

## Literature. &amp;c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

## SONG OF THE BLIND.

WHERE are ye, blessed flowers?  
A cloud on every blossom lies,  
Along the lawn the day-spring dies,  
And heaven in anger lours;  
Oh! never more to these dim eyes  
The beauty of your blossom shall rise,  
When breathing soft as Seraph sighs,  
Ye close at even hours!

Sweet odours haunt me still;  
A rapture, hidden but intense,  
And springing from a twofold sense,  
Through every pulse doth thrill,  
Where lifts the broom its golden sheaves  
I hear the rustling of the leaves,  
Till, like the spray the fountain weaves,  
Strange tears mine eyelids fill.

Where shall we meet again,  
Oh! chasteners of the spirit's eye?  
Where tears are at their fountain dry,  
And life hath no more pain;  
Where not as here ye drooping lie,  
Nor breathing wake, yet wake to die,  
Like hearts that break at memory's sigh  
To find their homage vain.

Your beauty hath not fled!  
Though light from those dull orbs hath flown,  
The sightless pilgrim not alone  
His tears like dew shall shed.  
He hears your light leaves' breezy tone,  
Whose sweets around his path have grown,  
And while ye breathe will never own  
The soul of feeling dead.

There is a heavenward shore  
Which troubled waters never leave;  
There shall your beauty bloom and wave,  
And blooming fade no more;  
There yearning love shall cease to crave,  
And in a world beyond the grave  
Shall turn from ye to Him who gave  
To worship and adore.

From Blackwood's Magazine for March.

## HESTER BENFIELD.

'My dearest Helen,' wrote General Allenby on the morning after the action, 'I trust this may reach you before you read in the newspapers any account of our last disastrous affair. Yes, my beloved wife and child, but for the care of an all-merciful Providence, I might now be lying side by side with those poor fellows who entered with me yesterday into that treacherous pass, to return no more. I owe my life to a young officer of the name of Benfield, who, seeing me unhorsed, disarmed, and on the point of being cut down, struck my assailant to the ground, and supporting me on one arm—for I am slightly wounded—fought his way with the other from the scene of bloodshed. I am now awaiting my deliverer, and I shall tell him there are two who will thank him better than I can for having so bravely risked his own young life to save mine—you, my beloved wife, and you, my Alice. I shall write again soon: at present I am not equal to greater exertion; my wound is but trifling, so have no anxiety on that score.'

Frank Benfield also wrote to his mother to tell her of his safety, and as he did so, a sigh escaped him at the thought, which would intrude itself, that she would have but lightly regretted him had he been numbered with the fallen. He was interrupted in his occupation by a message from General Allenby, requesting his attendance at his tent. When, on his return, he resumed his pen, he added to his letter that he had, on the previous day, the good fortune of saving the General's life, and that, overrating this service, which he would have equally rendered to any fellow creature in the same danger, the kind old General had appointed him to his staff, and recommended him for promotion.

His mother's reply to this letter was more affectionate than any she had ever written to him. She called him her gallant brave boy, and told him how intense had been her anxiety on his account, on the arrival of the news of the action, until his letter dispelled her fears. She added that she was under the greatest obligation to General Allenby's wife—although she desired he would not mention this—and it had given her the greatest satisfaction to hear of the assistance which Frank had been able to afford him.

Bells were ringing and cannon firing to announce successes in the East, while mourners whose hearts' best treasures had been taken from them in the struggle for these very victories, listened tearfully to sounds which to them were as the funeral knell of the dear ones they had lost for ever. Heroes, both real and unreal, were flocking home; amongst the former were daily expected, General Sir William Allenby and his aide-de-camp, Major Benfield.

'Mamma, dearest, don't you long to see Major Benfield?' said Alice Allenby.

'Don't you long rather to see your father, Alice?' returned Lady Helen.

'Oh, of course, my own precious father is

before every one else in the world. I thought you would have understood that, mamma; but if there is one person I wish to know, it is Major Benfield—only think of all we owe him.'

This, lady Helen admitted, was very true, and equally true was it that she was sincerely grateful; but she ardently wished, at the same time, that instead of being a young unmarried officer, her husband had owed his deliverance to some steady old Benedict, or to a soldier in the ranks, whose reward would have been very different to that which the General had given Frank Benfield. She was disconcerted by Alice's enthusiasm on the subject of their bounden gratitude to him. It fretted her and alarmed her pride to think that, perhaps, in Alice's devotion to her father, she might look with too kindly an eye on the young soldier to whom he owed so much; her hope was that he might not prove to be a person likely to captivate one so fastidiously reared as her daughter had been; but in this respect lady Helen was grievously disappointed. She was compelled to admit to herself, when at length they became acquainted, that she had never met with a brighter, handsomer, or more engaging being than the man to whom, in her fear of giving him too great encouragement, she had determined to accord outwardly but a scant measure of gratitude.

But, lady Helen you may say as you will. You may call Major Benfield to this side of the room, on the smallest pretext, when he is speaking to Alice on the other—you may carry her off from the ball-room just before that last dance—yet will they still fall in love, notwithstanding all your efforts to prevent it. They know it not themselves.

It was only accidentally that they discovered it at all. When Alice's little Arab, which was supposed to have finished his education at the training-school, became restive one day and threw her, then it all burst forth, and the dreadful part of it was, that Sir William Allenby saw nothing in it that was objectionable.

'Heavens, Sir William, how you try me!' cried lady Helen, ending her string of arguments against such an engagement by asking if his life had been saved by a common soldier, whether he would have thought it necessary to unite his only daughter as a mark of gratitude; to which her husband smilingly replied, by quoting the marriage of David, the shepherd-boy, with the king's daughter, in acknowledgement of a far lighter debt.

'You know I am grateful, Allenby. God knows how thankful I was for your deliverance,' she said, her eyes filling with tears; but the blood of the Maldons has never yet mingled with that of a plebeian, and I cannot bear to think of it.

'How do you know he is a plebeian, as you call it? I am sure there is nothing in Frank Benfield's appearance to indicate this: a finer-looking, more gentlemanly fellow I have never seen. And think of our little Alice; she loves him. Poor child, it is her first love, and for a question of mere pride would you wound her young heart?'

'Oh, Allenby, that will soon heal, never fear,' said lady Helen, coldly—'first love is all a dream—a mere fancy.'

'Do you say so, Helen?' asked her husband searchingly.

She coloured deeply, over face and neck, and then replied firmly, 'Yes, because I have proved it.'

Frank Benfield had a conversation with lady Helen, which more than ever hardened her against him, and made him leave London to seek his mother, resolved to learn something from her of his parentage. She had hitherto evaded all his questions on the subject, but now he has an object in view, which, in spite of her coldness, nerves him to press for the truth. She was living by the sea-side, whither she had gone for the benefit of the health of his sister Mary, whose declining state her mother alone was unable to perceive.

'Mother,' cried Frank, 'I beseech you to tell me who my father was—who you yourself were previously to your marriage with Dr. Thornton? If you retain the slightest affection for me, I entreat you to do what I ask; the happiness of my life may depend upon your answer.'

He waited for a reply, but none came. Her face worked convulsively for a moment, and then grew as calm and stony as before.

'Oh, mother, answer me!'

'I will, Frank—listen. From my lips you shall never learn what you seek to know—NEVER; and none but mine can reveal it—NONE. Nay, listen further' (and there was passion and almost madness in the glance with which she regarded him), 'if again you approach the subject, my curse, boy, my bitter curse, shall fall on you; so beware.'

'Mother,' he urged hoarsely, 'you do not know to what misery you are condemning your son. Be merciful; I implore you.'

'Are you alone the sufferer, think you? Bear your share, boy. HE had no mercy,' she concluded wildly, and then, waving her hand peremptorily, she said, 'Go.' Her agitation was alarming to witness, and he would have remained to soothe her, but again she commanded him to be gone, and sadly he obeyed.

In the garden he met his sister, and for a while his thoughts were diverted from his own griefs by the shock he received at seeing the ravages which a few weeks had made on the young creature before him.

'Oh! Frank, my dear brother, how glad I am to see you!' she exclaimed. 'Have you come down to stay with us for some time? I hope so. I have been so wishing to see you; there is something I want to ask you.'

'No, dear Mary, I can only stay for an hour; I must return to town by the next train; but tell me, dear child, about yourself, how you feel? Do you grow stronger here?'

'That is just it, Frank—just what I want to speak to you about. Come, let us sit down quietly, and then I shall be better able to tell you. You know, my dear brother, how passionately our mother loves me. I have sometimes mourned over this blind affection for one so little worthy of such devotion. Frank, I have thought it sinful. Sometimes lately I have been almost terrified at her outbursts. One night since we came here, when she thought I slept—I don't sleep much, dear Frank—I felt our mother leaning over me; presently she kissed me gently, and then murmured; 'For you, my precious, my darling, I must go on enduring;' and shortly afterwards she named some one—I could not catch distinctly who—George, coupled with some other name, and called him, almost fiercely, the ruiner of her peace. I have been longing to tell you all this, and also something else. Dear Frank, and her voice slightly shook, 'do you not see that I am dying? Do not turn away, or seek to deceive me. I feel, too surely, that I am soon to leave this earth; and it pains me that my darling mother should not perceive how nearly my end is approaching. The blow will fall so much heavier if she is unprepared to receive it. My dear father, I see, expects it; but even he does not know how quickly the last sands are running out. Do you not think I should tell her? I wish, dear brother, you could be at hand, to support me by your presence, to soothe and calm her into resignation. You must console her, you know, when I am gone; and Frank, when I am taken away, the scales will fall from her eyes, and she will do you the justice which it has often grieved me, oh! so deeply, to see withheld. You will come again soon—some very early day; for, remember, I have little time to abide here, and then I shall tell her. You will come, will you not, dearest Frank?'

It was almost a relief to Frank Benfield's pent-up feelings to hold his young sister to his heart and weep. It seemed to him, as he did so, that every being whom he loved was either to be severed from him by a cruel fate, or cut off by death. The mother of his earlier days, how changed was she! What could be that mysterious something which had arisen between them? The old friend who had taken that parent's place also gone. Of Alice he dared think no more, and Mary, his dearly-loved sister, about to sink prematurely to the grave. Long did he hold her in his arms, her pale cheek resting on his shoulder. 'I shall come, Mary dearest, the day after to-morrow. Oh, my sister!' he cried passionately, after he had snatched a last kiss, 'would that I, uncared for and an outcast, were to be taken, and that you, the light of many hearts, might still be spared to spread sunshine around.'

He left her puzzled and amazed at his last words. 'Mamma,' she suddenly inquired that evening, 'why have you never told me anything about Frank's father? I never heard you speak to Frank about him either; he died long years before you married papa.'

It was a thrust Hester little expected from such a quarter, and she gasped for breath in her vain efforts to articulate.

'Poor Frank seemed very unhappy this evening, mother dear, and said things which distressed and puzzled me when he was leaving. What could he mean by calling himself an outcast, and uncared for? Oh, mother, it grieved me to hear him say such things; I trust you were not speaking severely to him to-day, he is good.'

'Mary, my own angel, spare your wretched mother,' cried Hester, throwing herself at the feet of her child, 'every word you utter is a dagger in my heart. Do not you reproach me. Let all the world accuse me, but not you; and then, with her face hidden in the folds of her daughter's dress, the secret of so many years was told—told almost ere she knew it had passed her lips.

'My own darling mother, what have you not suffered? Oh, mamma, I must tell you now; I cannot delay, for I feel that it is coming closer even than I thought. Look at my hand; it is thin and pale? Look at my face; is it not wan? Can you believe health will ever again visit it? I told dear Frank to-day, mamma, what I am going to say to you now, instead of waiting, and begged him to come and be beside you when I broke it. I am not growing better; daily, hourly, my strength decreases. Do you not understand—do you not see, dearest mother, that I must quickly be at rest—that I shall soon fall into that blessed sleep which knows no waking? When I am gone—mother! mother!'

Hester's eyes grew distended, and the hand which clasped her child's pale fingers, grasped

them more tightly for an instant, as, with a shriek, she fell backwards on the floor in strong convulsions.

Frank Benfield stood beside a couch, on which lay extended the figure of his sister, on the evening succeeding the day last mentioned. He had been suddenly recalled in consequence of the dangerous illness of his mother, whose cries in the height of delirium, from an adjoining room, pierced his heart, though they failed to bring any expression into the marble form on which she gazed; for Mary was past all earthly emotion—she was dead.

Days passed, and still Hester raved on, watched and cared for by the husband she loved so dearly, and the son she had so wronged. At length a change came, which they hoped might be for the better—first a glimmering of reason, then a gradual recognition of those about her; but the mental shock, joined to great bodily prostration, on learning that her daughter was dead, which they had tried in vain, by every gentle fiction, to keep from her knowledge, was too great for the little strength remaining; and though her mind continued clear, it became evident to them that her days were numbered.

It was during one of those latter days that, calling Doctor Thornton and her son to her side, she with much pain and difficulty revealed to them likewise the secret which had burned in her heart so long, and accounted to Frank all the incidents with which the reader is already acquainted.

'I do not know, my son, whether your father still lives. I may be going down to the grave to find he has preceded me there; and if so, then the reparation I ardently wish to make you will be all too late. Give me my desk. See,' she said, taking a small volume of Milton from it, 'this is the only thing I have to give you to aid your search—the writing on the fly-leaf is his. He bought the book shortly after we were married, in the town in which for a few weeks he resided with me; and Frank read on the page to which she pointed, 'George Maldon Asleigh,' 10th Dec. 18—'

It was thirteen years, in September last, since I saw or heard of him. This also, Frank, I wish to give you; take it to lady Helen Allenby, and tell her the dying blessing of the woman she once succoured is hers, and she placed in his hand the card which lady Helen Maldon had given her so many years before.

'If I could but write a few words,' she said, striving to raise herself in bed: 'if he is found, they would satisfy him, if he at all doubted. Husband, dearest, help me; and while Doctor Thornton supported her in his arms, with a trembling hand she traced the following words:

'GEORGE ASLEIGH,—I am on my death bed—a few hours, and the hand which writes these lines will be motionless for evermore. If you still live, they will be given to you by our son. Do not start; what I say is true, although, when last we met, fearful that a desire to right him might weigh more with you than the wish you expressed to repair the injury done to me, I was tempted to conceal his existence. Enclosed is the certificate of his birth. The last request of his mother is that you will do him the justice which she has so wickedly withheld. That God may pardon me, and forgive you, is the earnest prayer of

HESTER.

Her peace was made with all, and in the sombre twilight, with the gentle loving heart of old restored to her, Hester was passing away. 'Hark! did you not hear a voice calling me? It is my Mary's. I see her now; she is going to bear me upwards on her bosom. Dearest husband, I may not stay—kiss me, and let me depart. Frank, my dear dutiful son, forgive me; let me clasp you once more; and in that close embrace her last sigh was breathed.

Not many weeks after the events we have narrated, Frank Benfield presented himself at General Allenby's to give his mother's message to lady Helen, and entreat her to put off his dismissal until he had had time to make inquiry respecting his father. The only clue he possessed was so slight, 'hat how to follow it had been a matter of anxious thought. He had determined to consult his kind friend the General, and as he drove to the house the thought struck him that Maldon, which was one of his father's names, had also been lady Helen's—that it was at any rate a strange coincidence, if it should lead to nothing—and Maldon was not a very common name.

Lady Helen received him coldly enough, though her glance softened when she noticed his dress of deep mourning, and learnt from him that he had been absent attending the deathbeds of his mother and sister.

'My mother, lady Helen, desired me to give you this, and to tell you—lady Helen was looking with a puzzled air at the card he had handed to her—and to tell you that the dying blessing of the woman to whom you yourself gave that card, and whom you once succoured, was yours. I see you have no recollection of the occurrence to which she alluded. When you were lady Helen Maldon, do you remember, on a journey from London about five-and-twenty years ago, observing in the porch of a way-side inn a young girl?'

'I do, I do—I remember all now. I assisted