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A LETTER.

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Select Poetry.

THE DAYS OF YOUTH.

BY H. J. B.

Oh, for the days, the joyous days,
The days when I was young;
When in mine ear Health's blessed voice
A heavenly anthem sung;
When nought of sorrow, nought of strife,
Had marr'd the pageants gay,
That swept the golden plains of life
With banners bright as day.

I loved a love then sweeter far
Than any now I see;
Her brow was like the morning star,
Her step was light and free.
But she is dead! about her bed
The wild winds careless play;
And all in vain I strive to gain
The peace that's pass'd away.

Soft are the shadows in the wood—
Sweet are its blossoms fair;
I love the fields—the dew that yields
Its freshness to the air.
But 'mid them all there is a voice
That I alone can hear;
In sorrow's tones its sighs, it moans,
Of blossoms dead and sere.

Select Story.

A TALE OF A BRIDGE.

From the French.

Buried, as it was, amid a sea of dense foliage, the little mill betrayed its presence only by the sound of churning water and falling sprays. It sounded at a little distance like a melody with a sad rhythm to it that from time to time became suddenly bright with a thousand charming graces, and then returned again to the old melancholy song.

The mill itself, with its roof of soft, red tiles, mingled its soft coloring with the tops of forest trees; and the background of poplars that shut it in behind and extended to the horison only let through the ruddy glow of the sunset.

To reach the sunset it was necessary to cross a stream which in one of its tortuous meanderings a little farther on, flung itself with such sweet music against the revolving mill wheel.

A bridge spanned it here and led up to the entrance, but a bridge whose beginning and end alone were in a serviceable condition. The middle consisted merely of a couple of movable planks which rested on the two ends, and imparted a springy motion to all who passed across them.

But only foot passengers dared to trust themselves on these perilous boards, and the wagons loaded with flour and corn were obliged to make a long detour to reach the mill.

And this little oasis so well protected, this little out-of-the-way corner, where human industry had made itself a home, was situated, as the rubicund visage of its portly owner indicated, in Bourgogne.

This brave miller possessed but one fault and that a common one, namely an immoderate affection for dollars.

He was a widower, and his daughter Martha lived with him. She was a charming creature who busied herself with the household duties and was a treasure toward which many had already directed covetous eyes.

For Martha was 18 years of age, besides which she had a lovely mass of auburn hair, eyes of exquisite tenderness, and a thousand and one other attractions. It was known by all within a radius of twenty leagues that she would be rich one day; her father had saved money for years.

But she, brave lass of Bourgogne, was as profoundly indifferent to the burning eyes that watched every Sunday in the church as she was to the passionate hand-pressure of the enchanted partners who led her away in the dances of the village fetes and festivals.

Martha really had some love in her heart. There was a delightful innocence in the way she loved her cousin Thomas, who, for his part, was not a whit more enterprising in love matters than herself.

Thomas possessed tastes that showed considerable refinement. He was fond of reading and he played the flute. He was a dreamer of mild characteristics. He loved nature too fondly ever to have robbed a bird's nest, and he cultivated sweet-smelling flowers in every possible corner of the garden.

This native aristocracy of taste had always pleased his young cousin Martha.

But le pere Bernard looked upon his nephew as hopelessly stupid, and as, in addition, the lad's parents had scrupulously neglected to bequeath to him a single sou, there was no chance that the two cousins would ever be united by the sacred bonds of matrimony.

They both knew this, but despair sits lightly in young hearts, and they continued to live resignedly in the warmth of this impossible dream. They gave to each other the thousand little joys and attentions that are allowed between relations and, like true lovers, they found infinite sweetness in the most trivial incidents. Who can tell the value of a furtive pressure of the hand in the shady grove, the touching of the fair one's hair with the yearning lips, the flower let fall from the pretty waistband and treasured ever after with trembling and heart-pangs?

Those who like may sneer at these things, but they are, nevertheless, delightful, and he who has never experienced them is a twice unhappy wretch.

As Sully-Prud'homme says: "It is the little things that bear witness to the deepest love."

Thus Martha and Thomas lived side by side, not daring to think of a future which had in store for them a common love, yet happy at least that they were not separated for the present.

One morning as Martha came in from the yard where the sweet spring air had awakened the clucking of the young chickens, le pere Bernard came to meet her with an expression on his face that was half laughing, half angry. He held in his hand three letters that the postman had just left.

"Here, read these, filette," he said to Martha, who, when she had opened all three, stood there with a look of great surprise, mingled with a little annoyance on her pretty face.

The first letter said:

"MONSIEUR BERNARD: I love Mlle. Marthe, and I have the honor to ask of you her hand. I shall come for your answer this very night at 9 o'clock."

The second ran:

"MONSIEUR THE MILLER: I adore your daughter and I burn to be her husband. To-night at 9.30 o'clock I shall have the pleasure of asking you for your consent.

And the third follows:

"The undersigned, madly in love with Mlle. Bernard, begs respectfully to inform her father of the fact. To-night at the stroke of ten he will present himself to learn whether he may be agreeable as her fiance."

The first letter was signed by Jean, the second by Martin and the third by Jacques, with the surname following; the surnames, if you please, of three of the best and wealthiest families of the neighborhood.

"That's what I call a joke in bad taste," said Martha, shrugging her shoulders and casting a reassuring glance toward poor Thomas, who was white as a sheet and trembling like a leaf.

"If it is a joke," growled Bernard, "the first of these brave fellows that comes will get a reception calculated to prevent the other two from following his example."

Talking to himself in the manner of all peasants who are absorbed with a single idea, he grasped Thomas by the hand and led him away. "You may be sure of that Thomas hein?"

Thomas would infinitely have rather remained there by the side of his cousin who seemed to him more charming now than ever.

* * * * *

And now I imagine you would not be sorry to learn the triple solution of the epistolary puzzle.

Know then that Jean Monnoreaux, Martin Bondois and Jacques Moulinot were three good friends, who, in the course of conversation one night, learned that they one and all found the daughter of the miller very much to their taste.

All three loved with honest purpose, and all three were able by kindness of fortune to aspire to the hand of the miller's daughter. The knowledge of this had allowed to grow up between the three of them a certain sense of awkwardness. They found themselves noting the smallest advance of each other, laying little plots and pitfalls in each others' way and spying upon one another in the most wretched manner.

Jacques, whose heart was of gold, felt the position of affairs very keenly and it was he who, weary with it all, brought about the reconciliation of the three friends.

"We shall end by quarrelling altogether and separating," he said to them, "and after being like brothers ever since childhood, that would be a great misfortune. Why should not each of us write to M. Bernard to let him know of our wishes? Why not each of us go, with short intervals between our calls, for his answer? All the better for him whom Mlle. Marthe chooses. Let us swear to bear him no ill will, and to be friends, as we always used to be."

Martin went to get three sheets of paper, and you now know the secret of the three letters received by the miller.

Jean was the first to face the fire. The three friends had cast lots and Jean was the fortunate one to act as leader, if not as victim. For it was evident that if the miller took the thing seriously, the first arrival would have to bear the weight of his bad humor, and the miller was well known to have a swift and heavy fist.

It was a night without a moon. The air was moist and redolent of hawthorn trees. A few stars, like flowers in the gardens of the sky, threw a fitful and uncertain light upon the sleeping earth.

Jean did not feel particularly brave. The creaking of the planks as he crossed the bridge seemed to him all the more sinister that the deep shadows of the poplars engulfed the stream beneath him in a degree of darkness that even concealed the fringe of white, dancing foam along its rocky banks.

When he had crossed the bridge he sat down for a moment on a low bowlder, overgrown with moss, to mop his forehead.

The momenis's rest seemed to inspire him with bad counsel, for suddenly a wicked and disloyal thought found its way into his mind.

"What," he thought to himself, "if I were to prevent my rivals' coming to the mill at the arranged hour? There will be more time for me to plead my own cause and the miller will imagine that it is they, not I, who played the joke on him with the letters."

But how? Nothing simpler than to remove the two planks that rested on the banks and alone made the bridge passable. In the darkness of the trees, where it was almost necessary to creep along on tip-toe, it would be impossible to see the chasm thus yawning at their feet.

Unfortunate Martin and poor Jacques, who knew the path and could find it with their eyes shut, would assuredly take the plunge like thoroughbreds.

True, there was ten feet of water at least; but then both of them knew how to swim and there could be no risk to their lives.

"Moreover," Jean reflected, "they will never dare present themselves to their loved one—to their future wife—like dripping dogs just coming out of their baths and shaking water from their coats with every movement of their bodies."

Jean persuaded himself that love excuses everything in this world, and even if it was a little mean he would put the plan into action.

He dragged the two planks onto the bank without losing a minute more—for 9 o'clock had just sounded from the village church—he approached the mill and rang the bell. His heart was beating rather rapidly, but he felt no remorse in his soul and proved that he possessed a nature well hardened against the prick of the holy needles of conscience.

"Ah, Mr. Badjoker," said the miller angrily. "Here you are at last!"

He had sent Martha into an adjoining room in case the visit should have a violent termination.

"Why do you speak to me like that, Mr. Miller?" asked Jean with the most natural manner in the world.

"I suppose you made a bet among yourselves, hein?" continued the barley miller, gruffly.

"How—a bet, M. Bernard?"

"Eh bien, with those inseparable friends of yours, Martin and Jacques."

"I don't understand what Martin and Jacques have to do with this conversation."

"What, you don't know that they are coming here, too, in a short while?"

"I cannot believe for an instant that they would play such an unkind trick upon me."

"I tell you that Martin has announced himself for 9.30 o'clock and Jacques for 10 o'clock, both of them to ask me for my daughter's hand."

"It's a shame!" cried Jean, "an unqualified piece of treachery! Because they found out that I love Mlle. Marthe, they are jealous of me. Listen, M. Bernard, if these fellows come at the hours indicated, you may believe I am their accomplice. But if they do not come, you must see that they have made fools of myself as much as of you, and that they certainly are not in love with your daughter."

"That sounds plausible," thought le pere Bernard. "Let us spend the time meanwhile in conversation."

"That was exactly what Jean wanted. He began at once to enumerate with much complaisance the various qualifications he possessed for a suitable son-in-law, and while he talked the face of his listener began to show evidence of benevolence and reassurance.

Crash! heard Jean, who had kept his ears well opened for any sound from the direction of the bridge.

A minute later the half hour sounded. Completely satisfied with Martin's fate, the rogue continued to enumerate the advantages with which kind fortune had overloaded him, until at length Father Bernard commenced to think that after all this fellow might be the son-in-law of whom he had so often dreamed for his daughter.

Crash! heard Jean a second time in the same direction.

It was Jacques landing on his head. Ten o'clock sounded almost immediately afterward, and the miller looked at his watch as if he were already convinced.

"You were right," he said, putting the watch back in his waistcoat pocket. "Neither one nor the other has come. They alone are the guilty ones, and I shall not forget them easily nor their villainous joke. Meanwhile, I have discovered that you improve marvellously upon acquaintance and, my faith I'll agree to it. It is a bargain!"

"But, Mlle, Marthe," stammered Jean, "will she approve?"

His good fortune began to trouble him.

"My daughter will do what I wish. It is agreed, I tell you, my son-in-law."

Jean was crazy with joy. When the miller had embraced him and called him his son-in-law he went out of the room backward, scarcely knowing what he was doing.

Once outside he could no longer contain himself. He began to jump for joy and to cut capers like a child.

It was while cutting these capers, skipping about that he reached the beginning of the bridge without being aware of it. In particular he had forgotten quite that he had taken away the two planks.

"Greeting to thee, sweet abode," he sang, turning with a hop, skip and a jump for the last time toward the beloved house that was so soon to be his own.

Crash! he went in his turn and remembered too late.

The water was a little cold and Jean reached home shivering. Next day he had developed a beautiful pleurisy. His illness was a severe one, for it kept him in bed two months, nursed by his excellent friends, Jacques and Martin, who had never suspected him as the author of their triple misfortune.

As soon as he was well again he ran to the mill and met le pere Bernard holding his two hands out toward him and crying for very joy.

"Mon brave ami!" he cried, "my daughter is going to be married in a week. She is to be the wife of Thomas, who has been left a splendid fortune by one of his relatives. They loved each other, these two children, what more could you wish? Will you be best man?"

"Grand merci," cried Jean, who was simply astounded at the news.

For my part I judge his discomfiture to have been thoroughly deserved. May it thus be to all who are not loyal first and selfish afterward.

Nature's Most Most Invincible Creatures.

BY DR. EUGENE MURRAY AARON.

From Scientific American.

We are apt to consider ourselves the most powerful and all-conquering members of the animal world, and next to us we range such creatures as the lion, tiger, grizzly bear, and elephant, as capable of maintaining their own against all comers in an open hand-to-hand or mouth-to-mouth fight. Yet in doing so we err greatly, simply because we consider mere bigness or muscular force, forgetting the energy and the intellectual powers that make one of nature's tiny creatures, when combined in the vast numbers in which they are always found, by far the most formidable animal force known on land. Therefore, when the question is put to us, "Which do you consider the most resistless of all animals?" it is always safe to reply that if warlike manifestations are referred to, the soldier or driver ants are far and away the most terribly invincible creatures with which we can be brought in contact.

Monsieur Coillard, a French missionary in the Barotse Valley of South Central Africa, thus writes of these terrors there: "One sees them busy in innumerable battalions, ranked and disciplined, winding along like a broad black ribbon of watered silk. Whence come they? Where are they going? Nothing can stop them nor can any object change their route. If it is an inanimate object, they turn it aside and pass on; if it is living they assail it venomously, crowding one on top of the other to the attack, while the main army passess on, business like and silent. Is the obstacle a trench or a stream of water? Then they form themselves at its edge into a compact mass. Is this a deliberating assembly? Probably, for soon the mass stirs and moves on, crosses the trench or stream, continues in its incestant and mysterious march. A multitude of these soldiers are sacrificed for the common good, and these legions, which know not what it is to be beaten, pass over the corpses of these victims to their destination."

Against these tiny enemies no man, nor band of men, no lion or tiger, nor even a herd of elephants, can do anything but hurriedly get out of the way. Among the Barotse natives a favorite form of capital punishment is to coat the victim with grease and throw him before the advancing army of soldier ants. The quickness with which the poor wretch is dispatched is marvelous when it is considered that each ant can do nothing more than merely tear out a small particle of flesh and carry it off. Yet in a surprisingly short time the writhing victim will have been changed into a skeleton of clean and polished bones that will make the trained anatomist envious.

All are familiar with the tales of how these armies of ants enter a tropical village and take entire possession of it, driving its inhabitants out in terror, and at last in a few hours or a day or two abandoning it cleaner than the arts of the most orderly housekeeper could ever make it. These are not travelers' tales. The most gifted pen must fail to give an adequate idea to the uninitiated of just how thorough and searching these creatures are in ridding a house of every bit of animal or vegetable matter in it. Perhaps, however, the narration of the following bit of personal experience may help to illustrate it. I had returned from a day's tramp in the hills, laden with trophies in the shape of tropical insects, some of them, perhaps, new to the eyes of scientists, and all of certain value, when I was called out of my house by the cry, "The driver ants, the driver ants." Hastily placing most of my collections in glass jars and tin boxes, so as to be out of the reach of the invaders, and gathering such clothes as I would need for a day or two, I made a rather undignified retreat. After I had done so I remembered that I had left some rare bees pinned in a box that was in the pocket of my collecting coat, but as the coat had been placed in a strong chest and this chest was heavily scented with naphthalin or "tar camphor," and the lid fitted down very tight, I felt that they were safe. The next morning when I went back, after a night spent in my hammock, in a tamarind tree, I found that of a bunch of bananas, consisting of a thick stem and about 100 of the fruit, there was no trace whatever, save the dangling string with which it had been hung from the ceiling; and not a vestige of bread, chocolate, coffee, and other eatable odds and ends could be found on the thoroughly cleaned shelves on which some food had been left. Even the cracks between the floor boards had been cleaned out, the particles of edible matter having been carried away or devoured and the mere dust left where it could easily be swept away.

This was not so bad, for a good cleaning never hurts a house in the tropics; but when I came to examine my chest and found that a hole quite two inches in diameter had been torn in one end through an inch board of hard wood, that the box in my coat pocket had also been pierced and every one of the pins on which my beetles had been arranged stood in place as empty and clean as when taken out of the paper, I had a better idea of the thoroughness of these tiny scavengers than ever before.

The Mother's Duty.

The mother must reflect that education, in its true sense, is not a mere mechanical task; nor does it consist in a series of admonitions and corrections, of rewards and punishments, of imprecations and directions strung together without unity of purpose or dignity of execution. The mother's great endeavor must be to build up humanity; the passions, appetites, intellectual power, mental energy, come under her attention in this work. It is for her to strip the grosser husk from passion, and to develope the germ of enthusiasm, which lies concealed within it, to purposes of good, not so much to repress the appetite, as to fix its impulses upon pure and wholesome food.

The race of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other. From the time that the mother binds the child's head till the moment that some kind assistant wipes the death damp from the brows of the dying, we cannot exist without mutual help. All, therefore, that need aid have a right to ask it of their fellow-mortals; no one who has the power can refuse it without guilt.

Covetousness is the mother of all other sins.

The Railways of the United States.

The Inter-State Commerce Commission has lately made its sixth statistical report.

The total mileage of railways in the United States on June 30, 1893, was 176,461.07, being an increase during the year of 4,897.55 miles. The corresponding increase during the previous year was 3,160.78, from which it appears that there was some revival in railway construction during the year covered by the report. The number of roads abandoned during the year was nineteen. The total length of line, including all tracks, was 230,137.27, which includes 10,051.36 miles of second track and 42,043.40 miles of yard track and sidings.

The total number of locomotives on June 30, 1893 was 34,788, being an increase of 1,652 during the year. Of these, 8,957 were passenger locomotives, 18,599 freight locomotives and 4,802 switching locomotives, the remainder being unclassified. The total number of cars owned by carriers making report was 1,119,946 cars operated directly by the carriers. This shows an increase in the number of cars directly controlled of 58,854 during the year. Of the total number of cars, 31,384 were in the passenger service and 1,047,577 in the freight service. The number of passengers carried per passenger locomotive was 66,268, and the number of passenger miles per passenger locomotive was 1,588,601. These figures show an increase in the efficiency of passenger locomotives. The number of tons of freight carried per freight locomotive was 40,062, and the number of ton miles accomplished per freight locomotive was 5,031,889. These figures show no change in the efficiency of freight locomotives as compared with previous years.

The total number of employes in the service of railways on June 30, 1893, was 873,602, being an increase of 52,187. Of this total of employes, 35,384 are assigned to the work of general administration, 256,212 to maintenance of way and structures, 175,464, to maintenance of equipment, and 397,915 to conducting transportation, the remainder, 8,627, being unclassified.

Abuse of the Stomach.

Different constitutions have peculiarities in regard to the way in which they assimilate food, and the old adage that what is one man's meat is another's poison is a very true one, says the *Popular Science Monthly*. There is no ailment more common in middle life and in old age than indigestion. This, of course, depends upon improper food taken too frequently and in undue quantity. As a rule, the victim of indigestion flies to medicines for relief, or to one of the thousand-and-one quick remedies that are advertised to cure everything. How much more rational would it be to alter the diet and to give the stomach the food for which it is craving? If the stomach could talk, I can imagine it, after pills and gin and bitters and quack remedies of every description have been poured into it, begging to be relieved of such horrors and saying, "Give me a little rest and a cup of beef tea and a biscuit, and go and take a little fresh air and exercise yourself." Instead of this, the miserable organ has to be dosed with all sorts of horrible concoctions in the way of drugs, brandies and sodas, and champagne, to endeavor to stimulate it to action. There is no doubt that the stomach that requires stimulants and potions to enable it to act efficiently can hardly be said to be in a healthy state, or can long continue to do its work properly. The digestive organs, unfortunately, are the first to sympathize with any mental worry. They are like a barometer, and indicate the errors of malnutrition and its consequences. The healthy action of every organ depends on the proper assimilation of the food taken. As soon as the digestive process fails everything fails, and ill health results, with all its disastrous concomitants.

Men of prudence and real ability rarely act on the spur of the moment, and in affairs of difficulty see in anticipation the dangers and inconveniences which a false step may involve. Outsiders mistake wise hesitation for a revelation of weakness and incapicity; but impudence, trusting to that blind goddess who directs things as often rightly as she does wrongly, rushes into action and assumes the form of decision and capacity. Impudence without ability is rarely successful, though it may perhaps be questioned whether men have not failed quite as often possessing ability without boldness. So potent however is impudence in itself that it would not be difficult to point to instances of men who have attained an ample share of worldly success by that simple quality alone.

A Little carbolic acid added to the whitewash will kill the vermin in the henhouse.

Every difficulty overcome is made a stepping stone.

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