

## Literature. &amp;c.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

## THE OLD MILL.

LIVE and die; live and die;  
And all their weary years gone by,  
And the quaint old mill stands still;  
The unmixed shade, like a spotted snake,  
Lies half concealed in the bushy brake,  
And half across the rill.

The summer comes, and the winter comes,  
And the flower blooms, and the strip'd bee hums,  
And the old mill stands in the sun;  
The lichen hangs from the walls aloof,  
And the rusty nails from the ragged roof  
Drop daily one by one.

The long grass grows in the shady pool,  
Where the cattle used to come to cool,  
And the rotting wheel stands still;  
The grey owl winks in the granary loft,  
And the sly rat slinks, with a pit-pat soft,  
From the steps of the quaint old mill.

The mill-wheel clicked, and the mill-wheel  
clacked,  
And the groaning grooves once creaked and  
cracked;

And the children came and played;  
The lazy team in the days of yore  
Munched their fodder there, at the old mill  
door;  
Or browsed in its grateful shade.

But the good wife died, and the old miller  
died,

And the children all went far and wide,  
From the playground by the rill;  
Their marble ring is grass o'er-grown,  
As the mossy foot of the rough grave-stone,  
Where the old folks sleep so still.

From Household Words.

## A DAY OF RECKONING.

IKE BRANSTON was a man who respected his position and spoke of it loudly and often; a man of the obsolete school, who withstood innovation on principle, and was accounted a perfectly safe man because he had escaped the prevailing epidemic of reform. He boasted perpetually of his successes in his profession, and delighted to be styled a self-made man; but his whole career had turned on the rotten hinge of expediency. He held severe theories of morals though he was never averse to taking advantage in the way of business, if it were not likely to be found out; he put down his name on published subscription lists, because it was cheaper than private charity and the odor of its sanctity travelled further. Was any acquaintance going down in the world, and to give him a shove or a kick might be profitable, Ike Branston was not withheld from administering it by any antiquated notions of former friendship or obligation. On the other side, did he see a man struggling bravely out of difficulties—one who was sure to win—he would stretch forth a finger and help him with Pecksniffian smile; then, when he was up and rising above him, he would point to him triumphantly, and cry, 'I made him!'

Ike Branston had brought up his elder son Carl on his own principles, and the lad took to them as naturally as to his mother's milk. He was precociously shrewd, keen, and plausible—a veritable chip of the old block. The younger, Robin or Robert, was not deficient in ability, but his father and brother thought him a fool, and told him so. He did not value money for its own sake; where could be a stronger evidence of his weakness and folly? He had his friends and acquaintance in artists' studios and sculptors' ateliers; he lived happily, and not disorderly, amongst them, like a prodigal son, spending his quarter's allowance in three weeks, and then existing nobody exactly knew how. His father had assigned him his portion, and bade him go and ruin himself as fast as he liked, but never to trouble him again, or expect anything more from him. Robin shook his merry head and departed thankfully. The paternal home was dismal, the paternal society oppressive; it was like escaping out of prison to have his liberty in the world, and Robin tried its delights like a judicious epicure, who, reveling in the luxuries of to-day, has still a thought for the pleasures of to-morrow, and will not risk his powers of enjoyment by over-indulgence. His heart was, perhaps, rather womanish, his mind too delicate and refined for a man who would do vigorous battle with life; but both were richly capable of seizing its subtle aroma of happiness and tasting it in its pristine sweetness and strength. Carl met his brother occasionally, and sneered at him, gave him good advice, predicted debasement, and laid his head on his pillow nightly in the flattering assurance that he was not as that prodigal, idle, wasteful, warm-hearted, generous, unsuspecting. No; Carl knew the ways of this wicked world to the inmost tangle of the clue, or thought he did, which is much the same.

Ike Branston had a niece living in his house, the penniless child of his sister; her name was Alice Deane. She sat at his table, aired his newspapers and slippers, mended his thrifty

gloves, and made herself generally and unobtrusively useful. Ike did not notice her much, he used her as a machine; never thought whether she was pretty or ugly, stupid or clever, amiable or the reverse. She had been there 16 years, growing gradually from child to woman, unheeded. Ike never cared for her or for Robin; he never had cared for anybody but himself and Carl, and, perhaps, a little while for Carl's mother, who was, a long time since, dead. It was on Alice Deane's account chiefly that Carl rejoiced in Robin's absence. Though Ike was blind to the patent fact, the brothers had both found out that she was wonderfully fair and attractive, that her solemn gray eyes were the most beautiful eyes in the world, and that her figure was moulded like a Diana.

Robin being out of the way, Carl took every opportunity of denouncing him as a libertine and ridiculing him as a simpleton in Alice's presence, and as she never said a word in his favor, Carl thought he was progressing famously in his suit.

He got his father's permission to marry her; old Ike thought if she had not a fortune she would save one, seeing that she had no hankering after women's finery, and was content to sit reading and sewing, drawing and singing, the year round. Carl redoubled his assiduities, but whenever he had made up his mind, and got ready a speech of proposal to Alice, something in her manner indescribably icy and repellent drove him back again into himself. As far as selfish people ever do love, Carl loved Alice, and her pertinacious blindness to the fact half maddened him. He could not stir her from her impassibility one iota. Her eyes—ever pure, cool, and self-possessed, would meet his calmly; her cheek kept its uniform tint, her voice its even unembarrassed flow, no matter what he looked, spoke, or insinuated. Ike laughed at his son; he said, Robin would have wooed, won, and married the girl, while Carl stood looking at her like grapes hung too high for his reach. Carl was mortified; he was afraid his father spoke truth, and that Robin was Alice's favorite. So, in the end he spoke to her.

It was one rich July evening when she was sitting in the dismal parlor reading. Even in there came a ray or two of dusty sunshine, and when he approached her, Carl, for a moment, fancied she blushed; but he was speedily undeceived; it was only the red reflection of a ray through the crimson window-curtain, and her gown was blushing as much as she. He asked what she was reading? and, without looking up, she answered, 'The May Queen.'

'Can you leave it a minute and listen to me?'

He spoke as if he were addressing her about the household accounts which it was her province to keep. She read to the end of the page, shut up the book, and, looking him straight in the face, said, 'Well!' He stamped impatiently, walked to and fro in the room, came back and stood before her; the faintest suspicion of a smile lurked about Alice's mouth as she asked what disturbed him.

'It is you—you, Alice! Do you know how I have been worshipping you—adoring you—for months?'

'I'm surprised at you, cousin Carl; I thought you had more sense; I am not a goddess,' was the quiet reply. There was no feeling in her face.

'How I have been loving you, Alice!' and he brought down his heel with another imperative stamp.

The girl's eyes went straight from his countenance, gloomy, passionate, and eager, to his impatient foot. 'Carl,' she said, gravely, 'it is the surest sign in the world that I do not love you in return, because I never found you out. I never should have found it out if you had not told me. Perhaps it is a mistake.'

'A mistake? What on earth do you mean?'

'What I say—neither more nor less.'

'I do love you, Alice; I would give my life for you;' and Carl sank his voice to a pleading tone.

'That is a mere phrase; besides, I know you would not give a much smaller thing. There was a man came yesterday about a little sum of money that he owes to my uncle. I heard you tell him that if the debt were not paid within three days you should proceed against him; he said with tears in his eyes, that he had not the means, he pleaded his sickly wife and family of young children, and you sent him away with your first answer. You have plenty of money, Carl: if I made a point of it, would you pay that man's debt?'

'Nonsense, Alice, you don't understand business,' was the half-peevish, half-confused reply.

'Then I have made a poor use of my opportunities, for I have heard of little else all my life long; and I answer you, cousin Carl, you do not understand love as I understand it, and I have no love of my kind to give you.'

'You are thinking of Robin, that poor reckless fool! Why, Alice, he does not care for you as I do; he is a wild, extravagant, reckless scapegrace, who would make you miserable.'

'He is a better man than you, Carl. I

never shudder away from the grasp of his hand—'

'You shudder from my touch!'

'Yes; I am always conscious of your presence as I am conscious of thunder in the air before the storm bursts; when I hear you speak I think that is the tongue that would lie away Robin's good name; when you give me your hand in the morning I think how many unfortunate creatures' dooms it will sign before night, and how many it signed yesterday. When you laugh, I say, to myself, some poor soul is weeping, perhaps, for a hard deed of yours—no, cousin Carl, I do not love you: I never can love you.'

'You give me my answer plainly.'

'Yes. You said to me last night, "Whatever you are, be practical." I am practical, therefore. Now, may I go on with my story?'

He made her no reply, and she took up the book. Carl was standing with his back to the window, looking down on her pure, serene countenance. He liked her better than ever. Her reproaches did not sting him at all; they were weak and womanish, but natural, from a heart like hers; he could afford to smile at them.

'Alice,' he said, ironically, 'you are not practical—you are anything but practical. You are a poor dependent; a word from me to my father would make you homeless and destitute to-morrow.'

'It is generous in you to remind me of it, Carl—generous and kind.'

'It is true. With me you would have position, money society, if you wished. I am rich; my father is rich and old—he cannot live much longer. I would restore to Robin part of his share which his prodigality has justly forfeited—'

'Carl, if you were to talk till midnight you could not change my mind or your own nature. You are rich. Well, there are women to be bought; for myself, I would rather toil and go clad in hodden gray than be your wife—to be worshipped six months, and neglected afterwards to the end of my days.'

'You are very hard, Alice.'

'For you, Carl, hard as the nether millstone, and not hard only. Be satisfied. If I were caught by the name of your wealth, I should come to hate you—I should grow wicked. Go away, Carl; you and I have nothing in common—go.'

She was moved at last. Her gray, calm eyes had a tawny, dangerous spark in them; her heart was not marble—it was smouldering fire, rather.

Carl took heart of grace. 'She is worth winning—she may be won; only let me find out the way,' he said to himself. And, feigning a deep depression, he slowly left her, and went straight to his father.

The old man was in a sarcastic mood. 'Carl Branston plays Lothario ill,' cried he. 'Pluck up a spirit, man, or ask Robin to give thee a lesson how to woo. Robin has her ear.'

'Do you think Robin loves her, father? I told her he did not.'

'She knows better than thee, Carl, and laughed at thee for a liar.'

'She never laughed.'

The young man knawed his lips, and gave his father a darkling look. He was wondering why Alice preferred his brother, whom he despised and hated, to himself, who was handsome, cleverer, richer, and more respected. People loved Robin, but they respected Carl who had a position and money, and a hard, sensible head. Ike Branston fathomed his son's thoughts.

'Thou'rt a marvellous proper man, Carl,' said he, laughing. 'What a pity Alice don't fancy thee, or that thee don't fancy another woman! When I was thy age I was not so easily downcast. Thy mother said nay a full score of times before she said yea.'

'Alice is of a different sort. You would not tell me to try her again, if you had heard her bid me go ten minutes since.'

'I'll not keep her here to vex thee, Carl. Say the word and she shall go to Margery Pilkington to-morrow. She will be glad enough to come back, even with thee, a month or two hence.'

Carl's face cleared. 'Robin would never find her out there,' he said.

'Yes, man, he'd find her in Hades, if he loves her. But you must be beforehand with him—assiduous, flattering, mind that. Take her gifts—bless me! I'll court her for you, if you don't know how. I should like to hear her say nay to Ike Branston.'

'Let her alone, father, but send to Margery Pilkington to come and fetch her. Robin must not hear of it.' And Carl went out.

Margery Pilkington was a woman whose bones were as brass, and her blood as ice mud: a slow, stagnant woman, who never did a kind deed, or thought a good thought, but who was congealed in a statue of pharisaical and earthly selfishness. She was Ike Branston's cousin—Ike Branston's feminine counterpart, divested of his sleek beauty; he was a very handsome old man, she was plain to repulsiveness, but their minds were stamped with the same die, and their views bounded by the same limit. Margery

Pilkington lived in a square, unobtrusive-looking brick house overlooking the village green of Beckford at the farther side of which was a row of ugly cottages, her property. From her parlor window she could exercise surveillance over her tenants, both them and her servants she ruled arbitrarily; she ruled Alice Deane arbitrarily also when she got her—cousin Ike had said the girl was wilful and obstinate, and wanted bringing to reason. Margery undertook the task with unctuous satisfaction.

Did Alice want to walk by the river side, she must sit in doors, and refresh herself with darning stockings; did the north-east wind blow, she must go out for her health; had she a headache, it was affection, she must work at a solid, improving book; was she deep in some interesting study, she must relinquish it. Well indeed, did Mistress Margery Pilkington understand the art and science of thwarting every body in an aggravating considerate way, which could not be complained of, for it wore the guise of kindness. Alice contradicted her once, but she scolded and fretted for an hour without taking breath, and impressed such an awful picture of her sensitiveness on her victim's mind that she felt no inclination to transgress again. Alice saw through her feint and despised it, but submitted to captivity with a tolerable grace.

Carl Branston came down to Beckford in buoyant humor when his cousin had been there about ten days—long enough to weary of Miss Margery Pilkington's pugatorial discipline. He had made a successful speculation, and chose to augur therefrom good to his suit. Alice received him cordially; any change was better than none.

'Take me home, Carl,' whispered she, forgetting the scene before she left her uncle's house, and reverting to cousinly familiarity.

He seemed gratified. Are you softening towards me Alice?' he asked gently.

She drew up her slender shape with an air of indescribable haughtiness, and looking him in the face, said, 'so I have been sent here for a punishment, as a banishment? Very well, Carl Branston; I will stay here till doomsday rather than be your wife. Did you imagine that I did not loathe you sufficiently before, that you descend to certain persecution? And she turned from him as one would turn from some villainous creeping thing, and left him feeling a very mean and beaten scoundrel indeed. Carl had not the courage left to present the fine gauds he had brought for her; he returned to London with them in his pocket and venomous rage in his heart.

Margery Pilkington was, according to her own statement, a martyr to tic douleureux; she was afflicted with it the next day, and, after a morning of rampant ill-humor, during which it is a question whether she or Alice suffered most she retired to her chamber and shut herself up. Alice put on her hat with a sigh of relief, and sauntered away to the river-side. Beckford river was a famous trout stream; what was more natural than that when she was come to a pretty bend near the wood she should see a man fishing, and that this man should be cousin Robin? and what again more natural than that, meeting him thus accidentally, they should each exclaim how glad they were, and then wander on together through the shady glades of Beechwood, talking about all sorts of interesting which nobody need listen to unless they like?

'I heard of you yesterday,' said Robin, 'and made my way down here directly. Why have they banished thee my pretty Alice?'

Alice told him something, and he guessed the rest.

'That brother of mine is a sorry knave; I'll disown him!' cried he, with a laugh; but she knew very well that Robin would have shared his last crumb with his greatest enemy; he could not remember an injury, and, as for being jealous of Carl's attachment to Alice, he thought it just the most natural thing in the world.

Robin had a very pleasant voice, full and rich in tone, but he could sink it to the softest of whispers, and what he said next, the little birds in the tree-tops could scarcely have heard if they had listened with all their might. It was, 'Alice, love me; let me take care of thee; I've loved thee sixteen years, ever since they brought thee, a little shy lassie that could scarce crawl, and set thee down between me and Carl, and told us to be brothers to thee.'

Alice was not coquettish, but there was a mischievous sparkle in her eyes as she said: 'And you fought the next day who should love me best.'

'And I beat Carl. Answer me, Alice; will you love me?'

'I think you have earned some reward by your faithfulness, Robin,' said she with a blushing smile.

'Then promise to give it me.'

He held out his hand and she put hers into it like a tiny fair dove hiding in its nest, and as there was none but the wood creatures to behold, and the winds to whisper it, he made her soft warm lips seal the promise then and there made and recorded at once.

It was mid-afternoon when they met: it was shading into twilight when they separated at the top of Wood lane; Alice crossing the Green