ladies; she is not only a gentlewoman, but a Christian.'

Yet it was observable that the tide of feeling against the squire's 'low' wife ebbed day by day. First, some kindly stranger noticed publicly that she was extremely good-looking; to confirm which, by some lucky chance, poor Nancy grew much thinner, probably with the daily walk to and from Mrs Rochdale's residence. Wild reports flew abroad that the squire's mother, without doubt one of the most accomplished and well read women of her generation, was actually engaged in 'improving the mind' of her daughter-in-law.

That 'some strong influence was at work became evident in the daily change creeping over Mrs Lemuel. Her manners grew quieter, gentler; her voice took a softer tone; even her attire, down, or rather up to the much abused bonnets, was subdued to colors suitable for her large and showy person. One day a second stranger actually asked 'who was that distinguished looking woman?' and was coughed down. But the effect of the comment remained.

Gradually the point at issue slightly changed; and the question became:

'I wonder whether Mrs Rochdale expects us to visit Mrs Lemuel?'

But Mrs Rochdale, though of course she knew all about it,—for everybody knew everything in our village,—never vouchsafed the slightest hint one way or the other as to her expectations.

Nevertheless the difficulty increased daily, especially as the squire's mother had been long the object of universal respect and attention from her neighbours. The question, 'To visit or not to visit?' was mooted and canvassed far and wide. Mrs Rochdale's example was strong, yet the country people had their prejudices of their class, and most of them had warmly regarded poor Celandine Childe.

I have hitherto not said a word of Miss Childe. She was still abroad. But I often noticed how her eyes would brighten at sight of letters in the delicate handwriting I knew so well. The strong attachment between these two nothing had power to break.

One day she sat poring long over Celandine's letters, and many times took off her glasses,—alas! as I said, Mrs Rochdale was an old lady now,—to wipe the dew from them. At length she called in a clear voice, 'Martha!' and I found her standing by the mirror smiling.

'Martha, I am going to a wedding!'

'Indeed! whose madam?'

'Miss Childe's. She is to be married next week.'

'To whom?' I cried in unfeigned astonishment.

'Do you remember Mr Sinclair?'

I did. He was the rector of Ashen Dale.—One of the many suitors whom, years ago, popular report had given to Miss Childe.

'Was that really the case Mrs Rochdale?'

'Yes, afterwards he became and has been ever since, her truest, tenderest, most faithful friend. Now—'

Mrs Rochdale sat down, still smiling, but which I also felt a certain pang, for which I blamed myself the moment after, to think that love can never die and be buried.—Yet surely the Maker of the human heart knows it best. One thing I know, and perhaps it would account for a great deal, that the Lemuel of Celandine's love was not, never had been, the real Lemuel Rochdale. Still—

Something in my looks betrayed me; for Mrs Rochdale turning round said decisively: 'Martha, I am very glad of this marriage, deeply and entirely glad. She will be happy my poor Celandine!'

And happy she always has been I believe.

After Mrs Rochdale's return from the wedding, she one day sent for me,

'Martha' and an amused smile about her mouth reminded me of our lady of the manor in her young days.—'I am going to astonish the village. I intend giving a dinner party.—Will you write the invitations?'

They were, without exception, to the 'best families of our neighbourhood.' Literally the best—the worthiest: people, like Mrs Rochdale herself, to whom 'position' was a mere clothing, used or not used, never concealing or meant to conceal the honest form beneath, the common humanity that we all owe alike to father Adam and mother Eve. People who had no need to stifle the rank that was their birthright, the honor that was their due; whose blood was so thoughtfully 'gentle,' that it inclined them to gentle manners and gentle deeds. Of such—and there are not a few throughout our English land—of such are the true aristocracy.

All Thorpe was on the *qui vive* respecting this wonderful dinner-party, for hitherto, gossip said because she could of course have no gentleman at the head of her table—Mrs Rochdale had abstained from anything of the kind. Now, would her son really take his rightful place at the entertainment? and if so, what was to be done with his wife. Could our 'best' families, such as they esteemed Mrs Rochdale, ever un-