

The National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the interests of the Soldiers and Sailors of the late war, and all Pensioners of the United States.

GEORGE E. LEMON & CO., } Vol. I, No. 7.
Editors and Proprietors.

WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL, 1878.

TERMS, FIFTY CENTS PER YEAR.
Single Copies, 5 Cents in Currency or Postage Stamps.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year of our Lord, 1878, by George E. Lemon & Co., in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

The Telephone.

The world stood still for a thousand years,
And crept for a thousand more—
This wonderful world with wings for ears,
Like the Messenger-god of yore—
And winged feet and winged wand,
And a wing on its either hand,
And more than Mercury wore.

It bristles and rides a furnace's foal,
With iron and hammer for sire;
Great clouds of white from their nostrils roll,
And it feeds its horses fire!
They are blooded stock, the engines swift;
Beneath their heels the distances drift
Like snows from the Arctic pole!

They rattle across meridian lines,
And down the parallels play;
They marry together the palms and pines—
A thousand miles in a day,
The world has trained a wonderful wire,
A nerve of a route for articulate fire,
And taught the lightnings to say:

"Dear Mary, be mine!"—"Car load of swine!"
"One ton of cheese!"—"Maria dead!"
"Joy! It's a boy!"—"I'm coming to dine!"
"Send soap!"—"She's married to Fred!"
The blindest of words like angels fly
A thousand miles in the flash of an eye,
You hear before they are said!

What happened at ten you know at nine,
And you away in the West,
They distance along the lightning line
The sun in his golden rest.
They talk to-day in audible tone,
The telegraph turns the telephone,
And parted lovers are blest!

Think of a girl in a lonely hour,
No bean in a forty miles,
She sits by the tube of talking power,
She thinks a minute and smiles,
"I'll call my John," you fancy her say,
"He lives but a hundred miles away,
And banish the weary whiles."

Behold them at the end of the line,
This John and his black-eyed boon;
His head and her's to the wire incline,
And she sings him Bonny Doon.
He sighs for the only thing amiss:
He has no voice, but then he can—kiss!
He might as well be in the moon!
For emptier than the east wind's laugh
Is a lover's kiss by telegraph!

The Sphinx—A Mystery.

BY J. MURDO.

I.

I am by profession a barrister, and as there seems to be a popular notion that all young barristers who write their experiences, or otherwise figure in polite literature, are briefless, it may be right to say that I am not altogether a briefless barrister, having held several briefs, and earnestly expecting more.

My friend Charley Deben, from the city, came up to my chambers one day last December, bringing me an invitation from his family to go home with him and spend Christmas. I had been a good many times with Charley to his paternal roof-tree in Essex, and I never failed to greatly enjoy myself each time. I liked the old people, and also his brothers and sisters whom I saw. They were true and natural English country people, who had grown, as it were, out of the soil, like the violets by the hazel-roots or the May-blossoms on the hedgerows. But there was a secret attraction for me in that home which outweighed all the rest a hundred-fold. Charley's grown-up sister Ethel had fairly entered into possession of the vacant space in the core of my affections. The very first time I met her she exerted her peculiar influence over me. What young man does not know the tender anticipation with which he looks forward to meeting the sister of his friend, whom he has heard about more than once before in lovable terms from her brother, and who already has excited a gentle interest in his breast? It is with this feeling that I first encountered Miss Ethel Deben. I had gone with Charley to his home, "Oak Hall," Essex, to spend a week in wild-fowl shooting, and it was then I met her for the first time. Her almost perfect features, her rich black hair, her bright complexion, her dark blue eyes, in which truth and tenderness seemed mirrored, her quiet, ladylike manners and sweet smile, had captivated my heart. Succeeding visits had only completed my thralldom, and her dear image was never far from my thoughts; it disputed my attention with files of parchment deeds, and perpetually obtruded itself amidst dry legal clauses and references to precedents, and was as much out of place amongst them as a picture of Arcadian life in a laboratory of physical apparatus. It was rather a hopeless passion of mine, however, for Ethel Deben was not only beautiful, amiable, and admired, but also well dowered, and I calculated, with legal acumen, but at the same time with very small satisfaction, that such a prize as she was would soon be carried off. My own circumstances were, at best, only promising, and I could only keep in the background while some more fortunate individual, whose bread had been buttered for him by a kinder fortune, played a leading part and won the rare meed. But although I kept carefully in the background, I was only too glad to avail myself of Charley Deben's invitation to spend Christmas in her society. Like the moth, I was drawn invincibly to the candle, and so I went down with him to Oak Hall, happy to see and be near her again, but guarding myself cautiously against any betrayal of attachment.

We arrived at Oak Hall on Christmas Eve. We had

found a trap waiting for us at the nearest railway station, and had driven six miles in the dark, through a wooded upland country, to the house, which stood on a hill surrounded by a park with some fine old timber. It was a wet, inflated, boisterous night, and we were gratified to see the warm light of the windows of the old family home appear through the trees at last. Charley urged on the horse, and we soon drew up in front of the house—a square, comfortable, old red brick mansion, with a pillared portico, many plain, oblong windows, tall chimney tops, and a stone coat-of-arms over the doorway. Two great cedars stood sentinel at each end, and spread their black flakes over the lawn.

Mr. Deben, a hale, hearty old gentleman, was ready to receive us at the door, and Mrs. Deben met us in the lobby, where Charley was soon engaged with his younger brothers and sisters in a scramble for presents. When I entered the drawing-room I found a good number of people there, one or two of whom I had met before, and others who were strangers to me. Ethel Deben was the first to meet me and shake hands. She came forward with her usual frank manner, and at once introduced me to another smiling beauty who followed her. Miss Rose Herrick, Ethel's friend, was a fair Saxon type of beauty, all roses and lilies and dimples. Her hair was of a flaxen brown, but soft as silk, and wavy over the temples. When she laughed her blooming face was the incarnation of merriment and fun. Another of the guests to whom I was introduced for the first time was a young squire called Heywood, a fine brown-haired, broad-shouldered young fellow, with many fine, brown and broad acres to match. He looked and was a good fellow, I am obliged to confess it; but I felt little desire to converse with him. The fact is, he damped my spirits for a little while. I was foolish enough to feel the slightest shade of jealousy at seeing him, without any reason, I own; but love does not wait for reasons. On calmly considering the matter, however, I forced myself to dismiss any feeling of jealousy from my mind, because I had no right to entertain it. If young Mr. Heywood admired Ethel Deben, it was no business of mine. "Let it be so," I said to myself; and I determined to be as cheerful under the circumstances as if no thought of Ethel Deben had ever agitated my bosom. So while Heywood lounged very close to Ethel, I sat down just as close to Rose Herrick. We became friends in a moment, and very soon we were laughing gaily together over repartees that seemed to flow (at least, from me,) with unusual copiousness and brilliancy. The more Rose laughed at my jokes, the better I was pleased; and I was not sorry to see that Mr. Heywood said little to Ethel that could be called amusing. I fear I was jealous still.

"Oh, by-the-by, Mr. Temple," said Rose to me. "I ought to tell you—your bedroom is the haunted room. Do you know there is a haunted room in this old house, with a wonderful ghost in it, or voice, or something? Ethel will tell you the story. On former occasions the ghost has made its appearance, or the voice has been heard about Christmas time; so don't be surprised if you hear a queer voice talking to you to-night—a weird elin voice, complaining of its sad fate, and warning you of future ills."

"I should like to talk with a spirit," I said. "I should like to know my future lot—at least, one or two things about it. I wish some kind angel would deign to enlighten me about them. But the days of genii, and wizards, and magic glasses are past, and angels' visits are very, very few and far between."

"Oh, no, they are not," said Rose, "if we only had eyes to see them; you will believe me yet. But how about the automaton 'Zoe?' I have never seen her yet. What is she like? They say the old automaton 'Psycho' has fallen in love with her, and is quite off his head."

II.

I thought very little about ghosts, or indeed any thing else, when I got to my chamber that night. I was too tired for thinking, and very soon went to bed. Next morning was Christmas Day, and, according to all immemorial legends and tales, the country ought to have been lying under a close white coverlet of snow; the holly-trees, with their red berries, should have been stuffed with the powdery crystals, and the lanes should have looked like the galleries of some ivory palace under the intricate fretwork of snow-laced boughs. But our Christmas Day was mild and almost balmy—a green yule. A light gray fog lay in the hollows, a mellow sunshine enlivened the moist air and gilded the bare twigs of the trees against the blue sky. It was a quiet, still, genial day after the boisterous night before, and there was a sabbath calm about it in keeping with the time.

In the forenoon we all went to service in the village church. I walked there beside Miss Ethel, and returned along with Miss Rose, exchanging places with Mr. Heywood. It was only a short walk across the park to church, so we did not have much conversation; but it was a happy time for me. Ethel seemed so kind, charming, and withal sensible, that I wished the time would never change, the walk never come to an end. Rose was in capital humor, and asked me if I had not had any communications from the spirits during the night. I said they might have been in legions round my night-cap, playing at bo-peep in my ears, and pirouetting on my nose, for all I knew or cared. I was so tired out last night and had slept so soundly.

"I see you are a skeptic," she said; "you are spirit-proof. Even 'Allie Slade' would not convince you."
"I am a lawyer," I replied, "and like to see black on white."

"But I suppose you would be satisfied with white on black, and that is what 'Allie' would give you with her slate."

"I think we lawyers rather exposed 'Alice's slate-writing.'"

"That is matter of opinion. You had popular prejudice on your side, and played upon it to great purpose. You couldn't explain the raps, and lights, and the ringing of bells. Ah! there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are comprehended in Coke and Blackstone."

In the afternoon Charley Deben and his brother Frank, who had just come home from abroad, Mr. Heywood, and I took a long walk, and returned to the Hall in time to dress for dinner, which was served earlier than usual.

At dinner, I found myself between Rose Herrick and Ethel Deben. The meal was a substantial specimen of old English Christmas Cheer, refined by modern taste and science. We were a merry party. Charley Deben and his brother Frank were especially entertaining. The host and hostess looked the picture of good-humored happiness; and the old vicar of the parish, with his ruddy but refined features, and thin gray locks, smiled again and again at the ready sallies of youth, and toasted Ethel with a grave but fatherly courtesy that was almost a benediction.

After dinner we had music and games, dancing and acting charades. Often during the dance my eyes furtively sought out Ethel, and stole a gaze at her radiant beauty. If her eyes chanced to turn in my direction, I was quick to lower mine or avert them. I danced several times with her, and found her ever the same: charming, gentle, natural, and true, with apparently no vestige of affectation in her whole demeanor. Heywood led her to the floor a great many times, and seemed very attentive to her. Her manner was at least as gracious to him as to me. If any jealous feeling crossed me, I sought out Rose Herrick as soon as I could, in order to regain a proper tone.

Supper was another meal almost as substantial as dinner. By this time the old vicar and one or two more had taken their departure, so that the party was smaller, but even more convivial. It was not very late when we broke up for the night—at least, I do not think it was. When I got to the sitting room, from which my bedroom opened, I drew an easy-chair before the fire and sank into it. I was in that delicious frame of mind induced by good cheer well seasoned with good wine, good company but above, all with love. I was deeply in love with Ethel Deben. There was no questioning it. My chamber was a cosy, old-fashioned place, with high wainscoting of carved oak, blackened by time. There was a quaint look about the ancient place, and seemed to me the very acme of comfort on a winter night. A fagot fire blazed and cracked cheerily in the grate, and cast flickering lights on the furniture and damask curtain hangings of the window; for I had turned the lamp low in order to recede within my own thoughts. The wind, which had been laid all day, now began to bestir itself and hurry round the chimney-tops. I felt inspired with a poem—a poem expressing my present happiness and my love. My heart struggled for utterance, and a feeling of inspiration grew upon me. I was possessed by the muse. A little writing table stood near, with writing materials all handy, and kindly provided for my use by a thoughtful hostess, or perhaps by Ethel herself. I drew it close to my elbow and prepared myself to write. The thoughts came glowing, but disjointed and incoherent, from my heart. I wrote them down as they came, intending to put them into verse form afterwards. I wished now only to express my confused happiness and passion. I covered sheet after sheet in a few moments with the rapidity of a short-hand writer, and then I stopped, having worked off the superabundant feeling. I began to declaim to myself what I had written and to polish it into form.

"Vision of Beauty, gliding through my life,"

I commenced, in a fine and elevated voice:

"Ethereal goddess haunting dismal groves,
And bringing to men lost, in the earthly haze,
A glimpse of azure fields and ivory gates
(golden rivers,
In the ideal regions, too much forgot,
Divine Ethel!"

I stopped to correct this into "Ethel divine," and almost fancied that I heard a sound of mocking laughter quite close to my face. I listened, and could hardly believe my senses, but I seemed still to catch a light laugh—a faint, tiny, muffled kind of laugh, but yet perfectly distinct. It seemed to be in the air and to hover over the table. There was nothing on the table but my writing-paper and blotting-book, the ink-bottle, a pen-holder, and a pen-wiper. The holder was a representation of Cleopatra's Needle, open at the top to insert the handles of pens; and the wiper was made up in the form of an Egyptian sphinx, and was at the same time a pincushion. It was a neat little sphinx in dark red cloth, with a woman's head. The body served for the pincushion, and the pedestal for the wiper. That was all the table contained. I fancied I must have been dreaming, or perhaps I had taken too much wine. I was a sleepy fool, and ought to get off to bed as fast as possible; but the mysterious voice again seemed to break silence. This time it spoke, and seemed to issue from the sphinx, whose impassive face regarded me with a calm and rigid solemnity.

"Child of mortals," said the sphinx, "know that the immortals brook no comparison with things of clay. Cease the futile ravings, thy incomprehensible cries of a