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THE MUSES' BOWER.

MY BIRTHDAY.

BY THOMAS MOORE.

"My birthday!"—what a different sound
That word had in my youthful years,
And how, each time the day comes round,
Less and less will its marks appear!

When first our scanty years are told,
It seems like pastime to grow old!
And, as youth counts the shining links
That time around him binds so fast,
Pleased with the task, he little thinks
How hard that chain will press at last.
Vain was the man, and false as vain
Who said—"where he ordain'd to run
His long career of life again,
He would do all that he had done."
Ah! 'tis not thus the voice that dwells
In sober birthdays speaks to me;
Far otherwise—of time it tells
Lavish'd unwisely—carelessly;
Of counsel mock'd—of talents made
Happy for high and pure designs,
But oft, like Israel's incense laid
Upon unholy, earthly shrines;
Of nursing many a wrong desire—
Of wandering after Love too far,
And taking every meteor fire
That cross'd my pathway for his star,
All this, it tells; and could I trace
Th' imperfect picture o'er again,
With power to add, retouch, efface
The lights and shades—the joy and pain,
How little of the past would stay!
How quickly all would melt away—
All but the Freedom of the Mind
Which hath been more than wealth to me.
Those friendships in my boyhood twined,
And kept till now unchangingly;
And that dear home and saving ark
Where Love's true light at once I've found;
Cheering within, when all grows dark
And comfortless and stormy round!

INSURANCE AND ASSURANCE.

Bernardine.—I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

Duke.—Oh, sir, you must; and therefore I beseech you look forward on the journey you shall go.

Bernardine.—I swear I will not die to day for any man's persuasion.—*Measure for Measure.*

'It is inconceivable to the virtuous and praiseworthy part of the world, who have been born and bred to respectable idleness, what terrible straits are the lot of those scandalous rogues whom fortune has left to shift for themselves!' Such was my feeling ejaculation, when full of penitence for the sin of urgent necessity, I wended my way to the attorney who had swept together, and, for the most part, picked up the crumbs which fell from my father's table. He was a little grizzled, sardonic animal, with features which were as hard as his heart, & fitted their leather jacket so tightly, that one would have thought it had shrunk from washing, or that they had bought it second hand, and were pretty nearly out at the elbows. They were completely emblematic of their possessor, whose religion it was to make the most of everything, and amongst the rest, of the distress of his particular friends, amongst whom I had the happiness of standing very forward. My business required but little explanation, for I was oppressed by neither rent rolls nor title deeds; and we sat down to consider the readiest means of turning an excellent income for one year into something decent for a few more. My adviser, whose small experienced eye had twinkled through all the speculations of the age, and, at the same time, had taken a very exact admeasurement of my capabilities of turning them to advantage, seemed to be of opinion that I was fit for nothing on earth. For one undertaking I wanted application; for another I wanted capital. 'Now,' said he, 'as the first of these deficiences is irremediable, we must see what we can do to supply the latter. Take my advice.—Insure your life for a few thousands; you will have but little premium to pay, for you look as if you would live forever; and from my knowledge of your rattle pated habits, and the various chances against you, I will give you a handsome sum for the insurance.' Necessity obliged me to acquiesce in the proposal, and I assured the old cormorant that there was every likelihood of my requiting his liberality by the most unremitting perseverance in all the evil habits which had procured me his countenance. We shook hands in mutual ill opinion, and he obligingly volunteered to accompany me to an Insurance office, where they were supposed to estimate the duration of a man's life to a quarter of an hour and odd seconds.

We arrived a little before the business hour, and were shown into a large room, where we found several more speculators waiting ruefully for the oracle to pronounce sentence. In the centre was a large table, round which, at equal distances, were placed certain little lumps of money, which my friend told me were to reward the labours of the inquisition, among whom the surplus arising from absentees would likewise be divided. From the keenness with which each individual darted upon his share, and ogled that of his absent neighbor, I surmised that some of my fellow sufferers would find the day against them.—They would be examined by eyes capable of penetrating every crevice of their constitutions, by noses which could smell a rat a mile off, and hunt a guinea breast high. How indeed could plague or pestilence, gout or gluttony, expect to lurk in its hole undisturbed when surrounded by a pack of terriers which seemed hungry enough to devour one another? Whenever the door slammed, and they looked for an addition to their cry, they seemed for all the world as though they were going to bark: and if a straggler really entertained and seized upon his moiety, the intelligent look of vexation was precisely like that of a dog who has lost a bone. When ten or a dozen of these gentry had assembled, the labors of the day commenced.

Most of our adventurers for raising supplies upon their natural lives, were afflicted with a natural conceit that they were by no means circumscribed in foundation for such a project. In vain did the board endeavour to persuade them that they were half dead already. They fought hard for a few more years, swore that their fathers had been almost immortal, and that their whole family had been as tenacious of life as eels themselves. Alas! they were first ordered into an adjoining room, which I soon learnt was the condemned cell, and then delicately informed that the establishment could have nothing to say to them. Some indeed had the good luck to be reprieved a little longer, but even those did not effect a very flattering or advantageous bargain. One old gentleman had to pay a large premium for a totter in his knees; another for an extraordinary circumference in the girth; and a dowager of high respectability, who was afflicted with certain undue proportions of width, was fined most exhorbitantly. The only customer who met with anything like satisfaction, was a gigantic man of Ireland, with whom death, I thought was likely to have a puzzling contest.

'How old are you, sir?' enquired an examiner.

'Forty.'

'You seem a strong man.'

'I am the strongest man in Ireland.'

'But subject to the gout?'

'No—the rheumatism—nothing else, upon my soul.

'What age was your father when he died?'

'Oh, he died young, but then he was killed in a row.'

'Have you any uncles alive?'

'No, they were all killed in rows too.'

'Pray, sir, do you think of returning to Ireland?'

'Maybe I shall, some day or other.'

'What security can we have that you are not killed in a row yourself?'

'Oh, never fear! I am the sweetest temper in the world, barring when I'm dining out, which is not often.'

'What sir, you can drink a little?'

'Three bottles, with ease.'

'Ay, that is bad. You have a red face, and look applopetic. You will, no doubt go off suddenly.'

'Devil a bit. My red face was born with me, and I'll lay a bet that I live longer than any two in the room.'

'But three bottles———'

'Never you mind that. I don't mean to drink more than a bottle and a half in future. Besides, I intend to get married, if I can, and live snug.'

A debate arose amongst the directors respecting this gentleman's eligibility. The words 'row,' and 'three bottles,' ran hurry scurry round the table. Every dog had a snap at them. At last, however, the leader of the pack addressed him in a demurring growl, and agreed, that, upon paying a slight additional premium for his irregularities, he should be admitted as a fit subject.

It was now my turn to exhibit; but, as my friend was handing me forward, my progress was arrested by the entrance of a young lady with an elderly maid servant. She was dressed in slight mourning, was the most sparkling beauty I had ever seen, and appeared to produce an instantaneous effect, even upon the stony hearted directors themselves. The chairman politely requested her to take a seat at the table, and immediately entered into her business, which seemed little more than to show herself, and be entitled to twenty thousand pounds, for which her late husband had insured his life.

'Zounds,' thought I, 'twenty thousand pounds, and a widow!'

'Ah, Madam,' observed the chairman, 'your husband made too good a bargain with us. I told him he was an elderly sick sort of man, and not likely to last; but I never thought he would have died so soon after his marriage.'

An elderly, sickly sort of man! she would marry again, of course! I was on fire to be examined before, and let her hear a favorable report of me. As luck would have it, she had some further transactions which required certain papers to be sent for, and in the pause I stepped boldly forward.

'Gentleman, said my lawyer with a smile which whitened the tip of his nose, and very nearly sent it through the external integuments. 'allow me to introduce Mr. ———, a particular friend of mine, who is desirous of insuring his life. You perceive he is not one of your dying sort.'

The directors turned their eyes towards me with evident satisfaction, and I had the vanity to believe that the widow did so too.

'You have a good broad chest,' said one. 'I dare say your lungs are never affected.'

'Good shoulders, too,' said another. 'Not likely to be knocked down in a row.'

'Strong in the legs, and not debilitated by dissipation,' cried a third. 'I think this gentleman will suit us.'

I could perceive that, during these compliments and a few others, the widow was very much inclined to titter, which I considered as much as a flirtation commenced; and when I was ordered into another room to be farther examined by the surgeon in attendance, I longed to tell her to stop till I came back. The professional gentleman did his utmost to find a flaw in me, but was obliged to write a certificate in which I was re-entered, and had the satisfaction of hearing the chairman read that I was warranted sound. The board congratulated me somewhat jocosely, and the widow laughed outright. Our affairs were settled exactly at the same moment, and I followed her closely down stairs.

'What mad trick are you at now?' inquired the cormorant.

'I am going to hand that lady to her carriage,' I responded, and I kept my word. She bowed to me with much courtesy, laughed again, and desired her servant to drive home.

'Where is that, John?'

'Number —, sir, in ——— street,' said John: and away they went.

We walked steadily along, the bird of prey reckoning up the advantages of his bargain with me, and I in a mood of equally interesting reflection.

'What are you pondering about, young gentleman?' he at last commenced.

'I am pondering whether or no you have not over-reached yourself in this transaction.'

'How so?'

'Why I begin to think I shall be obliged to give up my harum scarum way of life; drink moderately, leave off fox hunting, and sell my spirited horses, which you know, will make a material difference in the probable date of my demise.'

'But where is the necessity for your doing all this?'

'My wife will most likely, make it a stipulation.'

'Your wife!'

'Yes, that pretty disconsolate widow we have just parted from. You may laugh; but, if you choose to bet the insurance which you have bought of me against the purchase money, I will take you that she makes me a sedate married man in less than two months.'

'Done!' said the cormorant, his features again straining their buckshins at the idea of having made a double profit of me. 'Let us go to my house, and I will draw a deed to that effect, gratis.'

I did not flinch from the agreement. My case I knew was desperate. I should have hanged myself a month before, had it not been for the Epsom races, at which I had particular business; and any little additional reason for disgust to the world, would, I thought, be rather a pleasure than a pain—provided I was disappointed in the lovely widow.

Modesty is a sad bugbear upon fortune. I have known many who have not been oppressed by it remain in the shade, but I have never known one who emerged with it into prosperity. In my own case it was by no means a family disease, nor had I lived in any way by which I was likely to contract it. Accordingly, on the following day, I caught myself very cooly knocking at the widow's door; and so entirely had I been occupied in considering the various blessings which would accrue to both of us from our union, that I was half way up stairs before I began to think of an excuse for my intrusion. The drawing room was vacant, and I was left for a moment to wonder whether I was not actually in some temple of the Loves and Graces. There was not a thing to be seen which did not breathe with tenderness. The ceiling displayed a little heaven of sportive Cupids, the carpet a wilderness of turtle doves. The pictures were a series of love and Jupiter, the vases presented nothing but hearts-ease and love-lies-bleeding; the very canary birds were inspired, and had a nest of two young ones; and the cat herself looked kindly over the budding beauties of a tortoise-shell kitten. What a place for a sensitive heart like mine! I could not bear to look upon the mirrors which reflected my broad shoulders on every side, like so many giants; and would have given the world to appear a little pale and interesting, although it might have injured my life a dozen years purchase. Nevertheless, I was not daunted, and I looked round, for someting to talk about, on beauty's usual occupations, which I found were all in a tone with what I had before remarked.—Upon the open piano lay "Auld Robin Gray," which had no doubt been sung in allusion to her late husband. On the table was a half finished drawing of Apollo, which was, equally, without doubt, meant to apply to her future one; and round about were strewed the seductive tones of Moore, Campbell and Byron. 'This witch,' thought I, 'is the very creature I have been sighing after!' I I would have married her out of a hedgway, and worked upon the roads to maintain her; but with twenty thousand pounds—aye, and much more, unless I am mistaken, she would create a fever in the frosty Caucasus! I was in the most melting mood alive, when the door opened, and in walked the fascinating object of my speculations. She was dressed in simple grey, wholly without ornament, & her dark brown hair was braided demurely over a forehead which looked as lofty as her face was lovely. The reception she gave me was polite and graceful, but somewhat distant; and I perceived that she had either forgotten, or was determined not to recognize me. I was not quite prepared for this, and, in spite of my constitutional confidence, felt not a little embarrassed. I had perhaps, mistaken the breakings forth of a young and buoyant spirit, under ridiculous circumstances, for the encouragement of volatile coquetry; and for a moment I was in doubt whether I should not apologize and pretend that she was not the lady for whom my visit was intended. But then she was so beautiful! Angels and ministers! Nothing on earth could have sent me down stairs unless I had been kicked down! 'Madam,' I began—but my blood was in a turmoil, and I have never been able to recollect precisely what I said. Something it was, however, about my late father and her lamented husband, absence & the East Indies, liver complaints and Life Insurance; with compliments, condolences, pardon, and peterbation perter-pluperfect impertinence. The lady looked surprised, broke my speech with two or three well bred ejaculations, and astonished me very much by protesting that she had never heard her husband mention either my father or his promising little heir-apparent William Henry Thomas, in the whole course of their union. 'Ah, Madam,' said I, 'the omission is extremely natural! I am sure I am not at all offended with your late husband on that score. He was an elderly, sickly sort of a man. My father always told him he could not last, but he never thought he would have died so soon after his marriage. He had not time—he had not time Madame, to make his friends happy by introducing them to you.'

I believe; upon the whole, I must have behaved remarkably well, for the widow could not quite make up her mind whether to credit me or not, which when we consider the very slender materials I had to work upon, is saying a great deal.—At last I contrived to make the conversation slide away to Auld Robin Grey and the drawing of Apollo, which I pronounced to be a *chef-d' œuvre.* 'Permit me, however, to suggest, that the symetry of the figure would not be destroyed by a little more of Hercules in his shoulder, which would make his life worth a much longer purchase. A little more amplitude in the chest, too, and a trfle stronger on the legs, as they say at the Insurance Office.' The widow looked comically at the recollections which I brought to her mind; her rosy lips began to disclose their treasures in a half smile; and this, in turn, expanded into a laugh like the laugh of Euphrosyne. This was the very thing for me. I was always rather dashed by beauty on the stilts; but put us on fair grounds, and I never supposed that I could be otherwise than charming. I ran over all the amusing topics of the day, expending a thousand admirable jokes, repeating touching passages from a new poem which she had not read, laughed, sementalized, cuddled the kitten, and forgot to go away till I had sojourned full two hours. Enphrosyne quite lost sight of my questionable introduction, and chimed in with wit as brilliant as her beauty; nor did she put on a single grave look when I volunteered to call the next day and read the remainder of the poem.

It is impossible to concieve how carefully I walked home. My head and heart were full of the widow and the wager, and my life was more precious than the Pigot Diamond. I kept my eye sedulously upon the pavement, to be sure that the coal-holes were closed; and I never once crossed the street without looking both ways, to calculate the dangers of being run over. When I arrived, I was presented with a letter from my attorney, giving me the choice of an ensigncy in a regiment which was ordered to the West Indies, or of going missionary to New Zealand.—I wrote to him in answer, that it was perfectly immaterial to me whether I was cut off by the yellow fever or devoured by cannibals, but that I had business which would prevent me from availing myself of either alternative for two months, at least.

The next morning found me again at the door of Euphrosyne, who gave me her lily hand, and received me with the smile of an old acquaintance. Affairs went on pretty much the same as they did on the preceding day. The poem was long, her singing exquisite, my anecdote of New Zealand irresistable, and we again forgot ourselves till it was necessary, in common politeness, to ask me to dinner. Here her sober attire, which for some months had been a piece of mere gratuitous respect, was exchanged for a low evening dress, and my soul, which was brimming before, was in agony to find room for my increasing transports. Her spirits were sportive as butterflies, and fluttered over the flowers of her imagination with a grace that was quite miraculous. She rediculed the rapidity of our acquaintance, eulogized my modesty till it was well nigh burnt to a cinder, and every now and then sharpened her wit by a delicate recurrence to Appollo and the shoulders of Hercules.

The third and fourth and fifth day, with twice as many more, were equally productive of excuses for calling, and reasons for remaining, till at last I took upon me to call and remain without troubling myself about the one or the other. I was received with progressive cordiality; and, at last, with a mixture of timidity which assured me of the anticipation of a catastrophe which was, at once, to decide the question with the Insurance Office, and determine the course of my travels.—One day I found Peri sitting rather pensively at work, and as usual I took my seat opposit to her.

'I have been thinking,' said she, 'that I have been mightily imposed upon.'

'By whom?' I inquired.

'By one of whom you have the highest opinion—by yourself.'

'In what do you mistrust me?'

'Come now, will it please you to be candid, and tell me honestly that all that exceedingly intelligible story about your father, and the liver complaint, and Heaven knows what, was a mere fabrication?'

'Will it please you to let me thread that needle, for I see that you are taking aim at the wrong end of it?'

'Nonsense! will you answer me?'

'I think I could put the finishing touch to that sprig. Do you not see?' I continued, jumping up and leaning over her. 'It should be done so—and then so.—What stich do you call that?'

The beauty was not altogether in the mood for joking. I took her hand—it trembled—and so did mine.

'Will you pardon me? I whispered. 'I am a sinner, counterfeit, a poor, swindling, disreputable vagabond, ———but I love you to my soul.'

The work dropped upon her knee.

* * * * * * * * *

In about a fortnight from this time I addressed the following note to my friend:

DEAR SIR.—It will give you great pleasure to hear that my prospects are mending, and that you have lost your wager. As I intend to settle the insurance on my wife, I shall, of course, think you entitled to the job. Should your trifling loss in me oblige you to become an ensign in the West Indies, or a missionary in New Zealand, you may rely upon my interest there.

In a notice of a recent new work entitled 'The Glory and Shame of England,' published by the Philadelphia National Gazette, the following passage occurs:

The following figures show the population respectively of England, Irland, and Scotland, and the votes for Parliament given in the three parts of the Kingdom, and the ratio of the latter to the former.

	Population.	Votes.	Ratio.
England,	15,450,000	517,885	30 to 1
Ireland,	8,600,000	47,926	180 to 1
Scotland,	2,700,000	25,058	108 to 1
	26,750,000	590,869	

Here we have in the aggregate a population of nearly twenty seven millions, with less than six hundred thousand of their number privileged to choose Represenatives in the only one of three branches of the government in which the popular voice may be heard at all. In order that this disparity may be more apparent, we exhibit as follows, the population of New York and Massachusetts, and the votes given in those States at the last Presidential election:

	Population.	Votes.	Ratio.
New York,	2,428,921	438,331	5 to 1
Massachusetts,	737,699	125,281	6 to 1
	3,166,620	563,612	

Thus in the States of New York and Massachusetts with a united population less than one half that of Ireland, the number of voters is very nearly equal to that of Great Britain. The people of New York and Massachusetts are well governed—better governed than ever Englaud was under any rule since the day of Cœsar,—and they govern themselves. The people of England we need not say are badly governed, and we need not repeat also who governs them. And why are they so governed? The present British Premier, Sir Robert Peel, furnishes us with the answer.—When in 1828, a motion was made in Parliament for a measure of relief—the modification of the corn laws, Sir Robert Peel defended them because as he declared, it was the constitutional policy of England to maintain the aristocracy and magistry as assential parts of the community.'

Here is the secret, (if secret it be to any one,) or the ignorance, the degradation and the distress of the British population. This is what we call the 'shame of England, the mortal shame, that millions must toil and weep, from the cradle to the grave, 'to maintain the aristocracy.'

If marriage places a woman in that sphere where she may attain the greatest happiness, so does it advance her to a station of power and responsibility. Her power over her husband's happiness is almost absolute. By wisdom, by steadiness, by forbearance, by meekness, she may be to him a tower of strength, but no tongue can tell the ways in which she may annoy, and render him wretched.

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