VOL. VII.

Cambridge Chronicle.

BY G. W. CALLAHAN.

CAMBRIDGE, Md.---SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1834.

NO. 36.

WHOLE NO. 500.

TERMS:

The CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE is published every Saturday morning, at Two Dollars and Fifty Cents per annum, payable half-yearly, in advance. Subscriptions will not be taken for less than six months: No paper will be discontinued until all arrears are paid, unless at the option of the editor; and the failure to order a discontinuance previously to the expiration of the time already subscribed for, will be considered as a new engagement.

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THE GENTLE RECRUIT.

JACKSON'S NARRATIVE.

[CONTINUED.]

"Days, weeks, nay, months passed away, without the occurrence of any incident particularly deserving of notice. For a time the course of gaiety in which he had embarked, was pursued by my father with steady resolution, and visits were frequently paid to our neighbors, as they in their turn were frequently entertained at home. But by degrees his old humor began again to obtain the ascendency over him. His pride and ill-humor broke out on more than one occasion, with a violence which no equal could endure; and his neighbors, as a necessary consequence, grew cold in civilities which seemed so little valued, and were so thanklessly received. This change on their part operated only to rouse the natural implacability of his temper. A slight offered or received, sufficed to put an end at once to all farther intercourse with the offending party, no matter how gross and glaring the provocation might be. In this manner, first one, then another of our visiters fell off, till —— was left once more in the state of almost total solitude which formerly distinguished it.

"In proportion as this state of things attained its climax, my father's retired and unsocial habits resumed their ascendency over himself. His voice recovered its natural tones; he rarely spoke except in anger, or which was infinitely worse, in bitter raillery. The society of his wife appeared to possess no charms for him, and mine he rather shunned than courted. We never saw him, indeed, except at meals, for his mornings were spent constantly in the library, and he retired thither again as soon as the dinner ended; and, as to any act of kindness or attention, neither the one nor the other received such at his hands. I need not after this observe that the feeling so opposed to love, which I had struggled to subdue, again oppressed me as often as a thought of my father occurred; whilst poor Charlotte's dread of him became before long too conspicuous to be concealed.

"The consequence of all this was, that she and I were thrown continually upon one another for society, for consolation, I had almost said for support; whilst the reserve which had hitherto subsisted between us melted gradually away.

"Instead of separating for the rest of the morning, as we had been accustomed to do at the breakfast table, we found ourselves occupying the same apartment; she busied with her needle or her pencil, and I reading aloud the work of some author equally a favorite with both. Then came the time of exercise; and our walks, our rides, our drives, were felt to possess many additional attractions, now that they were taken, not separately, but together. Music, too, lent its powerful attractions. Our tastes here, as in literature, accorded; and the songs which she sang with the liveliest satisfaction to herself, were listened to by me with a feeling too deep even for tears. Need I say how all this ended? Wedded to one whom she had never loved, whose years alone had been sufficient obstacle to a union so revolting, and treated, even within a few months from her bridal day, not with indifference only, but with harshness and brutality; can it be wondered at, if she unconsciously gave to another that which was no longer hers to give? No; even though that other was the son of her husband, and, as a necessary consequence, a being from whom she was divided by a gulf never to be passed—who can blame her? She but obeyed the impulses which nature has implanted in every bosom; and obeying them without a consciousness of the results to which they lead, she was innocent. But for me—no such excuse was mine. I saw the chasm before me—plainly, clearly, saw it. I knew even from the first, that to remain near her, yet retain the mastery over myself, was impossible. Then why did I not leave her? Why did I not abandon my home forever?—a home which, till she entered it, possessed no attractions, and which, now that she was there, ought to have been regarded with horror. I cannot answer these questions. There was a spell upon me, which drove me on, with eyes open and senses wide awake, into the abyss that some power higher than my own will had prepared for me; and I followed its impulse, like a sheep led to the slaughter, without so much as making one struggle to resist it.

"In this manner the remaining portion of summer rolled on, and autumn came in, with all his variegated hues and sombre beauty. How delicious were the walks which we took at that glorious season, amidst groves dark with decaying foliage! How soothing were the moments which we spent under some tall beech, or umbrageous elm, whilst the dead leaves shaken from the branches at every breath, fell one by one at our feet! True, the thought of parting came but too frequently into our minds, for the period of my sojourn at home was drawing rapidly to a close; but the parting hour was yet by several weeks distant; and when did young hearts learn to anticipate distress? Never: at those blessed moments, (for blessed I must still regard them,) every thing was forgotten beyond the events of the passing hour. Yet let me not be misunderstood. Never had there passed between us one word, one syllable, one allusion which the angels of light would have blushed to witness. Our love, if such it must be called, was wholly unmixed with every earthly and debasing passion. She was to me an object of adoration—an idol—to be gazed upon with holy rapture, but with a rapture sanctified by the most profound respect; whilst to her, I was as the brother of her affections—the friend on whom alone she leaned for aid in her difficulties, and consolation in her griefs. Could there be aught impure in the intercourse of persons actuated by these sentiments, and these only? Why was it, then, that such moments never failed to bring in their train, hours of agony and remorse?

"The fatal period, so often thought of, and to which every allusion had been, as it were, studiously avoided, came at last. The middle of October arrived, and brought with it the necessity for my immediate abandonment of ——, and return to college. For some days previously, our intercourse, though not less constant than before, had been accompanied with a restraint perfectly novel. The truth is, we were equally desirous of hiding the sorrow of which both were equally conscious, and the effort necessary to ensure success, caused us to appear strange in each other's eyes. But the attempt, though nobly made, and for a while steadily persevered in, proved ultimately useless. Feeling, if it be really strong, will break through every restraint both of prudence and duty; and ours were far too impetuous not to sweep all such barriers before them.

"It was now the day preceding that which had been fixed for the commencement of my journey. It was Sunday, too—that day of holy rest, which, in the country, at least, never dawns without bringing a blessing along with it both upon man and beast; and Charlotte and myself, according to our invariable practice, attended divine service together. My father was not of the party; indeed, many years had elapsed since he last beheld the interior of a church, of which, and of the clergy, it was too much his custom, if he spoke at all, to speak in terms of contempt.

"Not at any moment of my life was I conscious of devotional feelings deeper or more engrossing than came over me on this occasion. I prayed, I say not fervently, but bitterly; the very tears made their way through the hands in which my face was buried; my whole soul seemed abstracted from earthly considerations, and even Charlotte was, for a time, forgotten. How she was affected, I know not; for, from the commencement of the service to its close, I never once beheld her, so entirely was my attention given up to the solemn business in which I was engaged.

"We did not return home as soon as the service concluded; but Charlotte passing her arm through mine, we sauntered on towards our favorite retreat in the beech-wood. We sat down as usual, just within the shelter of the grove, on a mound from whence a view of the whole landscape could be obtained, whilst we were ourselves concealed from observation. The day was beautifully mild and serene; there was not a cloud in the sky, nor a breath of air astir sufficiently violent to shake a withered leaf from its stem. A universal silence was around us, broken only by the full, clear and melodious notes of a thrush, which poured, from a brake hard by, a torrent of natural music. We looked abroad, too, upon a scene of no ordinary beauty—upon herds of deer quietly grazing—upon the modest church, more than half concealed in the grove that encircled it—upon hamlets, villages, and solitary cottages, reposing in the sanctity of the sabbath; but of human beings not a trace could be discerned. There was something in this perfect solitude particularly affecting to persons in our situation: we did not interrupt it by any attempt at conversation, to which we felt ourselves quite unequal, but sat in silence, whilst visions the most melancholy passed over our minds, like the shadows of clouds on a summer's day over the side of a hill.

"At last, the gradual inclination of the sun towards the west, warned us that it was time to quit the spot. We rose, as if by common consent, to obey the impulse, just as his disk reached the horizon; and we stood motionless while it sank lower and lower, till it wholly disappeared. It was then, that, for the first time, I ventured to speak: what I said I know not: I believe tt was some common-place remark, such as the circumstances of the case called forth,—as that I should be far away when next she beheld the sun set, or something to that purport; but it appeared as if the tones of my voice were alone required to break the spell which had so long bound us, and to cause the feelings of both, hitherto painfully repressed, to overflow. Charlotte burst into tears. Instinctively I threw my arm round her waist—a movement which she sought not to prevent, and then she laid her head upon my shoulder and wept bitterly. I cannot pretend to describe what I felt at that moment; I could not speak comfort to her, for my own tears choked my utterance; but I pressed her to my heart, as if it were there, and there only, that she must read the secret which my lips refused to reveal.

"We stood thus for several moments; not a sentence had been spoken by either, though both were too fully aware of the issue to which matters had been driven; when Charlotte, by a desperate effort, checked her weeping, and, raising her head from my shoulder, proposed that we should return home. I obeyed without hesitation, and, giving her my arm, we set forward in the direction of the house. We had just cleared the wood, when, happening to look back, I perceived the figure of a man passing with apparent caution to the right,—and a single glance served to convince me that it was my father. A horrible consciousness struck at once to my heart. I permitted Charlotte's arm to drop from mine, my senses all but forsook me, and it was not without difficulty that I prevented myself from falling to the ground. Alarmed at my condition, though ignorant of its cause, she shrieked aloud, and addressed to me in her agony, terms such as she ought never to have employed, nor I permitted. The words, not less than the manner of the speaker, restored to me at once my self-command. I perceived that she had not observed the spectacle which had so dreadfully shocked me; and, determined not to distress her by any intimation of the truth, I pretended that a sudden dizziness had come over me, to which I was occasionally subject. I then urged her to clear away every trace of tears from her cheeks; and once more taking her arm in mine, led her, at a quick pace, to the house.

"We parted in the hall, Charlotte going to the drawing-room, whilst I hurried off to my own apartment, to indulge in a train of thoughts more hideous than had ever yet entered into my mind. Could it be that my father entertained any suspicion of my honor, or his wife's fidelity? Could he act the part of a spy upon us, all the while that he pretended to desire our intimacy? Above all, was it possible for him to have witnessed all that passed in the beech-wood? What then? Had we been guilty of any deed, or spoken a single word, of which there was real cause to be ashamed? No! Whatever our feelings might have been, at least they were not disclosed; and the embrace,—was it more than the peculiar circumstances in which we stood authorised? Had I done aught besides what was enjoined upon me, in behaving towards Charlotte as a brother, and a friend? And was it not natural, on the eve of parting, that we should exhibit some such proofs that we looked forward to the separation with regret? All these questions I strove to answer to my own satisfaction; but there was a fiend in the back ground which continually reminded me, that the answers, though true in letter, were false in spirit. How conscience does make cowards of us! Had my own heart been able to acquit me, there would have been nothing in nature besides capable of stirring up one painful reflection; but my heart did not acquit me, and all my anticipations were, in consequence, terrible. I thought of the injury I had done, and of its probable punishment—a punishment to be poured out not upon me alone, for that I could have borne, but upon one dearer to me than life—to secure whose happiness I would have been content to sacrifice not only present peace, but eternity itself. I thought of Charlotte, not merely neglected, and occasionally chid, as was her fate now, but upbraided, insulted, disgraced, turned out upon a cold world, with a reputation blasted, and a broken heart, whilst I, the miserable cause of all this, could not offer to her so much as the last refuge of the guilty and the desperate. Maddened with the horrid picture, I threw myself with my face upon the bed, my whole frame shaking in convulsive agony, till the sweat-drops stood upon my brow like dew, and my brain burned as if it had been on fire.

"By degrees, however, hope, that inextinguishable principle in minds not utterly seared, began to exert its influence. There were no proofs before me, either that my father was really suspicious, or that, being so, he had watched our proceedings; still less had conclusive evidence appeared, that our proceedings on that day were observed. At the moment when I saw him, he was too far removed from the spot where we had sat, to overhear our conversation, had such passed between us; and the shape of the wood was, I felt confident, such as to screen our very figures from his observation. Should the case be so, then all might yet be well, and I should leave Charlotte exposed to no greater risks and miseries than were already about her. But should it not,—I would not receive that impression again. There was something within, which whispered that all could not be lost. We were not sufficiently guilty to merit utter perdition; and Heaven was too just to destroy on account of errors purely involuntary, and only of the mind. No, no; my fears had been too excessive, and I did wrong to indulge them. At all events, there was no advantage to be derived from the anticipation of evil; of the coming of which, if it were to come, I should soon receive tokens not to be misunderstood; so I determined to command myself, and to be guided in my judgment of what was likely to fall out, by the behaviour of my father when we met.

"Thus reasoning, I made haste to change my dress, and descended to the dining-room. Just as I reached the door of his apartment, my father came forth, and I found, that, however sturdy resolutions may be whilst the necessity of acting up to them is remote, they hold but an insecure ground if suddenly put to the test. My heart beat quick, and I would have passed on; but he spoke, and, agitated as I was, I retained my senses sufficiently about me to be aware that the moment of trial had arrived—I stopped. His observation was one of ordinary salutation merely. He hoped that I had had a pleasant walk—said that the sun, set beautifully, and predicted an agreeable day for my journey on the morrow; and he did so in a tone perfectly calm and natural: indeed, if any thing, with more of kindness in it than he had of late cared to show. I felt as if a mountain had been removed from my chest. I breathed again. I was like a person to whom liberty is unexpectedly restored,—like a criminal reprieved on the very scaffold. Hope for once had not deceived me; and my suspicions were proved to be groundless. With a light step and a joyous countenance, I continued my course to the dining-room; and I sat down to table a happier man than I had been during many weeks before.

"Moods of the mind, whether gay or melancholy, are surely infectious, where persons who take a real interest in each other's welfare are met together. We had not long been seated, when the dejection which at first marked Charlotte's air, gradually cleared away, and she joined cheerfully in the conversation, of which I was the prime mover and the chief supporter. My father, too, seemed to have laid aside for a while his constitutional coldness, that he might make the last evening of my sojourn an agreeable one; indeed, so affectionate was his manner towards both Charlotte and myself, that, had I not been under the influence of false excitement, that very affection would have stung me to the quick. I was, however, too happy in the discovery that my fears were without foundation, to permit any consideration of minor moment to ruffle me; and hence I acted and spoke, not like one about to quit a place endeared to him by the most tender associations, but as if the journey to be taken were one of pleasure. My father rallied me in this; Charlotte, too, threw out some hints which I could not misunderstand:—but I answered both in the same tone of levity, and then changed the subject. That the excitement might not abate, I drank wine profusely; and my father, though usually abstemious, encouraged me in so doing by imitating my example. By and by, Charlotte quitted us. There was a slight flutter of the pulse as the door closed after her,—a slight sense of apprehension, that a second trial was at hand; but nothing whatever occurring to justify the suspicion, I again became reassured; and we again plied the bottle, till I certainly, and my father, to all appearance, became considerably enlivened. But we broke up from our orgie at last, and following Charlotte to the saloon, the rest of the evening was spent in listening to Handel's exquisite music, rendered doubly sublime by being expressed in the tones of a voice to which those of the seraphim were harsh and unharmonious.

"It was drawing late, and all appeared to feel that the parting moment was come; for it was necessary for me to set out at an hour when few even of the domestics would be stirring. I did my best to appear calm; I even strove to keep up the gaiety of countenance which during the last hour or two had been worn in mockery of a heavy heart.—Charlotte likewise struggled hard to repress her grief; and she succeeded so well, that not a tear burst from the lids, beneath which a torrent lay imprisoned. My father was the first to speak. 'Good night, Charles,' said he, holding out his hand; 'there is nothing to be gained by prolonging a scene like this. Part we must; and though it be for a short time, to part is never agreeable. Go, kiss your mother—pooh—pooh—kiss Charlotte, and tell her not to break her heart, for you will return to us at Christmas.'

"I had replied to the squeeze of his hand, and was preparing to salute Charlotte, when the latter part of his speech attracted my notice. It had never been customary for me to visit home during any of the shorter vacations. These I usually spent either in Cambridge, or in town, or with some of my college friends, whose residences were not so remote as mine from the seat of learning; and the invitation to deviate now from an established practice, could not but forcibly strike me. I looked at my father suspiciously, but there was an air of absolute frankness about him which fully satisfied me that the invitation was not given invidiously. Still I hesitated how to answer him. God knows, my inclinations were not doubtful; had I acted as they pointed out, I should have at once closed with the proposition, no matter how pregnant with mischief; but there was an apprehension, suggested by conscience alone, lest my motives might be read, which caused me to appear undecided, if I really was not so.

"'You do not mean to deny us the pleasure of your company at Christmas?' asked my father; 'I am sure both Charlotte and I shall mope to death till we see you again. Try, my love, try your influence with this truant, who seems to quit his home with smiles, and looks forward to his return with tears.'

"Charlotte spoke. Her words were pronounced with difficulty, and the tone of her voice was low and plaintive; but it penetrated to my very heart, and put in jeopardy all my artificial composure. 'You will not reject your father's invitation?' said she: 'for my sake, not less than his, do not refuse him what he asks.' It was not without a desperate effort that I restrained myself; but I did restrain myself so far as to reply, in a tone meant to be that of indifference, that against such entreaties I could not think of standing out. I felt, however, that to dissemble much longer would be impossible. I accordingly took her hand, imprinted upon her cheek a cold, formal kiss, then snatching up my candle, hurried away to the privacy of my own apartment.

"I need not say that to me that was a night of intense and overwhelming misery. The steps which I had taken to support my courage, however effectual they might have been at the moment, told now that I was alone, fearfully against me; for the excitement produced by wine soon evaporated, and left me more than ever a prey to despondency and self reproach. I could not lie down; I did not so much as think of undressing; but with a brain distracted by a thousand fearful forebodings, and a fever raging through every vein, paced my chamber backwards and forwards, with the step of a maniac. Yet the images which passed through my mind that night, left no marked or definite form behind them. I believe indeed that they were too wild to assume a definite form,—that they were rather the shadows of terrible ideas, than ideas themselves,—vague, indistinct, uncertain, pointing to nothing tangible, nor resting upon any palpable foundation, but painful as the operations of a confused dream, when nothing more is remembered than that it was the source of exquisite distress. The truth is, that though conscience might have told a hideous tale, I was not sufficiently brave to let her voice be heard. Had I possessed courage enough, or candour enough, to listen to that monitor, the cause of my agony would have been at once displayed, and possibly all that followed might have been avoided; but I closed my ears against a warning note, which would have sounded harshly in proportion to its truth, and I have paid the full penalty of my own weakness.

"I pass over the events which immediately followed, partly because I myself retain of them but an indistinct recollection, and partly because, were the case otherwise, the detail could excite no interest in the mind of a stranger. Let it suffice to state, that morning found me thus occupied, not a single preparation having been made for my journey, and that when the arrival of the carriage was announced, I only began to take steps, which under other circumstances would have been taken many hours before. Notwithstanding the delay thus occasioned, however, I saw nothing either of my father or Charlotte. I think their usual hour of descending to the breakfast-room had arrived previous to my departure,—I am almost confident that it had; yet they made not their appearance, and the very shutters of their apartments remained closed as I passed under them. I did not look up again; on the contrary, I threw myself back in the chaise with the firm determination of forcing my thoughts into another channel:—how far I succeeded need not be told.

"At noon on the following day, I reached Cambridge; but how changed in every respect since last I traversed its venerable streets! I had been an enthusiast once in the studies of the place; I had aspired to the attainment of academic honours, and was not without a hope of succeeding to the utmost; whilst at the same time no man ever entered more freely into the gaieties, nor enjoyed more heartily the society of his fellow-students. Now I loathed them all: my books were neglected; my friends were avoided; I shut myself up in my chambers, a gloomy and discontented wretch, that I might ponder in solitude upon the single and horrible idea which began about this time to take possession of my mind.

"There are few ancient houses which have not a traditionary saying handed down from generation to generation, with which, in some way or other, the fate of the race is supposed to be connected. As I have already stated, ours was one of the oldest families in the north of England, as it had formerly been one of the most powerful; and we were not without our ominous prophecy, though when, or on what occasion spoken, I never heard. You must know that we bear as a device upon our shield, three young falcons, with a falcon likewise for our crest. Whether the rhyme has reference to these circumstances, no one presumed to say; but there was a distich well-known in the family, which obtained an increased importance in consequence of the coincidence, and which was supposed to forebode, that at some period or other, the house of —— would become violently extinct. It was this:

'The —— of —— sal rue the hour,
When the young hawk harries the old hawk's bower.'

"I have said that this venerable distich was well known to every member of the family. It had been repeated to me a hundred times at least, by my nurse; and even my father, during an occasional gleam of good humour, had more than once alluded to it; but, as may be believed, it never made upon me a greater impression than any other couplet of similar import and antiquity. Now, however, the case was different. I began to see it in the prophetic character which had all along been affixed to it by others. I took particular notice of its fitness with reference to the armorial bearings of the house; and as the allusion could hardly be to an ordinary spoliation, my excited imagination was not slow in discovering another and more apt point of tendency. To speak out at once,—I fancied that the day of our house's downfall had come,—that I was the miscreant by whose sacrilegious means its ruin was to be effected,—that I had already harried the nest of my father, by stealing away the affections of his wife, and that the penalty threatened would not fail to be exacted. No language would do justice to the effect produced upon me by this hideous conviction. I have sat motionless during an entire morning, ruminating upon the prophecy till all faith in the power of my own will to regulate my actions vanished; and I have risen, not furious, nor even excited, but calmly and deliberately convinced, that there was a path before me in which I could not avoid to walk, though the precipice to which it conducted was not for an instant concealed.

"It was not customary between my father and myself to keep up any frequent or regular epistolary communication. In case either party had business to transact with the other, then indeed the usual silence was broken; but letters of affection merely had never passed between us, from the hour at which I first quitted home for school. Under these circumstances, I had no right to expect that any notice of what might be passing at —— would be transmitted to me; and as often as I permitted sober reason to exert her power, this truth failed not to come conspicuously into view. But sober reason possesses but a very interrupted, as well as feeble influence, over a mind engrossed by one tumultuous and fatal passion. Morning after morning I examined my breadfast-table for that which was not, and ought not to have been lookek for there, and on each occasion I felt as if some serious injury had been done, such as I was justified in desiring to revenge. In short, I ceased either to think or act like a man in his senses,—I became, to all intents and purposes, insane.

"Slowly and drearily the time rolled on; but, slow and dreary as was its progress, it drew gradually to a close. It was now that a wild joy, scarcely more endurable than the despair which preceded it, began to assert its supremacy over me. In a few days more I should be again an inhabitant of the same dwelling with her to whom I felt myself bound by ties stronger than any human connexion acknowledges; and what to me was every consideration besides? I was no longer master of myself. The subject of a prophecy—marked out by destiny itself for one particular course—how was it possible for me to avoid my fate? and though that fate should envelope in it the ultimate misery both of myself and those most dear to me, how was I answerable? Such were the strange thoughts which pressed themselves upon me with an energy not to be resisted, and such the frame of mind into which I had fallen, when I once more quitted the university for the place of my birth.

"It was a clear frosty morning, the sun was shining brightly, and the earth, covered with a coat of hard crisp snow, was glittering as if overspread with diamonds, when I

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