

and such a death most horrible, shook off the pitiless assailants; but his own blood had dyed the snow, and the sight of it seemed to turn ferocity into fury. The blood-hounds closed again upon him—they pulled him down!

"People say there is no time to think in sudden dangers; they have never known one. There are more thoughts struck from the mind in one moment's collision with sudden and desperate peril than in days of fearless security. The sweets of this earth, the home that lay so near—the mystery of Heaven, swept over poor Mart's mind; nay, even particulars found time to intrude. He thought how Anno and Liso would watch through the night—how his mangled remains would tell in the morning—Anno's despair—the village lament: he thought of all this, and more, and knew himself in the jaws of hungry wolves! Then those foul lurid eyes glared over him: the tightening of the throat followed, and thinking was over. Still he struggled to release his arms—the grasp on the throat was suffocating him—his senses reeled—when on a sudden—dash came another animal hard-breathing along; threw itself into the midst with one sharp howl, and fastened upon the chief assailant. The wolves relaxed their fury for an instant; Mart reeled giddily to his feet, and recognised his brave dog. For a second he stood stunned and bewildered; when he saw one wolf retreating, and all three attacking the dauntless Karria Pois. He turned to help him, and a bright object met his eye; it was his hatchet lying on the snow, within arm's length of his last struggle. Mart snatched it up, and was now himself again. Blood was dripping from him, but his limbs were uninjured, and furious were the strokes he dealt.

"One wolf soon lay dead at his feet; the other cowed and retreated, spilling its blood as it went, and held off, skulking round, and now Mart poured his whole fury on the great monster, which held Karria Pois in as stifling a grasp as he had done his master. It was no easy task to release the dog. The hatchet rung on the wolf's skull, rattled on his ribs, and laid bare the gaunt backbone; but the dog's own body interrupted any mortal wound, and the wolf seemed to feel no other. Poor Karria Pois's case was desperate; his legs were all drawn together, protecting the very parts he sought to wound; when suddenly he stretched himself out with some fresh agony, and the hatchet was buried deep in the wolf's throat. Many more fierce strokes were needed before life was extinct; and as Mart rose, a hand on his shoulder startled him, and his wife fell on his bosom."

JUST TOO LATE.

A TALE, BY ANNA MARIA SARGEANT.

"A friendly eye could never see such faults;
 "A flatterer's might not, though they were as huge
 "As high Olympus." *Julius Caesar.*

"I AM afraid that you will be too late for the early train, dear Frank," was the exclamation of a gentle looking young woman who, as she spoke, placed one hand upon the shoulder of her husband, and with the other attempted, half-playfully half in earnest, to draw away the newspaper he held.

"I have plenty of time, my love: it wants five and thirty minutes to seven, and I can walk *leisurely* to the terminus in ten" was his reply, as he glanced hurriedly upon the watch which lay upon the table by his side,—and he commenced reading a fresh column.

The wife quietly reseated herself and resumed her needle-work, but her eye wandered ever and anon with

an impatient glance towards her companion, and then rested on the monitor at his elbow, the tickings of which were audible in the otherwise unbroken silence. Rising at length, she once more placed her hand upon her husband's arm and mildly enquired what he had found so very interesting as to engage his attention under such pressing circumstances.

"You are anxious, I see, Mary," he returned, "but I tell you I have plenty of time to finish this debate."

"Will you, for the sake of reading a debate, hazard the probability of not seeing your Uncle alive, my dear Frank," she somewhat reproachfully asked.

"I am not hazarding it," he with a pettish gesture returned, "and you know, Mary," he continued, "I never made any professions of affection for my uncle—our tastes and habits were too dissimilar for me to feel any, and I scorn to play the hypocrite."

"Still, since it is his dying wish to see you, you would surely desire to gratify it," pleaded the wife.

The young man threw the paper upon the table, hastily caught up the cloak which had been lying ready at his side, and taking up his watch, observed, "It still wants twenty minutes to seven, so I shall be there ten minutes before the train starts. Good bye, my love," he hurriedly added, and with the utterance of the latter sentence no vestige of petulance mingled.

Mrs. Merton followed him to the outer door: she did not trust her voice in a response to the parting benediction, lest her tears should flow, but having watched his retreating form till an angle in the street obscured him from her view, she returned to the parlour he had just quitted and wept unreservedly.

Mary Merton was a tender affectionate wife, but her grief on this occasion did not wholly arise from the separation. The five years of her wedded life had been five years of care not, unaccompanied by privation, and her trials had been less easy to endure from the knowledge that they were principally owing to her husband's dilatory, procrastinating habits. He had now left her and his children with no other means of support than her needle was capable of supplying, for every shilling they possessed was in requisition to meet the expenses of the journey he was about to undertake.

Our hero was one of that numerous class of young men who are without any settled occupation. Not having, as it is termed, a *turn for business*, and his father being without adequate means to enable him to study for one of the learned professions, he had been allowed to follow the bent of his own inclinations. His uncle's interest had been exerted in getting him early introduced into a respectable banking establishment; he was, however, speedily discharged for want of punctuality. He next took a situation as clerk in a lawyer's office, but the many hours he was now confined to a desk did not agree with his love of ease and leisure, and really impaired his health; from this position he had descended from necessity, to the counter. His pride would not long brook the humiliations to which he was here exposed. Adversity had not yet taught him that valuable truth, that no occupation is really derogatory which is not dishonourable, and which has been undertaken from elevated motives: thus he became the sport of fortune, and the amiable and gentle young creature who had, unfortunately for her, linked her destiny with his, was a sufferer with him.

Mrs. Merton was still weeping over her past troubles and future prospects, when she was aroused by a well-known knock at the street door. Her husband's want of prudence and perseverance had weaned from him every relative and friend save one. This was an old school-mate, whose liberality was only equalled by his forbearance. Charles Leicester was a character rarely met with, and still more rarely appreciated, for in him

were combined that nice sense of justice which permits not the claims of an enemy to be overlooked, and the warm hearted generosity which is ever ready to make a sacrifice of self-interest in the cause of friendship.

Such was the early visitor who was now admitted to the mansion. "Ho ho, you have the advantage of me I perceive," he exclaimed, as he entered the apartment where the breakfast apparatus gave sure indications that they had already taken their morning meal. "I came with the intention of taking a cup of coffee with you, and talking over some affairs of business before I went into the city."

"It is not often that my husband is out so early, Mr Leicester," Mrs. Merton returned, whilst a faint blush suffused her before pale cheek. "Last evening's post brought a letter from a confidential servant of Mr. Gresham's, with intelligence of the old gentleman's approaching dissolution, and further stating that it was his wish that Frank should visit him immediately."

"And is he really gone by the first train this morning," Leicester enquired with evident surprise.

The cheek of the wife was again flushed as she faltered forth that she *hoped* so. Scarcely, however, had the words escaped her lips ere she caught a glimpse of his figure passing the window

"This is surely he" cried her guest, whose eye had been roving in the same direction, for to confess the truth, both wife and friend had, from past experience, expected this result.

"Ha, Charles. my dear fellow, how are you, I'm glad to see you," Merton exclaimed as he re-entered his home. "Glad to see you," he repeated, laughing to hide his chagrin, for he would just then rather have seen even a dun. "But was there ever such an unlucky wight as myself?" he jocosely added.

"You were just too late I suppose," Leicester drily observed.

"Yes, my evil genius caused my watch to lose ten minutes during the night, and I got to the terminus just after the train had started," was his reply. "But it's my usual luck," he pettishly added, throwing his hat and cloak so carelessly on the table that the former by the irresistible laws of gravitation, speedily found its way to the floor. Mrs. Merton quietly took up the ill-used hat and busied herself in smoothing the few remaining vestiges of beaver on its surface.

Mary has told you, I suppose, where I was going this morning," the young man pursued, "but I've very little hopes from uncle Gresham's liberality. He has been a prosperous man all his life, everything he has touched has turned to gold, and he makes no allowances for the mishaps of an unfortunate fellow like me. Do you remember Charles, his disappointing me of a handsome pair of globes he had purchased purposely for me, because I did not meet him to the minute he appointed on the morning of my twelfth birth-day?"

"Oh, yes, I remember it," Leicester laughingly made answer, "and my memory is malicious enough to recollect also, that it was all owing to your having indulged yourself with an extra half hour's nap, which I suppose was the case *this* morning likewise. There, don't be nettled my good fellow," he resumed, perceiving a flush of anger on the cheek of his friend. "I know that the truth is not always palatable; it is nevertheless salutary to hear it sometimes. And right to tell it," he added, looking significantly at Mary, who was handing him a cup of coffee.

"You are quite out in your surmises this once at least," Merton exultingly exclaimed. "I was up before sunrise."

"Then the political debates, perhaps, attracted your attention," Leicester pertinaciously continued, glancing as he spoke at the newspaper, which still lay on the

breakfast table in the place where Frank had thrown it. "Was it so my dear madam?" he enquired, again directing his eyes towards Mrs. Merton.

"Don't ask me such a question, I pray you, Mr. Leicester," she returned in painful embarrassment, "it would ill become me to heighten my husband's disappointment, by casting reflections on his conduct."

"Not at all, my dear lady, if those reflections be from the mirror of truth, and they are made without any unkind intention."

The eyes of the wife were filled with tears, and she turned aside to conceal them, whilst the husband vented his indignation in confused murmurs, of which broken sentences, such as—"freedom of an old school fellow," "taking to task,"—"some people deem every *misfortune a fault*," etc., could alone be heard.

"Take care that you are not just too late for the *next* train," Leicester exclaimed as he arose, and caught the hand of his old schoolmate. The pressure of that hand was not the only indication of sympathy and friendship Merton received, the palm became the recipient of a bit of soft paper of unmistakeable value, but the donor darted from the apartment to avoid comment or thanks.

"Charles is a generous, kind hearted fellow," Frank Merton observed, as his wife re-entered the parlour, after having opened the door for the exit of her guest, "a very generous, kind hearted fellow," and he threw a five pound Bank of England note on the table, "but he presumes too much upon our long acquaintance and the few years he is my senior for all that."

"He can have no other motive than your benefit," pleaded Mary, whose heart overflowed with gratitude at this unlooked-for supply.

"Nay, he always did like to dictate, even when we were boys together," Merton made answer, "and as I happen to be of a temper which cannot very well brook it, it is a rock upon which we are constantly splitting. I hope, however, to pay him, some day, the long debt I owe him."

This last sentence was another of the young man's mental soliloquies which was not intended to meet any ear, but it nevertheless caught that of his gentle wife, who ventured to observe in reply, "that she hoped, with him, that they might be able to return the various sums his friend's generosity had so often furnished them with in their utmost need," adding however, "that the debt of *gratitude* could never be fully cancelled."

Gaining wisdom by his past experience—a thing our hero was not prone to do—Merton was this time at the railway station ten minutes before the train started. His patience was however put to a severe test by an accident, which, though not disastrous in its consequences, caused a delay of nearly an hour. "Was there ever anything so untoward, to think that my watch should deceive me, and make me too late for the first train, and that this should occur to hinder me further." These were the murmurings in which he now indulged, but if they were overheard, they were totally disregarded, for each passenger was too intent on his or her own discomfort to have any sympathy for him.

The passengers in a steam carriage may not unaptly be compared to men in the general transactions of life. They meet, as it were accidentally, secure the most comfortable places for themselves, whirl on from station to station, engrossed by self, or at best by the narrow circle to which they form a centre—exchange a few words on the passing events, part again and take no further interest in each other's weal or woe. We must not, however, moralize by the way, but follow our hero in imagination to the abode of his dying relative.

Mr. Francis Gresham, had fifteen years previously purchased a handsome estate in the vicinity of the large manufacturing town in which he had amassed a

fortune. He was one of those men whom the more refined portion of the world denominate *money getting*, but to do him justice, it must be told that his gettings had not been at the expense of his probity. He was related to Frank Merton on the maternal side, and being his namesake, and only nephew, he took so much notice of him when a boy, that it was generally supposed that he intended to make him his heir. This expectation was, perhaps, the reason why the youth did not pursue his father's business, or take to any other, but it was not avowed. The indolent habits and impatient temper of Frank were, however, a serious barrier to his long remaining a favourite with his uncle. They had many disagreements; Mr. Gresham exacted more than his nephew thought his position warranted, he was also, as he imagined, too *free* with his *censures*, and too *parsimonious* with his *money*, and the result was, that a rupture took place which left the young man very little hope of ever more enjoying his favour.

The house was a plain brick structure in which convenience rather than elegance had been studied. Our hero, in his boyish days, had often amused himself with planning its fall, and in imagination rearing a tasteful villa in its stead. His thoughts wandered back to that period as he now approached, and the latent sparks of affection were re-kindled as he once more trod on ground associated with youthful feelings and youthful hopes. His summons with the ponderous knocker was answered by the old servant before spoken of, and the now doleful aspect of the usually cheerful old man, told an unwelcome tale ere the visitor had time to put a question,—

"Ah Master Francis, I wish you had been here two or three hours earlier," Jonathan exclaimed as he took him familiarly by the hand. "I fear you are *too late*."

"Does my uncle yet live?" Merton gasped forth.

"He *breathes*, and that is all we can say."

"Then I will see him," and suiting the action to the words, the young man was about to bound up the stairs leading to the chamber Mr. Gresham was wont to occupy when he was a frequent guest at the mansion. He was however forcibly delayed by his aged companion, who besought him with tears in his eyes, not to shorten the few minutes his uncle might yet have to live, by forcing himself unannounced into his presence.

"I have something to tell you, sir," he added, "before I can allow you to see him."

"Tell me quickly then, I cannot submit to a delay."

"But how comes it Master Francis," the old man asked, "that you were not in greater haste before, my master expected you by the first train, he was then perfectly calm and collected, and had you come it would have prevented the foul work that has been going on since."

"Foul work, what can you mean old man?"

"Well, sir, I don't know that I ought to call it so—perhaps Miss Gresham, being my master's own sister, had as great or a greater right to the property than you have, but I always stood your friend, Master Francis."

"Miss Gresham! Has my Aunt Gresham been here?"

"She is here *now*—she travelled post through the night and arrived early this morning. How she got the intelligence that my poor master was dying, I don't know. I am sure he didn't expect her, and I don't think he wanted to see her either, for you know sir, they were not on very good terms."

The young man bit his lip with rage, "And the avacious old fox has been wheedling my poor uncle out of his property, and ruining me," he said, bitterly.

"I fear so. The housemaid was sent to town in a mighty hurry for Mr. Cribb, master's man of law, and then the cook and she were called up into master's bed-

room. I guessed too well for what purpose, but they were bribed, I fancy, to be silent, for they wouldn't confess a syllable."

"This is foul work, Jonathan," Merton furiously exclaimed; "but I'll thwart her yet, I must see my uncle instantly."

The old man again expostulated, but it was now in vain, for, mounting three or four stairs at a stride, our hero, urged by anger and disappointment, pursued his way regardless and even thoughtless of consequences, to the chamber of his sick relative.

His progress was however impeded at the door by the gaunt figure of Miss Gresham. Though in the decline of life, she was possessed of masculine strength, and her powerful arm was now put forth to obstruct his entrance.

"Let me pass, woman," Merton vociferated.

A malignant smile was the only answer he received, and she still maintained her hold on the door, which effectually prevented his proceeding.

"Oh, for the sake of your poor uncle, be calm," cried Jonathan, who had by this time followed the young man up the stairs.

"Calm! when I am robbed of my right by ——"

"Hold, hold, Master Francis. Think of your dying uncle!"

"I must think too of my starving wife and children," Merton fiercely made answer, as with a desperate plunge he forced himself through the half open door. The suddenness of the movement caused Miss Gresham to stagger, and not being able to maintain her hold, she fell to the floor.

The young man had no intention of injuring his relative, he was only intent on reaching the bedside of the dying man, but gladly availing herself of the unhappy circumstance, Miss Gresham uttered loud screams, which summoned the other inmates of the house to the spot, and led them to suppose that her life had been attempted. She then gave peremptory orders that a constable might be sent for, that her nephew might be given in charge, but to her infinite chagrin, after Jonathan had stated the truth, no one seemed disposed to obey her.

Merton meanwhile rushed to the bed, and drawing the curtain which had before obstructed his view of the occupant, gazed almost frantically upon the wasted and haggard form of the old man; his eyes were still open, but they were glazed, and every feature bore the rigid aspect of dissolution. The sight caused an instantaneous revulsion of feeling in the breast of our hero. The solemnities of the scene overcame the stormy passions which had before possessed the mastery; remembering only that the pale cold form before him, was the brother of one, around whose memory his tenderest affections clung, and that he had caressed him in his childhood, and counselled him in his youth; moreover that his own waywardness and imprudence had been the cause of the estrangement which had subsequently taken place, he sank beside the bed and wept.

Merton spent the night in that chamber of death, now pacing it with rapid yet uneven strides, now stopping to look upon its ghastly occupant, then turning to the open window to catch the cool zephyrs, hoping thereby to allay the feverish throbbings of his temples. Jonathan was his companion, but the old man did not often interrupt him in his musings, he was too much absorbed by grief at the loss of a master he had for twenty years faithfully served and warmly loved. He took occasion, however, to tell our hero, that Mr. Gresham had been much disappointed when he found he had not availed himself of the first means of conveyance, that he had expressed anger, which he, Jonathan, had attempted to avert, by supposing it possible that the

letter containing the information of his illness had miscarried. This attempt at exculpation had, he said, effectually made Miss Gresham his enemy, and from that time she had studiously avoided him.

Miss Gresham issued the orders for her brother's interment with the air of one who already felt herself mistress of the mansion. She gave her nephew many intimations that his presence was not necessary, and that his society might be dispensed with. Frank, notwithstanding, resolved to stay and witness the reading of the will. He could not doubt that a testament in her favour had been drawn up previously to his arrival, his only hope lay in finding proofs that his uncle was not in a state of sanity when the last will was signed, but this Jonathan discouraged, by averring his belief to the contrary.

The day appointed for the solemn obsequies arrived, and Miss Gresham came forth arrayed in the habiliments of mourning, which ill accorded with the triumphant smile on her countenance. The emotions of her nephew were varied: he was, by turns, burning with anger and penetrated with grief and contrition. The body consigned to the tomb, the usual forms succeeded—forms Merton's impatience could but ill brook—at length, however, the confirmation of his fears came: a will bearing the date of the day on which Mr. Gresham died was produced, wherein the bulk of the property of the deceased was bequeathed to his sister, Margaret Gresham. A handsome annuity was settled on Jonathan Brown, as (so it was expressed) a testimony of respect for his faithful services: small legacies were added for the other servants; and the sum of five hundred pounds to Francis Merton.

The possession of five hundred pounds would ten days previously have seemed an immense fortune to our hero, but the fact of his having been, as he deemed, unjustly deprived of more than twice as many thousands now preyed like a canker-worm at his heart. He stopped not another night in the mansion which he had once imagined would be his own, but returned to London with the full determination to spend his uncle's bequest in law proceedings, which might, he thought, eventually secure him his rights.

Merton had communicated the events we have made known to the reader, by letters to his wife and his friend, but he said not a word concerning his resolve until he was seated between them in his quiet little parlour. He had a presentiment that the proposal would not be very well received (a presentiment which was nearly akin to an inward acknowledgment of its imprudence) and he made several attempts to give it utterance ere he accomplished it. At last, however, the truth came out, and he tried to nerve himself against the opposition he was certain it would meet with.

Mary was silent, but the sorrowful expression which overcast her features too clearly revealed her feelings, and it must be acknowledged also, that that sorrowful look had a more powerful effect in shaking his resolution than the prudential arguments which he anticipated from his quondam school-mate.

"So you would throw away hundreds as if they were trash, because they don't happen to be thousands," Leicester dryly remarked.

"Not I—so far from it, I think I shall make the best possible use of them."

"If filling the pockets of the lawyers be making the best possible use of money, I grant you are right, but if you take my advice, my friend, you'll keep it in your own in preference."

Merton attempted to smile, but he was really much chagrined by the bantering strain which Leicester had taken up. "Of what use will five hundred pounds be to me," he peevishly asked. "If I should speculate

with it in any line of business, I am such an unlucky fellow I should be sure to lose it."

"That argument certainly tells against your speculating with it in the attempt to invalidate your aunt's claim"—His friend remarked, "However, I am not so fond of talking of good and bad luck as you are. I believe we, in a great measure, carve our own destinies, and that if we were honestly to trace all the circumstances preceding our misfortunes, we should, in nine cases out of ten, find they were the result of some inadvertence or folly of our own."

"You use the word *our*, meaning me to place the letter *y* before it and make it *your*," Merton laughingly observed.

"Nay, I don't mean any such thing," Leicester rejoined, "yours is not an isolated case, but if you are disposed to make my remarks personal, so much the better. They are more likely to come home. Now, my dear fellow," he added earnestly, "do search for a few minutes into the *causes* of those events which you denominate misfortunes—don't be afraid to bring out the truth; for, depend upon it, it will be to your future advantage."

Our hero winced a little under these searching propositions, but made no reply.

"I do not deem the loss of your uncle's large property," Leicester resumed, "so great a misfortune after all. Riches obtained without any exertion of our own are of doubtful utility. They oftener prove a curse than a blessing to their owner; but for a young man to form habits of promptitude and punctuality, for him to act with decision, and maintain that right balance of mind which will enable him to estimate the value of things as they stand connected with the plain path of duty—not with his inclination or the false judgment of the world—these, my friend, are of the utmost importance, and until you acknowledge and act upon the same, you will never surmount the difficulties under which you have for so many years laboured."

Merton still remained silent, but it was obvious that he listened with less impatience than heretofore.

"It was my lot, you know, Frank," his guest resumed, "to be cast upon my own resources early in life, and I attribute my subsequent success principally to that circumstance. I was learning lessons of prudence while most youths of my own age were sowing their wild oats. But *you* may acquire them at a later period; it is never too late to be wise. Take my advice, my friend, think no more of the acquisition of a fortune which will, depend on it, after all, prove a mere *ignis fatuus*—secure the good you possess by seriously considering in what manner it may be best appropriated for the comfort of your family—make a vigorous effort to shake off slothful and enervating habits, and you will find this five hundred pounds of more value than fifty thousand."

Frank Merton only pressed the hand of his friend in answer; but that warm pressure expressed more than language could have done; when the proud nature of man will give an indication of gratitude for reproof, it is more than half way towards amendment.

Our hero was not naturally deficient in firmness; but over indulgence in childhood and long-cherished habits of indolent self-gratification had obtained such a powerful influence, that he had yielded to them as of necessity, without ever asking himself whether a strong effort on his part might not overcome them. There is, however, nothing so animating as the consciousness that we are acting right; and this consciousness now gave vigour to the exertions he made to counteract the evils from which he had so long and so severely suffered. His sincerity and strength of purpose were shortly after put to the test. An offer was made from a respectable com-

mercial establishment to receive him as a junior partner, but as he could afford but a trifling premium, great exertion and constant application were required. These he was now determined to give, and the result was, the confidence of the seniors, which led to some diminution of labour and larger profits.

A happy change has taken place in our hero's circumstances: perseverance combined with good natural abilities, have conducted him to competence. Now, in the meridian of life, he cautions the youth with whom he has intercourse to avoid the quicksands upon which he foundered; taking every opportunity of encouraging that decision and promptitude in action which precludes the possibility of being *just too late*.

WHAT THE BEGGAR SAID*

BY EDWARD YOUL.

I did not dream upon a bed,
Nor cast my limbs beneath a roof,
When, hungering after wheaten bread,
I fell asleep and bought a loaf.
It was a meal of Christian food,
Not treasured scraps for dog or cat:
Hearts leap at unexpected good;
Mine leapt and gave God thanks for that.

I took my seat beneath a tree,
I broke the bread beside a stream;
O Heav'n above, be good to me,
For this great good was but a dream!
But in my dream the loaf was sweet;
I ate the crust; I ate the crumb;
I ate, and had enough to eat,
And could have given alms of some.

I woke;—the morning sky was grey;
A drizzling rain was falling fast:
I rose to spend another day,
A vagrant, as I spent the last:
My rags were dragged in the rain,
The rheumatism gnawed my bones;
Stiff joints are got, and ache, and pain,
From breezy beds on London stones.

Though older men than me are strong,
Yet I am miserably old;
For I have dragged my limbs along,
Twelve winters, through the damp and cold.
The Northwind smites me as it blows;
The Eastwind shakes my feeble frame;
And in the suns, and in the snows,
My place is on the earth the same.

I was no vagrant in my prime;
There stood a house near Middle-row
It was my home in happier time,
But that was many years ago.
Misfortune fell, as falls a frost,
Unseasonably from the sky:
It blighted all, but blighted most
My name, my fame, my energy.

I do not often tell the tale.
One night the rumbling engines came;
Down poured the sparks like burning hail;
Up shot a crazy spire of flame:
The water hissed upon the floors;
The rafters broke;—the roof fell in:—
My neighbours spurned me from their doors.
Accusers said, I did the sin.

As God's own face I hope to see,
I know not how the flames began;
Nor how suspicion fixed on me,
I could not understand, nor can.
I did *not* light the kindling match,
Nor waited till the street was clear;
I was *not* set upon the watch
For spies—I had no spies to fear.

They banished me across the sea;
I bear the brand, I feel the shame:
My cheeks confess the infamy—
Old convict,—yes, I know my name.
Returning after many a year,
I found no friends to give me bread;
I had no home, I felt despair
Sink down upon my heart, like lead.

I loathe the bread that beggars eat,
The sturdy rogues who fear to raise
Their arms in labour, whom the street
Sees idly crouching all their days.
God meant the stout heart to endure;
He made the arms for labour strong;
I loathe the man, or rich, or poor,
Who will not help the world along.

Alas, nor work, nor post, nor place,
I got;—to whom could I refer?
Who knew me, knew of my disgrace,
And would not give a character.
I halted upon Ludgate-hill,
I stood there with uncovered head,
I stretched my hands, against my will,
To passers by, and asked for bread.
Instinctively the brave man turns
From him who begs, and eyes askance
The slothful wretch, who never earns
The bread that is his sustenance.
It should be so, for I believe
This scripture, graven on my breast,
That men, whatever they receive,
Own what they earn, and steal the rest.

I drop upon the ground, and sleep,
Or seek the shelter of a shed;
Or walk all night, and strive to keep
The limbs alive, that should be dead.
I stagger in the Christmas street,
Struck senseless by the power of frost;
I hunger after refuse meat,
And pine, when men enjoy the most.

I am no beggar in the spring:
Primroses bloom along the lanes;
I sell them, and the violets bring
An independence for my pains,
I gather groundsel for the birds;
Ripe plantain has produced me food;
I ask no alms, with plaintive words,
In summer, from the multitude.

I swear I have no beggar's heart,
For idleness is not my crime:
I should rejoice to bear my part
In the redemption of the time.
Or in the rear, or in the van,
Give me a place, and I will prove
A vagrant still may be a man,
And love he will return with love.
Old vagabond, who bade thee speak?
Thy dismal rags are drenched with rain;
Retreat into the night, and seek
Thy bed upon the earth again.
Then, dreaming, break the wheaten bread
Beneath a tree, beside a stream,
With gratitude that God has fed
The starving beggar in a dream!

*These verses are the substance of a statement made by a London vagrant to a friend of my own.—E. Y.