VARIOUS

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DESCRIPTIVE POETRY

BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR

Whatever the poets may say, it is incontrovertible that the great majority of men look upon the beauties and glories of Nature that surround them with almost entire indifference. We shall not inquire whether this is the result of a natural incapacity to perceive and admire the beautiful and sublime, or whether it is that their impressions are so deadened by familiarity as to be passed by unnoticed. Probably the former is the case with the greater number; although we cannot believe with some writers, that all our ideas of beauty are but the results of association, or of our perceptions of the proportion, or fitness, or utility of things. When we say that some things are naturally agreeable, and others naturally disagreeable, we have said all that we know about the matter; and this amounts to nothing more than a confession of our ignorance. Yet, if we admit in all men the existence of a natural sense of beauty, daily observation shows us that the pleasure arising from it is in most cases very feeble and evanescent. How many live in the midst of the most magnificent natural scenery, and never perceive its beauties until they are pointed out to them by some intelligent traveller! And often if admiration be professed, it is of that vague, undistinguishing kind, which indicates little knowledge of the causes why they admire. Even among men of cultivated tastes, there is much more of affected than real enthusiasm.

If what we have said be true, it is a curious subject of inquiry why descriptive poetry has been so popular. How happens it that so many who have looked upon Nature herself with great indifference, have been so much delighted with the reflection of her image in the pages of the poets? We suspect, indeed, that a part of the popularity of this class of writers is factitious. Thomson, the most popular, is we suspect oftener purchased than read; and his 'Seasons' are not unfrequently spoken of with admiration by those who know little of them but the episodes. The chief interest of the 'Task' is to be sought for in other sources than its descriptions, notwithstanding the *curiosa felicitas* of Cowper's diction.

The pleasure which we feel in reading descriptive poetry may perhaps in all cases be traced to one of the three following sources: the conception in our own minds of objects corresponding in a greater or less degree to those which exist in the mind of the poet; the train of associations which his language awakens; or the moral interest with which he invests what he describes. In the case first mentioned, the emotions we feel are similar to those which the sight of the objects themselves would produce; if beautiful, of pleasure; if terrible, of awe. A painting, which is an accurate representation of nature, regarded irrespective of the skill of the artist, would affect us in the same way. But the effects resulting from this cause are too inconsiderable to require particular mention. The picture which words are able to present is so indistinct and vague as rarely to produce any strong emotion. If the objects themselves are generally looked upon with indifference, much less can a verbal description of them afford us any great degree of pleasure.

The language which the poet uses often suggests to the mind of the reader trains of thought and imagery which were never present to his own mind. Hence many expressions which are in themselves eminently poetic, will arouse associations, oftentimes, that entirely spoil the passage. On the other

hand, an expression low and vulgar may be ennobled by its associations, and give dignity and force to the composition. We not unfrequently meet phrases which have great beauty in the eyes of one man, which seem flat and insipid in the eyes of another. Every writer who has attempted dignified or pathetic composition, has felt how difficult it is to avoid those words which will suggest ideas that are unworthy of the subject. If, however, the poet is sometimes a loser, he is also sometimes a gainer from this cause. The reader often finds in his own associations, sources of pleasure independent of the poet. The light that illumines the page is but the reflected radiance of his own thoughts, and is unseen by all save himself.

But it is in the moral interest with which the poet invests the objects he describes, that the chief source of our pleasure is to be found. The poet paints Nature, not as she is, but as she seems. He adorns her with beauty not her own, and presents her thus adorned to men, to admire and to love. It is by interweaving human sympathies and feelings with the objects of the material world, that they lose their character of 'mute insensate things,' and acquire the power to charm and to soothe us, amidst all the cares and anxieties of our life. The intellectual process which here takes place is so interesting and important that we shall make no apology for treating the subject at some length.

It is sufficiently obvious that an accurate description of nature, or a beautiful work of art, is not poetical. On the other hand, in proportion as the minuteness of the description is increased, the poetry vanishes. The traveller who should give us the exact dimensions of the pyramids, the precise height of the terraces, the width and height of the inner passages, would give us much more definite ideas of those structures than he who should paint to us the effects produced on his own mind by their vastness, their antiquity, and the solitude that surrounds them. So in descriptions of natural scenery, the geographer who gives us the measurement of mountains, and rivers, and plains, is much more accurate than he who describes them solely from the picture that exists in his fancy. We wish to be rightly understood. We do not mean that vagueness and generality are essential to poetical description. As on the one hand, mathematical accuracy, by allowing no play to the imagination, produces a feeble impression, so on the other the indistinctness arising from indefinite expressions is equally unfavorable. But in neither is the poetry of the description dependent on the greater or less degree of minuteness with which particular objects are spoken of. When Whitbread described the Phenix, according to Sheridan's version, 'like a poulterer; it was green, and red, and yellow, and blue; he did not let us off for a single feather,' he did not fail more egregiously than Thomson in the following lines, in which, by the force of language, a flock of geese are made highly poetical objects:

'Hushed in short suspense
The plumy people streak their wings with oil,
To throw the lucid moisture trickling off,
And wait the approaching sign to strike at once
Into the general choir.'

The poet indeed must give us a lively and definite image of the scene or object which he undertakes to describe. But how shall this be done? Simply by telling us how it appeared to him; introducing those circumstances which had the greatest effect on his own imagination. He looks on nature neither as a gardener, a geographer, an astronomer, nor a geologist, but as a man, susceptible of strong impressions, and able to describe clearly to others the objects which affected himself. This he will do in the style which the emotion raised within him naturally dictates. His imagery, his illustrations, his whole language, will take the hue of his own feelings. It is in describing accurately the effect, not the cause, the emotion, not the object which produced it, that the poet's fidelity to nature consists. Let us illustrate our meaning by two or three examples. In Thomson we find the following description of a thunder-storm:

‘A boding silence reigns
Dread through the dun expanse; save the dull sound
That from the mountain, previous to the storm,
Rolls o’er the muttering earth, disturbs the flood,
And shakes the forest leaf without a breath.
Prone to the lowest vale, the aërial tribes
Descend: the tempest-loving raven scarce
Dares wing the dubious dusk. In rueful gaze
The cattle stand, and on the scowling heavens
Cast a deploring eye, by man forsook,
Who to the crowded cottage hies him fast,
Or seeks the shelter of the downward cave.
’Tis listening fear, and dumb amazement all,
When to the startled eye the sudden glance
Appears far south, eruptive through the cloud
And following slower in explosion vast,
The thunder raises his tremendous voice.
At first heard solemn o’er the verge of heaven
The tempest growls; but as it nearer comes
And rolls its awful burthen on the wind,
The lightnings flash a larger curve, and more
The noise astounds; till over head a sheet
Of livid flame discloses wide; then shuts
And opens wider; shuts, and opens still
Expansive, wrapping ether in a blaze.
Follows the loosened, aggravated roar,
Enlarging, deepening, mingling; peal on peal
Crushed horrible, convulsing heaven and earth.’

Mr. Irving describes a similar scene in the following terms: ‘It was the latter part of a calm sultry day, that they floated quietly with the tide between these stern mountains. There was that perfect quiet which prevails over nature in the languor of summer heat; the turning of a plank, or the accidental falling of an oar on deck, was echoed from the mountain side, and reverberated along the shores. To the left the Dunderberg reared its woody precipices, height over height, forest over forest, away into the deep summer sky. To the right strutted forth the bold promontory of Antony’s nose, with a solitary eagle wheeling about it; while beyond, mountain succeeded to mountain, until they seemed to lock their arms together, and confine this mighty river in their embraces. In the midst of his admiration, Dolph remarked a pile of bright snowy clouds peering above the western heights. It was succeeded by another and another, each seemingly pushing onward its predecessor, and towering with dazzling brilliancy in the deep blue atmosphere; and now muttering peals of thunder were faintly heard rolling behind the mountains. The river, hitherto still and glassy, reflecting pictures of the sky and land, now showed a dark ripple at a distance, as the breeze came creeping up it. The fish-hawks wheeled and screamed, and sought their nests on the high dry trees; the crows flew clamorously to the crevices of the rocks, and all nature seemed conscious of the approaching thunder gust. The clouds now rolled in volumes over the mountain tops; their summits still bright and snowy, but the lower parts of an inky blackness. The rain began to patter down in broad and scattered drops; the winds freshened, and curled up the waves; at length it seemed as if the bellying clouds were torn open by the mountain tops, and complete torrents of rain came rattling down. The lightning leaped from cloud to cloud, and streamed quivering against the rocks, splitting and rending the stoutest forest trees; the thunder

burst in tremendous explosions; the peals were echoed from mountain to mountain; they clashed upon Dunderberg, and then rolled up the long defile of the Highlands, each headland waking a new echo, until old Bull Hill seemed to bellow back the storm.'

We think that no one who attentively reads the foregoing extracts can fail to see the infinite superiority of the latter over the former, in every thing that pertains to a faithful representation of nature. Irving has given us the scene just as he saw it, unmixed with any hue or coloring with which the mood of his own mind might have invested it. We see the objects themselves, disconnected from the associations of the spectator. Had there been a thousand persons looking on, each would have heard the same sounds, and seen the same sights. There is nothing that is extraneous. He has given us an exact copy of his original, and nothing more. Thomson, on the contrary, has not described a thunderstorm as he saw it, but according to the effect that it produced on his own mind. His epithets are rarely descriptive of the qualities that exist in the objects to which they are applied. They have reference rather to the emotions which their presence produces in himself. Thus, in the first line, 'boding' is not a quality that can be predicated of silence. To the feeling that the silence preceding a storm is wont to excite, the epithet is properly enough applied. So with the expression 'dubious dusk.'

In connection with these extracts, we will look at one taken from Scott's description of the scenery around Loch Katrine:

'Boon nature scattered free and wild,
Each plant, or flower, the mountain's child;
Here eglantine embalmed the air,
Hawthorn and hazel mingled there;
The primrose pale, and violet flower,
Found in each cleft a narrow bower;
Foxglove and night-shade, side by side
Emblems of punishment and pride,
Grouped their dark hues with every stain
The weather-beaten crags retain;
With boughs that quaked at every breath,
Gray-birch and aspen wept beneath;
Aloft the ash and warrior oak
Cast anchor in the rifted rock;
And higher yet the pine tree hung
His scattered trunk, and frequent flung
Where seemed the cliffs to meet on high
His boughs athwart the narrowed sky.
Highest of all, where white peaks glanced,
Where glistening streamers waved and danced,
The wanderer's eye could barely view
The summer heaven's delicious blue.'

The same remarks which we applied to Irving are applicable with some little restriction here. With one or two exceptions, the epithets mark attributes that exist in the subjects. Every one can see at a glance the appropriateness of such terms as *pale* primrose, *gray* birch, and *narrow* bower. They are not dependent for their effect upon any fanciful train of associations which their names may excite.

If we compare the above extracts together, we arrive at certain results which we shall briefly state. We will throw out of view for a moment any pleasure which the rhythm may give us, as foreign to our present purpose. Each of these writers is describing a scene from nature. Each of them has the same object, to interest others by a representation of those sights and sounds that interested

themselves. Scott accomplishes his purpose by presenting as exact a picture of nature as it is possible perhaps for words to give. He does not tell us how he is affected by what he sees, and looks upon neither directly nor indirectly. He does not search for any resemblances that are not palpable, and founded in the nature of things. All similes and metaphors which serve to express his own emotions are carefully avoided. The whole is picturesque and life-like in the highest degree, yet every circumstance is mentioned in the cool, unimpassioned way in which we mention any common occurrence.

Thomson accomplishes his purpose by portraying his own feelings; not indeed in so many words, but by the use of those expressions, and by those transitions of thought, which mark a state of emotion. The epithet 'boding,' to which we have referred, is an example. It is an indirect disclosure of the mood of his own mind. At another time it is not improbable that an epithet of a directly opposite meaning would have been selected. The reader is affected by it, because by a law of sympathy, we are affected by whatever reveals the presence of passion in another. It influences us precisely as the tones of the voice of a person in distress influence us. Both are expressive of emotion, and we cannot remain unaffected by them.

This is the main source of the pleasure we feel in reading Thomson's description. It conveys to us but a very indistinct idea of the subject matter. Different readers, according to their mental peculiarities, will be differently affected by it. He does not paint to the bodily eye, but to the eye of the mind; and he will feel most pleasure who puts himself in the same position as the poet, and sees with his eyes and hears with his ears. Unless he can do this, he will derive but little gratification from the perusal.

Less minute than Irving, and more picturesque than Thomson, Scott will probably to most readers give more pleasure than either of them. In conveying lively impressions of natural objects he is unsurpassed, but he is scarcely less successful in inspiring the mind of the reader with the same emotions that fill his own breast. There is ever between the thought and its expression a perfect harmony. It is only when agitated by passion that he uses the *language* of passion. Hence we never find that timid phraseology which so often disgusts us in Thomson; *vox et præterea nihil*. No one delights more in the use of figurative language, nor employs metaphors that more appropriately convey the sentiment that pervades his mind. In the passage we have quoted are the following lines:

'Aloft the ash and warrior oak
Cast anchor in the rifted rock.'

The poet looking up at the trees firmly rooted in the rifts of the rock, defying the tempest and storm, felt an emotion of pleasure which the sight of their lofty position, and the apparent danger of their being hurled headlong at the first blast of wind, contrasted with the sense of their real security, produced. To express this pleasurable emotion, he fastens upon the resemblance between a root of the tree and an anchor; a resemblance not between the things themselves, but between their uses. Neglecting all the points of difference, and confining his attention to this single point of similarity, he presents an image which all admit to be highly forcible and poetical.

The great merit of all descriptive poetry consists in the unity of feeling which pervades it. Unlike the epic, or the drama, it has none of the interest which arises from a connected narrative, or the development of individual character in reference to a certain end. The poet confines himself to the expression of those feelings which are awakened by the sight of the beauty and sublimity of nature. Passing, as he necessarily must, from one object to another, each fitted to excite in his bosom conflicting emotions, his attention is so much diverted, that none of them produces upon him its legitimate effect. There is wanting some central object of interest to which all others are subordinate. Hence is explained the listlessness of which every one is conscious in the continuous perusal of the Seasons. We find the greatest pleasure by reading a page here and a page there, according to the state of our feelings.

It is never in short poems that the descriptive poets succeed best. L'Allegro and Le Penseroso are gems; but all Milton's genius could not have made the Paradise Lost readable, were it deprived of its unity as an epic, and broken up into a series of detached pictures. The Deserted Village of Goldsmith is the longest poem of this class that we now remember, having all its parts so pervaded by a common spirit that a succession of new objects does not impair the designed effect. Sweet Auburn as it was in its palmy days, and as it is in its desolation, presents two distinct pictures, yet so closely connected that each heightens the effect of the other by the contrast. Nothing can exceed the exquisite art with which Goldsmith has seized upon those circumstances that tend to make the desired impression, and rejected all others. How perfect are each of the following descriptions, and how much would their beauty be marred by the transfer of a single circumstance from one to the other:

'How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm;
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighb'ring hill;
The hawthorn-bush with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made.

.....

'The dancing pair that simply sought renown,
By holding out to tire each other down;
The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter tittered round the place;
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,
The matron's glance, that would those looks reprove.

.....

'No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
But choked with sedges works its weedy way;
Along thy glade, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires the echoes with unvaried cries;
Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall.'

It is by the selection of such objects as have in themselves no common bond of union, but which combine to raise a certain emotion, that the essential distinction is to be found between the descriptions of the poet and the prose-writer. The latter joins objects together as they are joined in nature, following a principle of association which is simple and obvious. His resemblances are usually such as are cognizable by the senses; a likeness in the sensible qualities of things. The poet's principle of association is in the effect produced on his imagination. Things which have not in themselves a single point of similarity, are connected together, because they produce the same emotions of

pleasure, or pain, or hope, or melancholy. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the opening stanzas of Gray's Elegy:

'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.'

A summer evening in the country is associated in most minds with images of mirth and joy. Thus Goldsmith has described it:

'Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's close,
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;
There as I passed with careless steps, and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young;
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice, that bayed the whisp'ring wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind.'

With what consummate skill, if indeed it be not rather the instinct of the poet, has Gray avoided all mention of those objects which might awaken associations discordant with the mood of his own mind! Each epithet is full of a plaintive melancholy. There is not one that does not contribute something to the effect; not one that can be omitted; not one that can be altered for the better. Yet there is scarcely one that is descriptive of any quality actually existing in its subject. The fitness of each is to be felt rather than seen.

In the selection of those circumstances and objects which Gray has enumerated, he was governed by the effect which each had upon his own feelings. He looked upon nature in the reflected light of his own heart. He was mournful in view of the destiny of man; and wandering amidst the graves of the lowly and obscure, he saw all the external world colored with the hue of his own sad thoughts. The melancholy spirit within him transformed all things without into its own likeness. His imagination, darting hither and thither, and governed in its flight by laws too subtle and delicate to be analyzed, reposed itself for a moment amidst the gloom of the historical associations that cluster around the curfew, hovered over the lowing herd, and followed the ploughman as he homeward plods his weary way. Goldsmith, recalling the scenes where he had spent many happy hours, looks upon nature under a far different aspect. Every thing to him is gay and joyous. He hears not the hollow tones of the curfew, nor the drowsy tinklings that lull the distant folds. He sees not the wearied ploughman, caring for nought but to forget his toils in the sweet oblivion of sleep. He hears but the song of the milk-maid, and the soft response of her rustic lover; the watchdog's voice, and the loud laugh of the happy idlers. He sees but the children just escaped from school, running and leaping, and romping in their innocent glee. Happy himself, he fastens upon whatever in nature around him

seems to sympathise with him, and dwelling fondly upon it, casts away from his thoughts every thing that can obstruct the full, free flow of his joyous emotions.

We may remark in passing, what has probably been before remarked by the attentive reader, that both Gray and Goldsmith, excited as they are by different passions, refer to the 'lowing herd' as raising on the one hand a cheerful, and on the other a melancholy feeling. To our thought, the associations connected with the return of the herds from the fields at sunset are best fitted to awaken that quiet, reflective state of mind which is most congenial to the mood of the elegiac poet. To another, these associations may be of such a character as to produce a directly opposite effect.

The writer of prose who should describe scenes like these, would aim to give us a distinct and accurate picture by presenting all their prominent features, omitting nothing, and grouping them as Nature herself had grouped them. Such descriptions we daily see in all books of voyages and travels. Or if the descriptions be of scenes wholly imaginary, their essential character is not changed. Although they cease to be real, they do not become poetical. The extract which we have made from Irving is not poetical. Accurate, vivid, life-like, it is. We cannot read it without a feeling of pleasure. We admire the genius of the writer; we wonder at the magnificence of the spectacle which, by a few masterly touches, he has raised up before us. But there is no more poetry in it than in his description of Herr Van Tassel's supper table, covered with all the luxuries of Dutch housewifery. It is true, there may be more of beauty and sublimity in the scenery of the Hudson, in the gathering clouds and muttering thunder, than in the sight of dough-nuts and crullers, sweet-cakes and short-cakes, peach pies and pumpkin pies, slices of ham and slices of smoked beef; yet the spirit of poetry exists no more in the one than in the other. Poetry has its abode in the *heart* of man; not in the winds, in the clouds, in the mountains, or in the vales. It does not derive its power from the outward world, but breathes into it its own breath of life, investing the earth with a beauty which has no existence but in the human soul, and filling the air with sweet harmonies, which are unheard save by the inspired ear of the poet.

We have now, we think, sufficiently answered the question, why so many who read descriptive poetry with pleasure, look with indifference upon what is beautiful or sublime in nature. The poet is to them like one who gives sight to the blind. The landscape which formerly lay before their eyes unregarded, almost unseen, is now 'beautiful exceedingly.' Nature has not changed; they themselves have not changed; yet there *is* a change. There is a glory unseen before, cast over the earth. It is, as it were, transfigured before them, and made radiant with celestial light. This is the poet's work. With a keener perception of the beautiful and sublime than other men; with a greater facility of association, and with the power to give to language the hue and intensity of his own feelings, he clothes lifeless nature with the attributes of humanity, making it instinct with human sentiment and passion. Like Burns, he pours forth his lament over the mountain-daisy cut down in its bloom, in a few simple words that find a response in the hearts of all men; and henceforth it is embalmed in our memories, and shall be as immortal as the star that shines in the far depths of the heavens. Like Wordsworth, he wanders upon the banks of his native lakes, and mingles his song with the noise of their waters, until the faintest whisper of the rippling waves seems but the echo of his voice. Wherever he goes fruits, flowers, and herbage spring up in his footsteps. A divine Presence goes with him; Nature speaks to him with her thousand voices, and he hears, and answers, making sweet music in the joy of his heart. Nothing is so inconsiderable as to be without the pale of his sympathy; nothing too humble to stir the fountains of love in his breast. The solitary flower that blossoms by the way-side, the rivulet far away amid the hills, is but the starting point of that wondrous chain of thick-coming fancies, that fill his eyes with light, and his ear with harmony; as if multitudes of angels were hovering around, and he heard on every side the rustling of their wings.

Such are the gifts of the poet. They are God's gifts, and are indeed 'wonderful in our eyes.'

VICISSITUDES

Hast thou not been where wild winds, freshly blowing,
Brought odorous gladness on each passing gale;
Hast thou not been where the pure streamlet flowing,
In each soft murmur told a gentle tale:

As the bright flashing of its gushing water,
Glad as the tones of merriment and glee
That joyous burst from children in their laughter,
Swift dashes onward to the boundless sea?

Hast thou not been where the enamelled mead
Its beauty gave to the enraptured sense,
And the crushed lily, from the elastic tread,
Yielded its life in breath of sweets intense?

Hast thou not been in spring-time's early hours,
Where the lone bird its short sweet carol gave
To the young bursting leaves and budding flowers,
Beside some wildly-rushing mountain wave?

Not such the lay it sings in summer hours,
When love beats high within its little breast,
And its exulting song it joyous pours,
Where thick embowering leaves conceal its nest.

Hast thou not marked, when autumn's gorgeous glory
Fled in the rushing of the hurrying blast,
The deep'ning pathos of the moral story
Sighed in each cadence, as it onward passed.

Hast thou not heard the ancient forests, bending
To the far sweeping of the mighty wind,
Send forth a solemn sound, as though responding
To voices deep that secret powers unbind?

Hast thou not stood where ocean madly raging,
Rolled onward as with overmastering shock:
'Till hushed the storm, the chaféd surge assuaging,
It gently laved the firm-opposing rock?

Hast thou not gleaned a lesson to thy reason
From winter's fostering power and spring's awakening reign;
Summer's brief heat, autumn's maturing season,
And learned vicissitudes are not in vain?

But from the varied page outspread before thee,
Garner'd of wisdom for thy fleeting days,
Whether the sunshine or the storm be o'er thee,
Forward to look with hope, and trust, and praise?

Newport, Rhode-Island, Dec., 1843. E. R. G. H.

THE IDLEBERG PAPERS

A CHRISTMAS YARN

At Christmas every body is or should be happy. The genial influence of the season lightens alike the lofty hall and the lowly cottage. It is the same at home or abroad, on the land or the billow, in royal purple or in ragged poverty; here and every where, to one and to all, it is always 'merrie Christmas.' At such a time there is an obligation due from every man to society, to be happy, and the more cheerfully it is paid, the better. The man who would be found scowling and glowering like a thunder-cloud, cherishing his private griefs or animosities at a time when every other countenance is glowing with light, and hope, and sunshine, should be denied all the charities of humanity, and exiled to Kamschatka, or some other inhospitable clime, to growl and fret with the wild beasts, or the wilder elements.

How dear is the light of home when glowing with the fires of Christmas! What though the elements be wild without, or Jack Frost blow his whistling pipe at the door, or fierce winds rumble down the chimney, and tell of sweeping gusts and howling storms abroad, if within and around that charmed circle is breathed the spirit of kindness and affection! Should the titled stranger or the ragged beggar knock, throw wide open the doors of thy hospitality; and while prattling infants recount the joys of the season, and school-boy striplings pursue their holiday sports, and gray-haired men who have traversed the wide world over, tell how in all their wanderings they have never passed a Christmas from home; he will turn his thoughts with a melancholy pleasure to the distant fireside beyond the sea, and to the friends who are gathered there, and wonder where the wanderer is spending his Christmas.

With all respect for the ancient and honorable class of 'old bachelors,' whose sympathy and good fellowship we most earnestly desire, be it said, that if to any it is allowed to be miserable at Christmas, it surely is to them. We would not for the world say aught to heighten the sad picture of their social desolation, by dwelling on the thousand tender endearments of home, the ten thousand cords of love, of which they know nothing. Certain it is, that to many of them 'merrie Christmas' brings only pangs of remorse; and we have known more than one crusty member of the fraternity, who on such occasions would rush incontinently from the scene and the sound of merriment, and shut themselves under lock and key, until the storm was passed, and people have recovered their lost senses.

Such an one, however, we are proud to say, was *not* Tom Hardesty, though bachelor he was, in the superlative degree. Every body wondered how he managed to preserve his good-humor and vivacity under the frosts of three-score winters. At the period of this authentic history, Tom was the village grocer; a station he had filled to his own profit and the town's convenience until he had become a piece of village furniture, necessary to its existence as a corporation. His little store, with its great variety of commodities, adapted to every human want, was in itself a perfect 'curiosity-shop.' Odd-looking boxes, kegs, chests, casks, barrels and hogsheads, contained his groceries, drugs and dye-stuffs. A few remnants of domestic prints and muslins, together with stray fragments of broadcloth, constituted his stock of dry-goods. Then there was a modicum of hardware and cutlery; a few spelling-books and new testaments for a book store; and sundry jars and bottles filled with fancy-colored powders and liquids, for an apothecary shop. His remaining list of commodities was made up of hats, caps and bonnets, boots and shoes, tin-pans and looking-glasses, slate-pencils and sifters; and as his standing advertisement in the village newspaper duly notified the public, 'other articles too numerous to mention—call and see for yourselves.' If any body desired an article nobody ever heard of before, he could find a large lot thereof at Tom Hardesty's; and if any lucky or ingenious wight had found or made any thing that nobody else would have as a gracious gift, let him call on

Mr. Hardesty, and it was the very thing he wanted. In a word, his shop was a grand dépôt for every article the ingenuity of man could devise, or his necessities require.

What a blessed convenience was Tom Hardesty! How could we have gotten along without him? How honest and affable! What long ells and heavy pounds he gave! And then his tea! how it inspired the village gossip on long winter nights in a chimney corner! All the matrons of the village were quite in love with Tom, or his tea; and many an old crone, as she sat inhaling cup after cup of the divine beverage, has been known to pause in the midst of her inspirations, and exclaim with uplifted hands, 'God bless Tom Hardesty!'

And yet Tom Hardesty was a bachelor, and kept 'bachelor's hall.' The only members of his mess were an orphan boy of his adoption, who waited in the store, and a brindle cat which the master had honored with his own name. This point, however, is still wrapt in obscurity, for Tom and 'Tom' were both so venerable that nobody could swear whether the cat had been named after the master, or the master after the cat. It had been rumored by those who should know, that Mr. Hardesty should not be held strictly accountable for this sin of celibacy, since he had offered his hand, his heart, and a partnership in his worldly goods, to more than one village beauty, each of whom had found it impossible to 'love for antiquity's sake,' and rejected his matrimonial offers accordingly. Still Tom never repined. His daily experience behind the counter had taught him the useful lesson, that each applicant does not necessarily always drive a trade, and the commodity which one rejects may be eagerly sought by another; and acting on the faith of this philosophy, he lived cheerfully on, cherishing the hope that even yet some fond heart would beat responsive to his own, and promise before the competent authority, to 'love, honor and obey' him, Tom Hardesty.

On a memorable Christmas-eve we enter his little counting-room. A cheerful fire blazes on the hearth; and at the moment grimalkin is purring on the rug. Master John, the adopted, is poring over a picture-book, probably an early edition of Peter Parley's Travels, and Mr. Hardesty is standing before a broken fragment of looking-glass, diligently brushing his scanty locks.

'John!' said Mr. Hardesty, turning from the mirror, and looking full at the boy, 'do I look very old to-night?'

The boy turned up his innocent face, gazed steadily on his master from top to toe, and answered, 'Sir!'

'Do I look very *old* to-night, John?'

John scratched his head. 'Not much older than you did this time last night, Sir.'

'Humph!' said Mr. Hardesty, appealing to the glass, and renewing his efforts with the brush, while John resumed his reading.

'But, John,' resumed Mr. Hardesty, seating himself beside the boy, 'do you really think that a middle-aged lady, of right comfortable property, would have, *could* have, any rational objection to be called Mrs. Hardesty?'

'I think not, Sir,' replied John, taking up the cat; 'I'm sure you have been very kind to me and old Tom here, and I know you would be so to her.'

'Very true, John,' said Mr. Hardesty, whose feelings were touched by this expression of the boy's gratitude; 'but I wish to extend the sphere of my usefulness; and I may venture to hope—but don't mention it—that in the course of three or four years, or may-be a little longer, there'll be a little boy at our house for you to play with; and if it's a girl, John, you shall marry her when you get old enough. Eh, John! how would you like *that*?' And the old gentleman chuckled himself into a fit of coughing that seemed to threaten his longevity, and prevented John's reply to a suggestion that had never occurred to him as being within the bounds of the most remote possibility.

Having amused himself sufficiently with these flights of his fancy, Mr. Hardesty rose from his seat, gave John eighteen-pence for Christmas-money, stroked his namesake's back, put on his cloak and cap, and after bidding John be a good boy, and not to mention it, and to take care of the fire till he came back, left the house on his errand of love.

Christmas eve! Surely the village streets were never so gay before! You may know there is a moon, for though the sky is darkened with clouds, and the snow is falling as it never fell before, there is a glow of light above and around, that would burst on the eye like dim revealings of fairy-land, but for the mist that floats through the dim upper air, and seems striving to bind the earth as with a mantle.

What a merry, merry Christmas! Gust after gust comes whirling on, full-freighted with the virgin snow. There are shouts of revelry that rise and fall with the sound of the blast. There are hurried footsteps that glide over the crackling snow. There are merry hearts within those bounding sleighs, and hands that clasp the hands they love, though wrapped in countless furs and muffs. Gay steeds dash on with steaming nostrils, as if their toil were sport; and their bells, as they ring cheerily out in the sombre night, give promise of marriage-bells to come.

Through all this busy scene Tom Hardesty pressed on, turning neither to the right nor left, except when he turned a corner. As the wind dashed the driving snow in his face, he drew his cloak more closely around him, and, shivering, passed on with cheerful thoughts of love and matrimony. Sometimes the boys pelted him with their snowy artillery, or old acquaintances inquired after his health, but he glided on like a dim shadow, heedless alike of all. By degrees the holiday din of the village waxed faint in his ears, and as he approached the suburbs, his heart beat fast while his steps were slow with indecision, for he was approaching the end of his pilgrimage—the dwelling of Miss Peggy Sidebottom.

While Mr. Hardesty is pausing at the door, stamping the snow from his feet, and making the accustomed use of his pocket-handkerchief, we will take advantage of his delay to state, briefly, that Miss Sidebottom, beside being sole proprietress of the cottage-like mansion aforesaid, claimed also among her chattels sundry shares in bank, and certain notes of hand, yielding her sufficient income, without calculating the value of her personal charms, to make her hand and heart two very desirable items of furniture in a bachelor's apartments. Her household consisted of herself, and a nephew and niece, christened Dick and Belinda, orphan children of a deceased brother. Dick was a wild, rattling scape-grace, as ever robbed hen-roost or melon-patch; Belinda was nothing, particularly, except a little, quiet, blue-eyed girl, the pride of her aunt, and a pattern of propriety to all little girls. That Miss Sidebottom was kind and motherly to the two orphans, there is no question; but it was rumored that in consideration thereof she enjoyed a comfortable legacy. It is only necessary to premise, farther, that Miss Sidebottom had been younger by some two-score years than she was that night; that she was one of Mr. Hardesty's best customers; and that after long worshipping her across the counter, he had suddenly determined to declare his passion with all the eloquence he possessed; which was not inconsiderable, as many can bear witness.

Mr. Hardesty knocks and is admitted to the hall. Another door is opened, and there, in the snuggest corner, and by the snuggest fire conceivable, sits Miss Sidebottom. The opposite end of the hearth is decorated by Belinda, while a cat is sleeping on the rug between them. It was a picture of quiet happiness that touched Mr. Hardesty's heart; and advancing into the room, he bows with all the elegance of a Beau Brummel.

Miss Sidebottom turned her eyes upon the new-comer, and as they fell on the familiar and smiling countenance of the grocer, she sprang to her feet, and exclaimed: 'Why, Mr. Hardesty! I am so glad to see you! Let me have your cloak and cap, Sir. Come, be seated; draw near the fire.'

Mr. Hardesty kept bowing all this time with as much nobility as was displayed by the famous stick that was too crooked to lie still; and after grasping Belinda's hand very affectionately, he seated himself, and drew near the fire.

'Dear me! what a night!' said Miss Sidebottom; 'ain't it cold out, Mr. Hardesty?'

Mr. Hardesty replied by shivering palpably, and said he had seen colder, and he had seen warmer, but it would do. Having said thus much, he produced his snuff-box, which he extended to the ladies, and then helped himself.

'I am truly glad, Miss Peggy,' continued Tom. 'to see you situated so comfortably—I am.' And he smiled tenderly and shifted his chair; but in doing so, he infringed on the cat's tail, and the animal, as cats are wont to do, squalled vehemently. Mr. Hardesty bounded from his seat.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Miss Sidebotton, 'don't do that!'

'Positively, Madam,' said Tom, 'I am very sorry, indeed—I am!'

'Poor thing!' said Belinda, taking the injured quadruped in her arms; 'poor thing!—did he hurt its tail?'

"Deed, Madam,' said Mr. Hardesty, stroking the animal's back, 'I wouldn't have done that for forty ordinary cats. I may say, Madam, speaking metaphorically, that your cat is of the short-horn Durham stock, and wasn't made to be trod on.'

'Lor', Sir,' replied Miss Sidebottom, adjusting her cap, 'cats is cats, and cattle is cattle—that's my sentiments; but as I was going to say, Mr. Hardesty, I was telling Mrs. Jenkins to-night, not an hour ago, that I felt a kind of nervous kind of feeling that somebody was coming; and sure enough, here comes you. You see, Mrs. Jenkins was here to take tea with me to-night, and beside the baby, why her little Jack and Sally and Bill and Susan *would* come, because, they said, pap wasn't at home, and they would starve if they staid there. And here, sure enough, come they did, before Mrs. Jenkins had fairly pulled off her bonnet; and stay they would, though she boxed 'em well; but they didn't mind that, and I told her Christmas come but once a year, and as it turned out, the poor things *were* hungry, in yearnest. And you never see children eat so; I do believe they hadn't had a good meal for a fortnight. Well, we hadn't got fairly seated after supper, when rap! rap! at the door, and there was Jake Crow had come for Mrs. Jenkins; for Jenkins had got into a drunken row, and had his head cut with a stick. And you never hearn sich a fuss; and Mrs. Jenkins and the little brats went home crying all the way; and here me and Belinda have been by ourselves ever since. But poor Mrs. Jenkins! I wonder men will get drunk and leave their wives and children to starve. *You* never get drunk, Mr. Hardesty, do you?'

'Drunk! Madam, drunk!' said Mr. Hardesty, placing his hand over his heart, and shaking his head emphatically. 'No, Madam; I only get what you may call intoxicated, and not with liquor neither; and I feel it coming on me now—I do indeed!'

'Well, well!' replies Mrs. Sidebottom, holding up her hands in utter astonishment, 'I never heard tell of the like of that before. P'raps its the cold, Mr. Hardesty.'

'No, Madam,' persisted the old gentleman; 'it's the heat.'

'Dear me! Mr. Hardesty; then I'll open the door.' And Miss Peggy started to her feet.

'No, my dear Madam, don't, if you please. It ain't this here fire in the hearth, but,' striking his breast passionately, 'it's *here*, Madam.'

'That's just where Mrs. Jenkins is affected sometimes, and she says Madeira's the best thing for it; and she has drank nearly all that last quart I got of you, Mr. Hardesty, and I don't see as she gets any better.'

'Madeira, indeed!' said old Tom, scornfully. 'Madeira, madam, instead of squenching, would only add fuel to the flame that is consuming me. There *are* men as takes to the bottle for it when they despair; but bless your soul!' he continued, dropping his voice to a whisper, 'I haven't despaired.'

At this eloquent appeal, Mrs. Sidebottom looked at the fire and said nothing, until an audible snore from Belinda, who had fallen asleep in her chair, aroused her.

'Bless me!' exclaimed Miss Peggy, bouncing to her feet; 'look at the child there! Belinda dear, wake up. Poor dear thing! you had better go up stairs to bed.' And rubbing her eyes, the child took up a lighted candle, bowed politely to Mr. Hardesty, and disappeared behind the stair-door.

Miss Sidebottom resumed her seat and looked again at the fire, and Mr. Hardesty looked at Miss Sidebottom. Presently, that amiable lady turned her gaze, lighted as it was by an equivocal smile, full upon Tom. In the space of about fifteen seconds, after trying in vain to interpret that smile to his own satisfaction, Mr. Hardesty quailed, while his heart commenced vibrating against his ribs, as though it would burst their feeble barrier, and take refuge in his waistcoat-pocket. Miss Sidebottom, however,

showed no such symptoms of alarm, and her courage rose as Tom's fell. By the way, composure in such delicate epochs is like see-sawing; one ascends as the other descends, until perchance the weaker party fails to recover his equilibrium, and tumbles off the fence. Diffident young courtiers should remember this.

Mr. Hardesty was bewildered beyond endurance. How could a man speak more plainly? And yet he would try once more.

'Let me tell you, my dear Miss Sidebottom, once for all, I'm–'

There was a noise of some one opening the front door, and as Mr. Hardesty turned his head, Dick entered the room.

'Why, Dicky, where have you been this cold night?' asked his aunt.

Dicky replied that he had been snow-balling, of which there were sufficient marks on his person. His countenance was flushed and heated, and he proceeded to say that he was tired, and wanted to go to bed.

At this Mr. Hardesty rose deliberately from his seat, saying it was time to go.

'But, Mr. Hardesty,' urged Miss Peggy, 'it's cold and snowing; stay all night there with Dicky,' pointing to a comfortable bed in one corner. 'I know you are delicate, and it's snowing hard. I'll go and see. Here Dicky,' and she left the room followed by Dick. Mr. Hardesty looked around at the comfortable quarters offered him, and determined to remain. Scarcely had he come to this decision, when the affectionate aunt and nephew returned, the former telling him not to think of going out on such a night, and the latter assuring him it was snowing 'like sixty.'

'I'll stay, Madam, and thank'ee too,' said Mr. Hardesty, re-seating himself. Miss Peggy bade her guest a very good night, and, threatening to catch him for a Christmas gift next morning, disappeared up the stairs and locked the door after her. Tom watched her retreating figure until she disappeared, and then addressed himself to the boy.

'Been snow-balling to-night, eh, Dicky? Fine sport, Dicky; fine sport.'

'I should say it was, Sir, when your side toes the mark and don't run,' said Dick, placing his damp shoes on the hearth. 'Them shoes'll never run away with *my* feet in 'em, certain.'

'Well, Dicky,' continued Mr. Hardesty, stirring the fire, 'you're a brave boy.'

'Yes, Sir,' said Dick, 'braver than you think for. Catch me napping when there's work to do, and I am to get a pie for it in the bargain, will you?' The bare suggestion amused Dick, and as he divested himself of his damp clothes, he laughed heartily.

'That's just what I was saying, Dicky, and was going on to add, that snow-balling and such like ain't for me now, but the time was when none was better at them than I.'

'P'raps not,' said Dick, 'but as I'm rather tired, and don't mind the cold, I'll get in and warm the bed, and you can come along when you like;' and the light-hearted boy sprang into his nest, and in less than five minutes was snoring audibly.

Mr. Hardesty stirred the fire, and as the myriad sparks flew up the chimney, he wished he had just so many dollars; he would give them all if *she* would but love him. Growing weary of this delusive sport, he looked at his watch, compared it with Miss Sidebottom's yankee clock, and finding his own time-piece was just five minutes the faster, concluded that both were wrong just two minutes and a half, and he would split the difference. He might be mistaken, but if he was he would consult the town clock to-morrow.

Mr. Hardesty resumed the poker and stirred the fire until its bright blaze threw a broad glare over the chamber; and out of the glowing coals he built strange towers and castles, and saw them change by turns into ashes, and grow dim like his own recent dreams of love. This being a melancholy contemplation, he lent his ear to a solitary cricket that was cheerily singing its household song, though the winds were wild without. Presently the cricket ceased its chirrup, and Mr. Hardesty growing tired of sitting, yawned, stretched himself, and walked to the window.

Outside, the ground was covered with a wild waste of snow, and the heavy flakes were still falling. Suddenly it occurred to him that somebody might accidentally pass that way and recognize him; so he let fall the curtain and walked across the room. Here, lifting his eyes from the floor, a looking-glass stared him in the face, and he started back. He turned again and walked to the bed-side where Dick was sleeping. The boy, he thought, might one day be his nephew, and he revolved in his mind a thousand schemes for advancing him in the world and making him a clever fellow.

Mr. Hardesty left the bed-side and looked up at the ceiling. Beyond that, he thought, was the adored Miss Sidebottom. What a narrow space sundered them! He walked to the fire-place and looked on the mantel for a book. He selected an old copy of Burns, and opened at the pathetic ballad of 'John Anderson.' Mr. Hardesty sat down and read it once aloud. Then he read it to himself over and over again, until he had gotten it by heart. And then by degrees the room swam dizzily before him, the fire glowed like a pale meteor, his eyes closed heavily, the open book fell from his hand, and Mr. Hardesty was asleep.

He slept and dreamed. Smiles like those of sleeping infancy stole over his venerable features. In one short moment he was the happiest man alive; his love had been crowned with success; and putting forth his hand to grasp the dear shadow, he lost his balance and fell from his chair.

Mr. Hardesty looked around him, wondering. He resumed his seat and rubbed his eyes. The fire had almost gone out. The wick was long and dim. He looked at the clock; it wanted just twenty minutes of midnight.

Mr. Hardesty snuffed the candle and commenced divesting himself of his apparel; placed his boots beside Dicky's shoes on the hearth; threw his upper garments on the back of a chair, and his nether ditto on the seat thereof. But his extremities were cold, he thought, and placing a chair bottom upward on the floor, he put his feet to the fire.

For some minutes Mr. Hardesty stared steadily at the ceiling, beyond which Miss Sidebottom was sleeping in virgin security; and whether from the magnetic effect of his constant gaze, or the slumbrous air that pervaded the room, his eyelids soon closed, and he was again soundly asleep. The candle burned dimly on; coal after coal was turned to ashes; at last both went out, and still Mr. Hardesty slept.

Presently there was a stir in the bed occupied by Dick. The boy rose on his pillow and looked cautiously around him. He called Mr. Hardesty, but there was no answer. At this Dick put one leg out of bed, and then the other, and stood firmly on the floor. Gliding cautiously over the carpet, he stooped over the sleeper, whose deep breathing assured him that all was safe. Then stepping softly to the chair on which Mr. Hardesty's clothes were lying, he selected that gentleman's nether garment, then went to the hearth and lifted the boots, and slipping on his own shoes, glided cautiously out of the room with his booty. Returning in a few minutes he again stooped over the sleeper, and then stole to bed, where, after laughing immoderately yet quietly, he was soon as fast asleep as Mr. Hardesty himself.

When Mr. Hardesty awoke he found himself still reclining on the back of the chair. Not a little vexed with himself for lying there all night, he rose to his feet, and looking around, found that Dick had risen before him, and the bed was empty. 'Why didn't he wake me, I wonder?' said Mr. Hardesty.

Mr. Hardesty walked to the window, lifted the curtain, and looked out. The mists and clouds had cleared away, and left the sky all bright and blue. The sun had just risen, and was shedding his early splendor on the myriad snow-drops as brightly as if to atone for the darkness and gloom of yesterday. It was a cheerful and beautiful view; but Mr. Hardesty heard the sound of shuffling footsteps overhead; so he turned shivering from the window to dress himself for the day. 'It'll never do to be caught in this fix,' said Mr. Hardesty.

His first search was for his boots, but these had been taken out, as he supposed, to be polished. He would put on his breeches and wait for his boots. He cast his eye on the pile of clothes, but the breeches were not there. Then he looked on the floor, and in all the corners of the room, and then

on the bed and under the bed—but in vain. 'What the d–l has become of my breeches!' said Mr. Hardesty.

It occurred to him at length that by some mysterious power of locomotion the garment had gotten into the drawer of a bureau that stood in one corner. He pulled at this drawer most lustily, but it was locked, and Miss Sidebottom had the key. To add to his discomfiture, he again heard the sound of footsteps overhead. He had but a moment to spare, and looking around for a place of retreat, his eye fell on a closet-door that opened beneath the stairs. Putting on hastily the remnant of his apparel, he presented altogether an appearance the like of which the writer has never seen, and will not attempt to describe, and managed to effect his retreat into the closet just as Miss Sidebottom and Belinda entered the room from above.

Mr. Hardesty applied his eye to the key-hole, but saw nothing save the form of either lady as it flitted from time to time across the limited range of his vision. Presently a conversation began between the two, of which, however, he could hear nothing except a confused murmur, and occasionally a most uproarious fit of laughter. Before long the merry tones of the elder lady were changed to those of anger. Miss Sidebottom was evidently scolding one of the servants, and then came reiterated sounds of castigation, interspersed with tongue-lashings, by far the most terrible of the two. Mr. Hardesty resigned himself to his fate, and was willing to endure a confinement that revealed to him the evil spirit that reigned within a form of so much loveliness.

After a while came the indescribable sounds of breakfast; the rattling of knives and forks, and cups and saucers, suggestive to Mr. Hardesty's mind of coffee, hot biscuits, and butter. Presently the table was cleared away, and he caught a glimpse through his key-hole of the two ladies, dressed in their cloaks and bonnets. In a moment they departed, leaving Mr. Hardesty sole proprietor.

Each moment of this time was one of intense agony to Mr. Hardesty. Exposed to hunger and thirst, and cold and insult, what had he done to deserve such misfortunes? And that was Christmas, too; what a merry day to all the world without; and in what a contemptible plight was he! What would little Master John think of his absence; and how much would be sold at his little store before night? These reflections only enhanced the agony of his imprisonment; so wrapping himself tightly in the folds of his cloak, he crouched down in a corner of the closet, and soon fell fast asleep.

Mr. Hardesty slept on until night-fall. So soon as he realized his situation, he determined to be a prisoner no longer, but to emerge from his confinement, whatever might be the danger of an exposure. Fortunately for him, the room was deserted. The ladies had not yet returned from their visit. Mr. Hardesty approached the window and found it quite dark without. He had little time left for deliberation, for he heard the sound of a key turning in the street-door lock, and recognized the well-known voice of Miss Sidebottom; so hoisting the window, he crawled rapidly through it, and leaped on the ground.

Mr. Hardesty breathed once more like a freeman; and muttering deep anathemas against the inhospitable house and all its inmates, he stole quietly along, with his bootless feet buried at each step in the snow. Leaving the more frequented streets, and worming his way through bypaths and dark alleys; now turning a corner, under the direful apprehension of meeting some acquaintance, and now darting this way or that to avoid a random snow-ball, he pursued his painful way until he reached home, where he knocked and was admitted by Master John.

The grocer bolted in, rushed into his counting-room, and throwing off his cloak, stared wildly at the bewildered boy. 'What do you think of that, John?' pointing to his denuded extremities. 'How does that become your old master, Sir?'

Master John, frightened partly at the anomalous appearance of the grocer, and partly at the sternness of his voice and manner, started back to the remotest corner of the room, but said nothing.

'What's the matter now, you little fool?' said his master. 'Are you afraid of old Tom Hardesty? If you are, you needn't be; nobody need be afraid of such an old coward as I am—darned if they need!' And feeling that he was growing melancholy, he determined to subdue the propensity, and to

that end commenced cutting the complicated figure entitled a pigeon-wing. This exhilarating sport soon restored the grocer's good humor, and he laughed heartily and made such a racket altogether, that the boy gradually approached him to inquire what it all meant, how he had spent his Christmas, what had become of his breeches, and all about it.

'Here, John,' said Mr. Hardesty, seating himself by the fire, 'sit here and I'll tell you all about it. But what an old fool I am! Here's twenty-four blessed hours gone, and the d–l a bit or a drop have I had since last night at supper. Is this my house or not, John? for I've forgot every thing except one, and wouldn't swear I ain't dreaming, and haven't been all day.'

The boy gave him every assurance that he was at home.

'Well, John,' pursued the master, 'I think the last time I was here—it may be a year, or it may be more—I'll be hanged if I know—but I rather think there was a lot of prime cheese, and a few barrels of crackers. You haven't sold 'em all, John?'

John smiled, and answered negatively.

'I rather think, too, there were several casks of best three-year-old whiskey, prime lot; any of *that* left, John?'

John pointed, in reply, to a row of casks in one corner that answered the description.

'No! stop, Sir!' said Mr. Hardesty, soliloquizing; 'I think she said Madeira was good for it. Yes, John, I'll take a little of the Madeira, if you've any on hand.'

John opened a cupboard door, and producing a black quart-bottle, assured Mr. Hardesty it was nearly full.

'That'll do, Sir,' said the grocer. 'Set the table; never mind the cloth. Crackers and cheese and old Madeira, and 'away with melancholy."

In a few minutes the table was spread according to directions, after which Mr. Hardesty seated himself near it and did ample justice to the simple fare.

'You see, John,' said the old gentleman, when his appetite was somewhat assuaged, 'it's all on account of that old, ugly, and infernal Peggy Sidebottom. Here's hoping she may—may never drown her sorrows in the flowing bowl!'

The grocer drank this toast with infinite gusto and replenished his glass.

'Well, Sir, as I was about saying, I went there last night to spend an hour in a little sociable chat, and was about taking leave–' At this point the speaker was interrupted by several violent raps at the door.

'Who's that?' inquired Mr. Hardesty, draining his glass.

'It's me,' said a voice from without.

'What do you want?' said Mr. Hardesty.

'Nothin'; what do *you* want?'

'Who the d–l are you?' said the grocer, in a voice of thunder.

'Dick!' replied the voice.

'Dick what?'

'Dick Sidebottom!'

'What do you want here?' said the grocer, rising and pacing the floor. 'John, where's my cow-hide? Clear yourself, you little rascal, or I'll–'

'But I've got your breeches and your boots, Sir,' said Dick.

'Oh! you *have*, have you?'—and Mr. Hardesty threw aside the cow-hide, and opened the door. Dick marched boldly in, deposited his plunder on a chair, and then looked Mr. Hardesty full in the face with a glance of perfect innocence. The owner of the recovered booty picked them up, examined them closely to satisfy himself of their identity, and without saying a word, put them on in their appropriate places. This done, he surveyed himself with a smile of approbation, and felt that he was indeed Mr. Hardesty once more. After helping Dick to a highly sweetened draught from the contents of the black bottle, he begged of him a detailed account of the affair of the lost boots and breeches.

This Dick proceeded to give; by telling, in his peculiar and highly figurative manner, how his aunt had first suggested the feat to him; how he had risen while Mr. Hardesty was asleep, secured the booty, and hid it in an adjoining hay-loft; how his aunt had promised him a Christmas pie, and though often requested thereto, had failed to comply; how she had inflicted personal chastisement on him for some trivial offence; and how, on reflecting what a kind-hearted old gentleman Mr. Hardesty was, and what a crabbed old thing Aunt Peggy was, he had repented of his theft, and determined to make restitution at the earliest opportunity; 'and there they are on you,' said Dick, in conclusion, 'and that's all about it.'

Mr. Hardesty listened with due attention to this detail, and then sat for some time in silence.

'And you can swear to all this in a court of justice, can you?'

'Certainly, Sir.'

'And you'll do it when called on?'

Dick bowed his head in assent.

'Good!' said Mr. Hardesty, grasping the boy's hand. 'Take a little more of this,' he continued, filling Dick's glass. 'Your aunt shall suffer for this yet, if there's any law or justice in the land.'

'Ain't there no law,' inquired Dick, pausing in his draught, 'for suing an old lady for 'sault and batterhim?'

'No, Dicky, I fear not in your case; but if I get any damages, I'll give you half.'

Dick drained the contents of his glass, and shaking hands most cordially with Mr. Hardesty and Master John, bade them good night. It is scarcely necessary to add, that the last surviving male heir of the Sidebottoms was gloriously drunk in less than an hour, and made such a demonstration of that fact to his sober and discreet aunt, that she caused his head to be soused repeatedly in cold water, and then flogged him into sobriety.

It is not to be supposed that the disappearance of the village grocer from his usual post for a whole day together, and particularly on Christmas, that busiest of all days, failed to excite a degree of general curiosity and inquisitiveness as to the cause of his absence; but to the many inquiries of his friends touching that subject, he only replied by shaking his head and saying that time would show. Enough had leaked out, however, to satisfy the public that the affair was shrouded in a mystery that was worth the trouble of penetrating; so that when on the morning of the first of January immediately succeeding the year that had just closed, Mr. Thomas Hardesty and Miss Margaret Sidebottom were summoned each by three lusty cheers from the town-crier to appear before his worship the police judge of Idleberg, the populace rushed to the scene of judicial conflict, until the humble and contracted audience-chamber was crowded to overflowing.

The witnesses summoned in the case were Mrs. Jenkins, Jake Crow, and Master Dick Sidebottom. In due time the defendant came into court, leaning on the arm of her next friend and privy counsellor, Mrs. Jenkins, who as usual was attended by a bevy of young Jenkinses. Before embarking in this trying embassy, the ladies, by the way, had gone to the Madeira bottle; the one complaining of a pain in the breast, and the other of general nervousness. Mr. Hardesty was unattended, and so were his remaining witnesses.

The warrant gravely charged the defendant with stealing or causing to be stolen from the plaintiff, on the night of the twenty-fourth of December last past, a pair of boots and a pair of breeches, whose respective values were duly set forth. The reading of this document created quite a sensation throughout the court-room. Mrs. Jenkins was called and sworn. She deposed that on the night specified in the warrant, she had taken tea at the defendant's house; that she was suddenly called home, missing thereby a great deal of anticipated pleasure; that the defendant passed the next day, being Christmas-day, at her (witness's) house; and witness did not at any time see defendant steal or cause to be stolen from plaintiff the said boots and breeches, nor did she believe Miss Sidebottom to be capable of such an act; 'and particular,' she said in conclusion, 'from such a pitiful old scamp as Tom Hardesty;' and glancing around triumphantly at the audience, and scornfully at the plaintiff, she waited for the court's cross-questions.

'Is that all you know about the case, Madam?' inquired his worship, smiling.

That was all.

'You can retire. Call Jake Crow.'

Mr. Crow stood in no need of being called, as he marched up to the judge immediately, and deposed that on the last Christmas-eve night, he had called at defendant's house for Mrs. Jenkins, as old Jenkins had been knocked on the head and carried home drunk. (At this Mrs. Jenkins looked like a carnation pink, and commenced fanning herself violently with her pocket-handkerchief.) Witness, however, did not enter the house, and knew nothing whatever of the matter in dispute.'

'You can retire, Mr. Crow. Call Richard Sidebottom.'

Dick had managed, with his usual restlessness, to retire some time before this from the crowded room, and was breathing the pure air and playing his boyish pranks in a distant part of the town. The officer who was despatched for the young gentlemen returned presently, lugging him by the coat-collar. After being introduced to the court by the usual solemnities, Dick proceeded to give in detail the events of the memorable night, as already known to the reader. He also gave an interesting account of the defendant's oft-repeated cruelties to himself personally; how on Christmas night he had restored the stolen articles to plaintiff, and how the rightful proprietor was wearing the same in court.

A general hurrah and stamping of feet succeeded the delivery of this testimony; at which the judge frowned, and the constable cried 'Order!' with all his lungs.

'Mr. Hardesty,' said the judge, when order was restored, 'do you feel disposed to prosecute this suit? I fear I must dismiss the warrant, on the ground that the court can furnish no relief in the case. What say you?'

Mr. Hardesty arose. 'May it please your worship, the time was, and I care not who knows it, when I entertained for the defendant in this cause feelings of the most profound respect and admiration. And I had been led to hope that my passion was not altogether disregarded; that Miss Sidebottom would one day become Mrs. Hardesty. And this, Sir, as detailed to you by the last witness, her own nephew, is the treatment I have received!' The speaker paused and applied his pocket handkerchief to his eyes. The audience was touched. 'It ain't the temporary loss of my breeches; it ain't the long weary hours I spent shivering in that closet; it ain't the wading home bare-footed in the snow; it ain't the finger of scorn some gentlemen may p'int at me now, that wounds my heart; but it's feeling and knowing that the woman I loved better than my own life; the woman I would have lived for, or died for, to make her happy; that that very woman–' He could say no more; his feelings overpowered him, and he sat down.

Miss Sidebottom's sympathies were evidently touched throughout this harangue. Until now, she had been rocking to and fro in her seat, and when Mr. Hardesty concluded, she rushed through the crowd, threw herself on his neck, and kissed him passionately.

'Clear the room!' bawled his worship, starting to his feet. 'Clerk,' he continued, addressing that official personage, who was standing near, 'write me a license to unite Thomas Hardesty and Margaret Sidebottom in the holy bands of matrimony. I know they are of age, and don't need any guardeens.'

The judge sat down, convulsed by his own wit, while the clerk proceeded to his task. The loving pair looked up and smiled through their tears. 'I loved you, Tom, all the time; I did indeed. It was all in fun, dear man—indeed it was!' Tom Hardesty threw his arms around her neck, and pressed her head to his bosom.

'Come!' said his worship, after reading the license, 'none of your hysterics here, but stand up and be married.' And married they were; and the bride, in consideration of her cruelty, paid the costs of the suit and the marriage fees; and off they marched homeward, amid the deafening huzzas of the multitude that was gathered in the street.

Happy New-Year! that sealed Tom Hardesty's happiness! Many a changing season has come and gone since then, and nobody knows but they are the happiest couple in Idleberg. Mr. Hardesty's first domestic advice to his bride was to decline Mrs. Jenkins's farther acquaintance, which she did

most readily. The old gentleman has long since despaired of having an heir direct, but has promised John, who is prospering behind his old master's counter, that he and Belinda shall marry before long. Mr. Richard Sidebottom is one of the 'reformed drunkards,' and eschews Madeira especially. He is now an attorney, *in embryo*, and gives ample promise of carrying into his profession all the acuteness and cunning which distinguished his exploits on the memorable night that opened this chapter in the biography of Mr. Tom Hardesty.

WINTER EVENING

The fire is burning cheerly bright, the room is snug and warm,
We keep afar the wintry night, and drive away the storm;
And when without the wanderer pines, and all is dark and chill,
We sit securely by the fire, and sparkling glasses fill.

And ever as the hollow wind howls through the moaning trees,
Strange feelings on the boding heart with sudden chillness seize:
But brightly blazes then the hearth, and freely flows the wine;
And laugh of glee, and song of mirth, then wreathe their merry twine.

We think not how the dashing sleet beats on the crusted pane,
We care not though the drifting snow whirls o'er the heath amain;
But haply, while our hearts are bright, far struggling through the waste,
Some traveller seeks our window's light, with long and fruitless haste.

Hark his halloo! we leave the fire, and hurry forth to save:
A short half hour, and he had found beneath the snow a grave.
Pile on the wood!—feed high the flame!—bring out our choicest store!
The traveller's heart grows warm again; his spirit droops no more.

J. G. P.

SONG OF THE NEW YEAR

BY MRS. R. S. NICHOLS

I have come, I have come from a shadowy clime,
An heir of the monarch Earth's children call Time;
With years yet unborn, I have stood in the hall
That was reared by our sire, awaiting his call:
Last eve, as I lay on his bosom at rest,
I saw slowly rise a white cloud in the west;
Now through the blue ether, through regions of space,
It floated up softly, with fairy-like grace,
And paused 'neath the light of the white-shining stars,
Whose rays pierced its centre, like clear silver bars;
The winds revelled round it, unchecked in their mirth,
As it hung, like a banner, 'mid heaven and earth.

The soft fleecy folds of the clouds swept aside,
The winds ceased their revels, and mournfully sighed;
A car slowly rolled down the pathway of Time,
A bell slowly tolled a funereal chime:
A sound in the air, and a wail on the breeze,
Swift as wave follows wave on tempest-tossed seas;
Thin shadows swept by in that funeral train,
As glide o'er old battle-grounds ghosts of the slain.
I saw the dim spectres of long-buried years—
The Seasons close followed, in mourning and tears.

Arrayed in his armor, death-darts in his hand,
The grim King of Terrors strode on with the band,
While cold, stark and ghastly, there lay on his bier
The death-stricken form of the hoary Old Year!
How bent was his figure, how furrowed his brow,
How weary he looked from his pilgrimage now!
The phantoms of Passion, of Hope and Despair,
With dark, waving plumage, encircled him there;
The Months stood around, and the bright dancing Hours
On spirit-wings floated, like birds among flowers.
A voice sweet as music now smote on my ear:
'Go forth in thy beauty, thou unspotted Year!
The old Year hath died 'mid rejoicings and mirth,
That rocked the stern heart of the rugged old Earth!
The midnight is passing; away to thy car!
Thou'lt sail by the lustre of morning's bright star;
Away!' And I rose from the bosom of Time,

And fled through the gates of that shadowy clime;
My car sped along on the wings of the wind,
While Winter, old man! tottered slowly behind.

The sky's eastern portals impeded my flight,
When Morning rose up from the arms of the Night;
The dawn faintly glowed, and I saw the old Earth,
And sailed in my kingdom, a monarch at birth!
'Then give me wild music, the dance and the song,
For ever!' I shouted, while whirling along:
'I have come, I have come from a shadowy clime,
A breath of the monarch Earth's children call Time!'

Cincinnati, December, 1843.

ON COLOUR

Full angel-like the birdis sang their hours[1]
Within their curtains green, within their bowers
Apparelled with white and red, with bloomys sweet.
Enamell'd was the field with all coloùrs:
The pearlit drops shook as in silver showers,
While all in balm did branche and leavis fleit.[2]
Depart fra' Phœbus did Aurora greit;
Her chrystal tears I saw hing on the flowers
Which he, for love, all drank up with his heat.

Dunbar.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
1. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
2. He leadeth me beside the still waters; He restoreth my soul.
A Psalm of David.

As I walk over the surface of this fair Earth, an erring and a wayward being, at times dejected by the trials of a solitary and an almost abortive life, or sustained or elevated by its prosperous incidents; I sometimes think that no one other blessing of existence hath ever comforted my heart and restored my soul so much, as the pleasures and delights of Colour. It is my wealth, my joy, my faculty, my fountain!

The recreative pleasure that others find in Music, although this is not denied is less to me than to them, a restorative and a balm. Music excites, arouses me; melts me into weakness, or animates me into passionate exertion; but it is in the green pasture and beside the still waters, in bowers apparelled with white and red; it is in the tints with which autumn is bedecked, and Day expires; that I feel I shall not want, and that God restoreth my soul! And it is among huge and solitary mountain masses of grey castellated rock, in the crevices of which the stinted pine, and the cedar with its brown and tattered trunk, struggle out a hard and scanty existence and are yet covered with never-fading verdure —mountains to which the Saviour of mankind might have retired to meditate and pray—that I feel that the Lord is my Shepherd, and shall bring me to the green pastures, and lead me beside the still waters; my Rock! my fortress! and my high tower!

Sometimes my heart takes a fancy altogether for *brown* hues; and as you cannot at all times command these in the country, I seat myself down quietly in front of a precious Cuyp with which God hath endowed me, and that (except the sky and water) is composed entirely of them in every gradation and shade; and when I rise up from the contemplation of it, I feel that it is in brown hues that God restoreth my soul.

Sometimes I dwell upon the silvery trunk of the birch-tree, or upon the darker hue of the beech. Sometimes my soul drinks the full beauties of the umbrageous chestnut; or revels in the golden berries, and the graceful branches that seem overladen with them, of the mountain-ash. As I grow old I wave often in the grey pendulous mosses of the South, or stand in thought under the gigantick branches of the live oak, with all its leaves of laurel, and its heroick gesture. Good God! I say, when I think that we might all have been born, ate, drank, smoked, grown up, built, propagated, and died,

[1] Heures, prayers.

[2] Float.

as thoroughly and effectually as we now do, and all these precious objects of our sight and joy been made for us—out of the one desolate colour of an old pipe!

And Water—that element of Life, that upon the plaintain-leaf looks so like a molten mass of diamond that you can hardly persuade yourself it is aught else, might as well have been created of a mere drab quaker-colour; or not even as bright as a bit of Quartz Rock! and yet have satisfied our thirst as well as if it had gushed forth from the limpid sources of the Croton; or been drawn from the transparent body of Lake George; or from those mountain streams of sparkling chrystal that, in alternate shade and gleams of light of tropical brilliancy, bound and gush and dance their way downward from rock to rock to the sound of their own musick, and make themselves into rivers of joy as they descend along the *Grand Etang* of the Island of Grenada!

And Wine, that God hath sent to make glad the heart of man, and hath blessed it in the cup; and which might perhaps have had the same hilarious effect, though it were of the dingy colour of the ashes of the grate by which I sit; but which, for our more perfect happiness, He hath made to outvie the Topaz and the Ruby, in its lustre and its varied hue!

There are many of us who have this one quality, the love of colour, in common with the magnificent David, whose precious inspiration I have quoted at the head of my Essay, and who in a thousand passages interweaves it like a golden thread amid his works; but as in the minds of many others, it may be a blessing only half appreciated, I have thought that a few words upon this subject might fall not unfruitfully upon the heart, perchance of some one young Reader of this article, just opening to the knowledge of this peculiar work of the great Master of mankind, Colour.

Even Music, although itself an occupation revealed to us as of the Angels of Light, is, except perhaps as they enjoy it—with whom poetry and modulated sound adapted to the thought are inseparably one—even music is less refined, less gentle, perfect, unobtrusive. For the enjoyment of Colour involves no possible interruption of another's tastes; no outbreak upon the quiet stillness of the day; no intrusion on 'the ear of night;' nor yet any expression, that by pouring abroad the sensations, might diminish the deep earnestness of the soul; which, all sight, all ear, becomes the Recipient. The enjoyment of colour is the Spirit within us listening to the language of God! to the mute expression of His unspeakable Love! Colour—the conception He hath chosen for His bow of promise in the Heavens! by which He decorates the Earth, and tells of Himself in the ocean, and in the sky, and by which He restoreth the Soul of man!

And in that state of celestial existence which attends the redeemed Soul disenthralled from 'the body of this death,' is it to be doubted, that among the joys that 'the eye hath never seen, nor the heart conceived,' there exist colours beautiful beyond all earthly wealth of imagination; beyond the poet's fancy and the painter's dream? There where the pure gold of which the city is constructed, is transparent as glass, and each gate is one pearl, and the very foundations of the walls are of jasper, and chalcedony, sapphire, emerald, ruby, amethyst and topaz; and the glory of God is the light that lightens it!

But it is not to another world that the joys of colour are postponed, nor even to another climate that we need look for the precious satisfaction that they impart. We have not the carpets of flowers of rainbow tints, that spread themselves over whole prairies of Texas and Mexico, but what a gem upon the bosom of Earth when it is unexpectedly found among us is the blue campanula! And the small white lily of the valley, sheltered and concealed in its green leaves like a hidden tear of Joy, and almost as rare! And the bright and graceful lobelia cardinalis that loves the neighbourhood of the still waters. And the fringed gentian of a tint so cerulean that our true poet derives it from the firmament; as his own spirit, if left to approach its kindred element, might claim affinity with the overshadowing expanse of celestial life![3]

[3] This allusion is to Byrant's lines 'To the Fringed Gentian,' a poem so replete with truth and beauty, that we cannot resist the inclination to quote it here.Ed. Knickerbocker.Thou blossom bright with autumn dew,And coloured with the heaven's own blue.That

I speak not to thee of the gorgeous sunsets and of those piles of massy clouds of living and ever-varying colours on which the Day pillows himself to rest in a luxurious repose; but open thine heart upon the Eastern bank of the Hudson at the grey of morning, and look with the Sun upon the opposite shore; and as the mists arise and are dispelled from before thee, there shall come change after change of colour neutral and calm and slowly warming into beauty, until a violet haze shall rest upon the hill-tops and the cliffs that might outvie the golden haze of Italy, and that shall raise thy thoughts in silent thankfulness, and educate thee to enjoy the untold treasuries of colour that glow in upper Heaven; and hope shall spring forth renewed within thee; and sorrow shall fade from thy widowed, or thy childless heart; the peace which passeth understanding shall come over thee; and God even thine own God shall bless thee; and to thine eyes, now opened to the wonders of His goodness, all the ends of the Earth shall *shew forth*

openest, when the quiet lightSucceeds the keen and frosty night.Thou comest not when violets leanO'er wandering brooks and springs unseen,Or columbines, in purple dressed,Nod o'er the ground-bird's hidden nest.Thou waitest late, and com'st alone,When woods are bare and birds are flown,And frosts and shortening days portendThe aged year is near his end.Then doth thy sweet and quiet eyeLook through its fringes to the sky,Blue—blue—as if that sky let fallA flower from its cerulean wall.I would that thus, when I shall seeThe hour of death draw near to me,Hope, blossoming within my heart,May look to heaven as I depart.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.