

Literature. &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

I OWE NO MAN A DOLLAR.

BY CHARLES P. SHIRAS.

Oh, do not envy, my own dear wife,  
The wealth of our next door neighbor,  
But bid me still be stout of heart,  
And cheerfully follow my labor.  
You must know the least of those little debts,  
That have been our lingering sorrow,  
Is paid this night! so we'll both go forth,  
With happier hearts to-morrow.  
Oh, the debtor is but a shamefaced dog,  
With the creditor's name on his collar;  
While I am a king, and you are a queen,  
For I owe no man a dollar.

Our neighbor you saw in his coach to-day,  
With his wife and flaunting daughter,  
While we sat down at our coverless board,  
To a crust and a cup of cold water.  
I saw that the tear drop stood in your eye,  
Though you tried your best to conceal it—  
I knew that the contrast reached your heart,  
And you could not help but feel it;  
But knowing how that our scanty fare,  
Has freed my neck from the collar,  
You'll join my laugh, and help me shout,  
That we owe no man a dollar.

This neighbor, whose show has dazzled your eyes,  
In fact is a wretched debtor;  
I pity him oft from my very heart,  
And I wish that his lot were better.  
Why, the man is the veriest slave alive,  
For his dashing wife and daughter,  
Will live in style, though ruin should come—  
So he goes like a lamb to the slaughter;  
But he feels it tighter every day,  
That terrible debtor's collar!  
Oh, what would he give could he say with us,  
That he owed no man a dollar.

You seem amazed, but I'll tell you more;  
Within two hours I met him  
Sneaking away with a frightened air,  
As if a fiend had beset him.  
Yet he fled from a very worthy man,  
Whom I met with the greatest pleasure—  
Whom I called by name, and forced to stop,  
Though he said he was not at leisure.  
He held my last note! so I held him fast,  
Till he freed my neck from the collar;  
Then I shook his hand and proudly said,  
"Now, I owe no man a dollar!"

Alas, now you smile, for you feel the force  
Of the truth I have been repeating;  
I know that a downright honest heart  
In that gentle breast was beating!  
To-morrow I'll rise, with giant's strength,  
To follow my daily labor!  
But ere we sleep, let us humbly pray  
For our wretched next door neighbor;  
And we'll pray for the time when all shall be free  
From the weight of the debtor's collar—  
When the poorest will lift up his voice and cry,  
"Now I owe no man a dollar!"

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HESTER BENFIELD.

STRETCHED upon the pebbly beach which fringes one of our southern counties, a man, whose appearance indicated that he belonged to what are termed the "higher classes", watched, or rather seemed to watch, on a lovely afternoon in August, the progress of the incoming tide, of which the waves, as they followed one upon another with a pleasing sound, approached him more nearly at every rush. He did indeed seem to watch, for the abstract look told plainly the spirit was far away, and had no part in the strange intentness with which he leaned forward and endeavoured, by using his stick, to draw towards him a portion of pink seaweed, each time as the rippling water washed it almost to his feet, and as quickly bore it back, until, at length, as a wave cast it within his reach, he with earnest vehemence beat the mass to pieces, and scattered here and there the clinging transparent leaves, which a moment before, had floated so lightly before him.

George Maldon Asleigh was one of Fortune's favourites: heir to a title, and possessed of means sufficient to procure for him everything that wealth could purchase, it had been rare for him to find a wish ungratified. Sufficiently good looking, and gifted with talents above the average, he had been courted until life seemed one long sunshine. Naturally of an easy temper, he could be capable of acts of kindness and generosity in cases where his own interests or whims were not in question; but, like a spoiled child—as the crushed seaweed illustrated—his best energies were too frequently exerted in the pursuit of objects which, when attained, were cast aside as valueless, and speedily forgotten. And still, inconsistent as it may seem, if ever a pure and true affection warmed the heart of man since the days of our great forefather, it had burned within his bosom for one who, believing him to be in all things fickle, had refused to listen to his prayers; yet he, the envied Asleigh, would for her sake have gladly sacrificed wealth and title—would have served cheer-

fully to win her, like another Jacob for his Rachel; but, denied the treasure of the love he sought, he looked upon all the gifts showered on him by a bountiful Providence as worthless now.

His humour alternated from despair to angry defiance; at one moment the desire to end a life now so aimless was uppermost, at another the wish for retaliation took its place. He would marry, and wound her thus—yes, marry at once the person he thought she would like least; that would pierce her woman's heart. A victim to such feelings, and shunning society, he had sought refuge in a distant village on the southern coast of England, where we first find him.

The sea-weed completely demolished and scattered to the winds, he took his way dreamily across the common, until a cry for help in a woman's voice aroused him, and turning hastily, he perceived at a short distance a girl running wildly along, followed by a sailor, whose unsteady movements told plainly how the morning had been spent.

"Protect me, sir, for Heaven's sake!" she screamed, and tottering forward, fell fainting on the ground, while a blow from Asleigh at the same moment arrested her pursuer's progress.

Asleigh looked round for assistance, but no one was to be seen, and to leave the fainting girl there it was impossible. Her drunken persecutor after giving utterance to some ineffectual abuse, and making several ineffectual attempts to rise, lay where he had fallen, and seemed to be already settling himself to sleep. Nothing could be done but to endeavour to restore animation as best he might; and Asleigh, after loosening her bonnet and shawl, ran to the beach, and dipping his handkerchief in the sea water, returned to place it on her pale forehead; and as he chafed her cold hands, fastidious as he was, their whiteness and symmetry struck him, notwithstanding that one first finger bore marks of the needle. But when returning consciousness brought back the colour to her cheek, he was astonished at the beauty of the young creature so unexpectedly thrust upon his notice.

With the instinctive feeling of a gentleman, he endeavoured to lessen his companion's confusion, as he conducted her across the common, until perceiving her to grow uneasy as they approached the village, he gently took leave of her and turned towards the house which for the time he called his home.

He occupied himself that evening in speculating upon what his new acquaintance would turn out to be, where she lived &c. She was, certainly very lovely, and her language not ill chosen; but she could scarcely be in the rank of a lady; her printed gown and common shawl belonged to a different class; and yet the delicate soft hands bore testimony to no rough work; she must, he thought, have occupied a higher station in life than her plain dress indicated; what could she be?

Reader, Hester Benfield—for such was her name—was a sewing-girl, and an orphan; her father had died during her early youth, and she had recently lost her mother, to whom she owed the teaching and high principle which had hitherto caused her to be as much respected for her blameless life, as admired for her beauty; she had but a short time previously come to the village of W—, for the purpose of learning millinery, her desire being first to obtain initiation into the mysteries of bonnet-making, and then proceed to London, that city of fabled golden pavements, where alone, she believed fortunes were to be made.

Asleigh quickly discovered Hester's calling and place of business, and frequently waylaid her in the evening, on her return to her solitary lodging. At first, curiosity and mere idleness induced him to seek her, then, piqued by the coldness of her manner and resolute endeavors to avoid him, he became more earnest; lastly, information which reached him from the metropolis renewed the idea that his marriage, and such a marriage, would of all things most deeply wound the woman who had rejected him; and thus it ended, that on one October evening, when, as usual, he had been waiting for Hester, and at length in the darkening caught sight of her light figure hurrying across the common, he joined her, and ere long had declared himself her suitor, eliciting in return from her quivering lips the assurance that she loved him.

She knew nothing of her lover's real rank, and it pleased him to think how great would be her surprise when some day she should find herself a countess-elect. There was much, however, to do in the mean time. George Asleigh's wife must be educated as well as beautiful, and this he resolved to undertake himself. She was not wanting in talent and delicacy of taste, and a year devoted to study would work wonders; then would come his hour of triumph. So thought the newly affianced husband, as he parted from the trembling girl destined by an evil fortune to be his wife.

And they were married; not in the village the place of their first meeting; he did not wish it should be so, and none of the friends she had made at W—, knew of the step she was about to take. Their marriage was celebrated in a distant town, and Asleigh conveyed his bride thence to a pretty residence he had

chosen, where, both being unknown, he intended they should remain until such time as it might please him to re-appear in the world with the lovely companion he had chosen.

Hester had been a wife a little more than a fortnight, when one morning Asleigh entered the room suddenly, to tell her that business of a pressing nature required his immediate presence in London, and that he must leave her for a few days.

"I have marked your studies, Hester: we shall finish the tempest together, dearest, when I return, be sure to write out your portion of Milton daily; God bless you; good-by!"—and he was gone.

The cause of her husband's hurried departure, which Hester guessed not, was this: a paragraph in the morning papers had met her eye, announcing the dangerous illness of the Earl of Redland, at his house in town.

Lord Redland was Asleigh's uncle and guardian. George had been almost as a son to the old man, and fondly had they both hoped he would in very truth become so. But such was not to be; had she not driven him from her? And now a barrier was placed between them, which Asleigh smiled bitterly as he thought upon—poor Hester!

He reached town to find his uncle in the extremity of illness, and his cousin more interesting in her grief than he had ever thought her in her brightest days. There was a timidity in her manner towards himself which touched him more than any other reception could have done. At one time he had believed she loved him; could it be possible he had mistaken her, when lately she had refused to allow it was so? The doubt almost distracted him, and his agony was complete, as his uncle, ignorant of what had passed between them, joined their hands, and blessed his children.—Then he would have fled, but the old man clung to the society of his nephew, declaring he felt always better when George was by, and in truth he seemed so. With an affectionate garrulity he would speak of the union of his children when he should be well again. "Helen," he said, "required a protector;" and though Helen would blush deeply, she did not dissent.

It was at night, when in solitude the voice of conscience spoke loudest, that George suffered most. During the day he could scarcely be said to struggle against the fascination of his cousin's society and it was no slight ordeal; for Helen, although she had her faults, was very lovable; her chief failing being pride—that old family pride, which had been almost inculcated as a virtue. Her mind, highly stored, rendered her a fitting companion for a man of intellect; her refinement admitted of no question; and wherever the Lady Helen appeared, all others fell for the time into the shade. Her very pride seemed to add to her perfections, and gave her that highborn look of dignity which is never to be acquired.

George's thoughts would revert to his bride far away, illiterate though most lovely; and it must be written—the toy was becoming unsightly to the mind's eye, and at length grew hateful. He had intended writing to his wife; by the close of the fourth day he felt he could not address her. With bitter regret, half in remorse, half in anger, he recalled the acts of the past three months; now he would curse his own folly, now his innocent victim, the obstacle he had with his own hand appeared to prevent the accomplishment of his dearest wishes.

And poor Hester! still studying that dry history till your blue eyes lose their lustre—still copying, with anxious care, from the sublime writings of Milton—lines which your un-instructed mind cannot yet follow—all to please the husband who never loved you, and to whom you are each hour growing more repugnant. She does not wonder at not hearing from him, for he said he should not write; but every day, as the evening mail arrives, finds her, dressed in her choicest, watching for him who comes not.

"George, my dear cousin George, I have wished to ask your forgiveness, oh, so often; you must have seen my desire to do so; and drawing herself up, 'you know my pride, it was long ere I could do it; but my beloved father's illness, that perhaps softened me, and your kindness to him, George—am I forgiven?' and Helen held out to him her matchless hand.

Suppressing a groan of agony, and to hide the deathlike pallor of his working face, he turned away, and then, without a word, drew her to him, and clasped her in his arms, while one deep sob burst from his overcharged heart.

"Dear George, I now know how truly you love me. When you spoke hurriedly that day, you remember, I had heard something which caused me pain, and I was hurt and angry. You don't know how I repented afterwards having wounded you. Do not now ask me to tell you what it was I heard. You shall some day know all: I shall never conceal anything from you, George, then."

"God bless you—may God bless you," was all his reply.

They were together in the large drawing-room, but at this moment a summons from her father called Helen away, and the door closed on Asleigh, than whom the world scarcely then contained a more miserable man.

Desperate was the inward struggle before honour gained the mastery: at one moment the spirit of evil whispered, "Cannot your marriage be annulled, perhaps denied, and Helen made your own?" at the next, happily for him, a better impulse succeeded. Should the name which for generations had remained unspotted be sullied by him? "And yet," he murmured, "oh, Helen, Helen, why did you drive me to do that which I have done? Wretched, hateful woman that I have made my wife, why did I ever meet you?"

Helen watched for Asleigh all that evening, but he did not appear. It had rather surprised her to find him gone, when, on her return from her father, she re-entered the drawing-room. How great became her astonishment during the following day, when a letter from her cousin was placed in her hand, the contents of which were as follows:

"Helen, my dearest cousin, we may never meet again on this earth. An insurmountable barrier stands in the way of our union. I dare not meet you again, nor can I further explain my conduct, which I know must appear incomprehensible and fickle. Forgive me, I beseech you, and believe only that, whatever I may seem, I love, and shall ever love you better than life—better than all, save my honor. I shall have quitted England ere you receive this, it may be to return no more. Forgive me. Farewell. G. M. A."

How the proud Lady Helen suffered in secret, no mortal was permitted to know. Not another eye but her own saw George's letter, and while the old man mourned over the quarrel which he supposed had deprived him of his nephew's society for a season, he little suspected the truth, but imagined that, like other lovers' quarrels which had preceded it, it would blow over, and his children, when reconciled, be better friends than ever.

In the meantime Hester watched on, but her husband came not; days grew into weeks, weeks into months, and still he was absent.—No word reached her to tell of his well-being or probable return: terrible fears for his safety assailed her, vexatious called upon her purse, which she could not meet, came in daily; her servants grew insolent; and when she told the tradespeople her husband's absence caused delay in the payment of their bills, they answered by smiles which cut her to the quick. Gradually, to liquidate as far as possible what was due, Hester parted with everything she possessed but a few articles of clothing; she grew pale—she was soon to become a mother—what to do, or where to turn she knew not: friendless and alone, the future was dark indeed for her.

It transpired one day in the town that Hester had disappeared. No one knew whether the poor deserted girl had bent her steps. The hard-hearted laughed, and said they had always suspected something wrong; and those more kindly disposed pitied while they blamed, adding, they feared, indeed, they feared it was the 'old tale,' so often told.

On the night before his departure from England, Asleigh wrote to his wife, and enclosed an order for money, telling her, at the same time, where to apply for a yearly allowance. He gave no reason for deserting her, but praying for her forgiveness, and applying to himself every epithet of opprobrium, bade her farewell. The letter by some accident never reached her—fortunately perhaps—for the shock might have been fatal in the delicate state of her health, while the 'hope deferred,' even though it burned but faintly within, still sustained her, in a measure, and encouraged the attempt she had resolved to make, of following her husband to London, on the chance of discovering him.

Late in the month of May, footsore and weary, Hester had arrived within a stage or two of the metropolis. She had walked the last few miles, and now, with feeble limbs and tottering steps, entered the yard of a way-side inn, and sitting down in the porch of the long low building, asked when the next mail for London would pass.

The kindly landlady was bustling out with some refreshment for the 'poor dear,' as she called Hester, when a carriage drove up; and while fresh horses were prepared, an old gentleman, looking like an invalid, alighted, and, supported on the arm of a lady who accompanied him, began to pace slowly, in the warm sunshine, in front of the door of the inn.

The lady was young, and Hester, who cast a furtive glance at her, when she could do so unperceived, thought she had never seen a face more beautiful.

On the other hand, Lady Helen—for she it was—equally struck with Hester's appearance had drawn Lord Redland's attention to her, as tired of exercising in the yard, he passed through the porch to enter the inn.

Little did these two women guess the secret sympathy which, perhaps, caused them thus to be attracted towards one another.

"Yes, my lady, she only just arrived before you and my lord; she is a pretty dear, my lady, but seems poorly enough; she is going on to London by the next mail, your ladyship."

"Thank you, landlady; she is very interesting, poor thing; I wonder if I might speak to her."