CROCUSES.

Yellow and purple and white,
Snow-white and lilac and gold,
Crocuses, my crocuses,
Peering up from the mould;
These like fingers of flame,
These in a raiment of snow,
And these of the dusky hue of thoughts
Cherished from long ago.

Last year, last month, last week,
My patch of garden was bare,
No glimmer of green or gleam of gold
Or sign of life was there;
It was only this morning early
That Spring came by this way,
And the gifts she leaves as a token
Were only mine to-day.

She delayed and delayed her coming,
For March was fierce and strong,
The bitter wind of his fury
Kept Winter here too long;
But at last this golden morning
Stirred every patient wing,
And down the shaft of a sunbeam
Glided the gentle Spring.

Hark, how the sparrows twitter,
For joy of the warmer sun!
They began their mating a month ago,
And their nesting will soon be done;
But the thrush has a gladder welcome,
Which he'll sing in the mellow eves,
I have heard him trying it over
In the trees forlorn of leaves.

Forlorn? Not now, nor ever,
Since Spring is here again,
And crocuses, my crocuses,
Herald her happy reign;
Yellow and white and purple,
Snow-white, blue-veined, and gold,
The signs of a new possession
That is old as the world is old.—

New life, new love, new leafage,
Forever old and young,
In all the flowers that open,
In all the songs that are sung;
And hers is the beautiful mission
To blossom and bloom and sing,
My crocus-bringer, my passion,
The Maid of the Months, the Spring.
—(George Cotterell.

THE BLACK KNIGHT.

BEING THE ACCOUNT OF AN EXCITING GAMES OF CHESS.

BY RAYMOND ALLEN.

A storm of wind and rain had come on suddenly, and, as there were no cabs to be got near at hand, there was nothing for it but to set out on foot. I was going to dine with old Colonel Bradshaw, whose acquaintance I had lately made at the local chess club, and I was due at half-past 7, so I pulled my coat collar up to my ears and started off through the muddy streets. Several times in the course of my exceedingly unpleasant walk the foulness of the weather had given rise to a wish on my part that I had invented some excuse for staying by my own comfortable fireside. Once arrived, however, the cheery welcome of the old soldier quickly dispersed all regrets for my own hearth, and restored me to the good-humor necessary for the proper appreciation of a good dinner.

Colonel Bradshaw had served in India during the time of the Mutiny, had received a severe wound in the left leg, which still caused him to limp, and had led to his comparatively early retirement from the service. He had returned to England on his retirement, and had lately leased a snug little house in our town, which he apparently intended to occupy for the rest of his days in the quiet enjoyment of peaceful obscurity. I had made his acquaintance, as I have said, at the chess club, where, I believe, he used to spend most of his evenings, and where he had earned the reputation of a decidedly strong player. I had not as yet encountered him over the board.

In his note of invitation the Colonel had asked me to bring my men with me, as he had left his own at the clubrooms, on the occasion of a match for which they had been called into requisition, and it was accordingly my set of chessmen which we now arranged in the customary order of battle. To my annoyance, however, I found that one of my black knights was missing, and I cast my eyes round the room in search of some article on which we might for the occasion confer the spurs of knighthood. On the Colonel's writing-table, acting as a paper-weight, I saw the very object we were in want of—a black knight. Not of the orthodox Staunton pattern, it is true, nor indeed were its grotesquely protruding eyes and maliciously grinning mouth characteristic of any pattern with which I was familiar; but still it was undeniably a black chess knight, and would serve our turn admirably. My host hesitated, and even seemed the least trifle annoyed when I suggested the expediency of pressing it into the service. The beast certainly looked incongruous among my Stauntons, but something in his human eyes and lifelike expression of malicious humor caught my fancy, and I asked to be allowed to play with the black men. The Colonel acquiesced, but declined the privilege of first move, which usually goes with the white. We accordingly drew for the move, and I won it.

Led partly by my fancy for the black knight, and partly "to take my opponent out of the books," I began the game by making the paper-weight first take the field. As I did so, I fancied my host gave a little start, and, as he certainly appeared to be annoyed at my irregular opening, I was sorry that I had begun by a move which I supposed he objected to on the ground that it generally leads to a close game. He said nothing, however, and the game was continued for some time by very ordinary moves on both sides, and presently I began to be absorbed in the study of the position and in the endeavor to gauge the strength of my opponent. For a time he seemed to play a decidedly good game, and in spite of continuous concentration on my part, to maintain some superiority of position. Presently, however, he embarked on a series of moves which appeared to give me a decisive advantage and to have no more rational object than the capture of my swarthy champion at a ruinous sacrifice of his own pieces. This eccentric proceeding puzzled me, and, added to his previous hesitation about using the substitute, excited my curiosity. So, relinquishing the object of winning the game in the ordinary way, I devoted all my skill to the defence of my king's knight, as though it were a piece coiffe with which I was pledged to give checkmate. Rooks were sacrificed for bishops, and bishops exchanged for inoffensive pawns, while the kings stood disregarded on their knights' squares, and the fight raged hotly round the black knight, who seemed to bear a charmed life and sprang nimbly about the board, always evading my opponent's headlong attempts at his capture. At last, in desperation, he offered the bribe of the white queen, but I obstinately refused at any price to part with my dusky cavalier, and a few moves later brought the game to a successful end with a smothered mate, the very bone of contention inflicting the deathblow.

The Colonel leaned back in his armchair and for some minutes continued silently to blow out thick clouds of smoke. After a pause, during which his brow was compressed into a frown, as though by the contemplation of some bewildering enigma to which he could not find the clew, he broke silence with the remark that "there were more things in heaven and earth——" and then again relapsed into silence in apparent forgetfulness of my presence. As he made no further remark for some time, I rose from my seat, and, muttering something about its being late, prepared to take my leave. "Wait a moment; look here," said the Colonel, rising to stop me with the air of a man who had formed a sudden determination, and pointing to the board, "I dare say you wonder what on earth I was driving at in that game?"

"Well, you appeared to me to be driving mainly at that outlandish black knight instead of at my king," I replied.

"Exactly, and perhaps I ought to apologize for having spoiled the game by giving way to an absurd fancy; but if you will sit down again and refill your pipe, I will tell you a curious experience which I had many years ago in India, and which you will perhaps admit as an excuse for my eccentric play to-night."

"Nothing I should like better," I replied; "for I confess you have considerably aroused my curiosity."

"Well, then, I think I can partly satisfy it;" and my host threw a fresh log on to the fire, stretched himself in the chair, and began.

"I don't know whether you take any interest in such subjects as hypnotism, thought-reading, and so on; but if you do you may perhaps be able to form some scientific theory to explain my story. Personally, I used to be very unbelieving in such matters, but my skepticism was considerably modified by the adventure I am going to tell you of. Very well, then. On one occasion in India, many years ago, I had got leave from my regiment for a few weeks in order to join a shooting expedition which had been got up by one of my greatest friends, a man many years older than I was then, and of much higher rank in the service. When, however, I arrived at our appointed meeting-place, I found my friend, the General, preparing for a more warlike excursion against a marauding tribe who had lately been extending their cattle raids across our frontier. The shooting expedition having fallen through I readily accepted the General's suggestion that I should accompany his force as a volunteer, and see some sport of a more exciting kind. A common risk, even when comparatively insignificant, inclines men to readier cordiality toward the companions they may shortly be going to lose, and I was soon on excellent terms with the other officers, who were as pleasant a set of fellows as I have ever met. Nothing of any interest happened till we were across the enemy's frontier and the force was encamped one night under a brilliant moon on a hill overlooking a thickly wooded valley.

"I was strolling round the camp with a cigar, when I was joined by one of the younger officers, who, not being on duty, was refreshing himself after the day's march in the same way, and we continued our walk together. We stopped to admire the view at a point where we could look down on the valley, and presently we fell into an argument as to whether a bright surface which caught the moonlight in a glade of the wood below was water or a smooth slab of rock. It happened that my companion particularly prided himself on the keeness of his sight, and a few days before had won a small bet from me on the subject. I, too, thought that I had good eyes, and, feeling sure that he was wrong in his contention that he could detect a gentle ripple on the surface in dispute, I offered him a second bet that it was rock, and proposed to settle the question by myself going down to the spot. He accepted my bet, and, as he was not at liberty to leave camp, I gayly started down the hill alone, telling him with a laugh to have the stakes ready by the time I returned, and never for a moment supposing that I was running any risk in the affair.

"I rapidly made my way down over the short grass of the hillside, and, marking the direction of the spot in question, soon plunged into the darkness of the wood, the cavernous depth of whose shadows was enhanced by an occasional glint of moonshine. I am not naturally superstitious. I have no particular aversion to midnight graveyards or haunted rooms, but I must confess I felt an uncommonly disagreeable feeling of something like dread when I got inside that wood. Everything was absolutely dead and still. Not the faintest rustle of a leaf, not the crick of an insect, nor murmur of water, but dense and awful blackness! It excited my nerves. I almost imagined I saw black shapes moving under the trees, though it was quite impossible that anything not luminous should show against such an inky background. I felt my way cautiously, stopping constantly to hear if anything was moving near me. What cracks the twigs under my feet gave! What a resounding crash reverberated in the gloomy shades when my foot set a loose stone rolling! My nerve was gone, and I felt horribly uncomfortable. I would gladly have paid my bet to be back again in camp, but I was bound to go through with my search now that I had once begun, and I should make myself a butt for the wit of the regiment if I turned back half-way to confess myself scared by the dark. After a longer time and with more difficulty than I had anticipated, I reached the slab of rock, for such it proved to be. Here I was clear of the trees, and I stood for a few moments in the bright moonlight, so that my friend above, who I knew would be watching for me to emerge from the shadow, might see that it was not water on which I stood. Then I turned, and struck out energetically for the camp.

"I had not, however, pushed my way far through the undergrowth when I was tripped up suddenly by what I at first took to be some stout creeper or protruding root. I fell forward on my hands, and had not time to get on my feet again before I learned that it was no accident which had overthrown me. Before I had time to offer the least resistance, or even to utter a shout for help, I felt myself seized round the neck by a grip like a vise; a few seconds more, and I was gagged, bound, and carried off through the forest, quickly, but in silence. As soon as subsiding astonishment left room for any other sensation, I felt a paroxysm of rage, as well against my own folly in running into such a trap as against my sudden assailants, whom I cursed none the less heartily for my inability to utter a sound. The futility of passion under the circumstances gradually subdued me, if not to philosophic fortitude, at least to sufficient calmness to speculate on my probable fate and on the chances of escape. For some time I seemed to be borne down hill and over irregular ground; then we must have emerged from the jungle on to more even ground, for the pace became quicker and smoother. This may have gone on for some twenty minutes or half an hour, and then my captors came to a halt. I was set on my feet, and my eyes and mouth released from their bandages. This change of condition did not, however, conduce to my comfort or reassurance; for, while an armed native on each side held me firmly by my pinioned arms, a third presented a huge horse pistol at my head at a yard's distance. For a few instants I endured an agony of suspense. I involuntarily shut my eyes, and waited for the bullet to crash through my brain.

"I have met many men who have at some time or other looked death pretty closely in the face, and you must often have heard it said that a man's mind at such moments reviews in a flash long periods of past time with an almost supernatural vividness of perception, but I didn't feel anything of this. I only felt that I might be dead in another second, and then, with a determination to 'die game,' which was rather an animal sensation than an articulate thought, I set my teeth and opened my eyes to meet those of my enemy. The pistol was still directed at my head, and the grim Indian still kept his finger on the trigger. I faced him defiantly, and, as though unwilling to change a dramatic situation which interested him, he still kept the same menacing posture, while I longed for the flash and the end before my nerve should fail.

"At last he spoke. He spoke a dialect which I only imperfectly followed, but I understood him to say that if I tried to escape I should be shot on the spot. I felt no confidence that I was not being reserved for a more horrible death, but the instinct of self-preservation kept me passive. When at last the pistol was lowered, and I no longer stood in momentary expectation of death, I looked around me and perceived that I was in the middle of a group of some half dozen Indians, and as many horses. On to one of these latter I was lifted, and secured in the saddle by leathern thongs, my captors not choosing to give me the chance of escape by leaving me the management of my horse.

"After about an hour's hard riding, during which the rapid motion and the blowing of the cool night air on my face and hands acted as a sedative on my racked nerves, we reached the encampment of the hostile tribe against which the expedition had been sent out. And now came the strangest part of my adventures; the part which bears on my eccentric play to-night."

Here Colonel Bradshaw paused to stir the smouldering log in the grate to a bright blaze, and then, staring into the fire and keeping the poker in his hands as he leaned forward in his chair, went on with his story, more slowly at first, but with growing animation of voice, which gradually rose to the eloquence of excitement as he seemed to forget his immediate surroundings, and to live once again through the distant scene he was describing.

"The human brain," he resumed, "is incapable, I imagine, of continuing to experience any intense sensation for very long. It reaches the maximum tension, and then one set of perceptive faculties becomes deadened. The previous incidents of the night had exhausted my capacity for fear, and, as I was led before the chief of the tribe to hear his decree concerning me, I awaited the decision with indifference. I was keenly alive to every detail of my surroundings, and noted the expression of every face, and yet I seemed somehow to have lost my own individuality; to be watching myself as an actor in a scene with which I had no personal concern, but only looked at from some outside point of view. The moon was now hidden behind a hill, but some twenty torches lit up the spot with their lurid flames. The party that had caught me had obviously been sent out to reconnoitre the movements of the English force, and the chief had been beguiling the time of their absence with nothing less than a game of chess.

"I was the less surprised at the nature of his pastime, as I knew that the game was widely spread in India, and had played it with natives myself, and knew in what points their game differed from our European rules. The chief's antagonist was a man whom I imagined, though I can't say exactly what suggested the idea, to be the priest of the tribe. He was shorter than the others, but his face suggested an extraordinarily active mind, and this, combined with his regularity of feature, would have made him a strikingly handsome type if it had not been for the fearful malignity of his expression. I wish I could give you some faint idea of that man's face, for it was the most terribly sinister face I have ever seen. His back had been turned toward me at first, but from the moment when I met the scrutiny of his black, deep-set eyes, which glared on me with a look of mocking, triumphant deviltry that must have been borrowed from the fiend below, I was fascinated, and could see nothing but that one diabolical face. If there is any truth in the Eastern belief in possession by evil spirits, a demon looked through that man's eyes. A shiver ran through my frame as I met his gaze, and I felt that he was exercising some subtle influence over me, against which every fibre of my body, every atom of my being, stiffened in revolt. I felt that unless I exerted the whole of my will-force in resistance to the dread spell he was casting over me, I should lose myself in his identity, and become the creature of his wicked will. It was not physical fear that I felt. I had passed through that stage, and I believe I should have met death with firmness; but I felt that my whole personality was at the death-grapple with that fearful being—a mysterious deadly struggle, fought in neither act nor word, with the powers of darkness impersonated.

"While all this was going on in me, the chief must have been listening to an account of my capture, though I was unconscious of any words being spoken near me, till the priest turned from me to him, and, pointing to the chessboard which stood on a sort of low table, made a suggestion which at first I did not fully grasp. Its meaning was soon made clear to me, however. I had some knowledge of their dialect, and most expressive pantomime conveyed the rest. I was to play a game of chess with the chief; the stakes, my life against a safe conduct to the English lines. Never before had I encountered so terrible an opponent, and never in the history of the royal game had so fateful an issue been fought out on the battlefield of the sixty-four squares. I took my seat opposite the chief, and the torchbearers formed a wide ring round the table, looking, as the dancing torch-flames shone on their dark faces and limbs, like so many stalwart statues of bronze. Within the circle, and a little behind the king, stood the evil priest, motionless, with folded arms, including me and the board in his keen, hateful gaze. I knew exactly where he stood before I looked at him, and again I felt the same dread fascination working on me that I had felt when I first set eyes on him. The chief moved the pieces indeed, but I was conscious in some subtle way that it was against his attendant's mind that I was pitted—that the former was scarcely more than an automaton under the thraldom of the priest's marvellous will, and the game itself only a sort of emblem or shadow of our inward contest of mind and personality.

"I played, appropriately enough, with the white pieces, and the game itself might have afforded an expressive symbol of the antagonism of the light and dark races, of the clear, bright West with the mystic, sombre East, but the thought did not occur to me then. To me it was rather a struggle between the intangible powers of good and evil—a realization in my own self of the eternal struggle of the universe. We played very slowly, and in absolute silence. No word was spoken nor sign made when either king was checked. Hour after hour the priest kept the same motionless posture behind his chief, who played with the same monotonously mechanical movement of the hand, the same vacant mesmerized expression on his face. Hour passed after hour, unmeasured by any clock, unmarked by any change except in the position of the pieces on the board. The chief, or rather the priest, played well; and, though time after time I seemed on the point of gaining a decisive advantage, some unforeseen move always deferred my victory.

"One piece in particular repeatedly thwarted my combinations. Again and again it constituted the weak point in a series of moves which should have brought me victory. Again and again, when, after straining every faculty of my brain, I made my move and raised my eyes to watch in the priest's face the effect of a stroke to which I saw no reply, a faint mocking smile would curl for a moment his cruel lips, and the black knight would be moved once more, threatening dangers which I had overlooked, and dashing my premature hopes to the ground. It was as though some secret link existed between that particular bit of bone and the grim, ghoulish spectator of our game. Piece after piece was taken from the board and dropped on the sand at our feet; the ranks of pawns grew thinner and thinner, but still that one black knight, now the only piece left to my antagonist, sprang over the board, evading my deep-laid plans for his capture. The opening was long passed, the wavering fortune of the middle-game had waned with the long hours to an end-game. The inexorable moment which must decide my fate was close upon me.

"I turned for a moment from the board to ease the throbbing fever of my brain. A black veil of formless mist hid the stars and gave back the earth's heat, till I gasped for breath, and drops of nervous sweat ran down my forehead. There was a stifling oppression in the still air, as in the minutes before the first lightning flash darts from the charged thunder-cloud. The chief moved, and I spurred my flagging energies once more to the study of the game. Suddenly I seemed to be gifted with extraordinary powers of calculation. I shut my eyes, and saw mentally the position change through every possible variation like the moving pattern of a kaleidoscope. I could have announced a mate. I knew, to the exclusion of any doubt, that I must win. I made my move, and then, concentrating every particle of the hatred and loathing with which the diabolical priest had inspired me into one flashing look of defiance, I tried to hurl from me the cursed influence of his malignant spirit and to crush it into subjection to mine. His face changed with a hideous contortion of defeated evil purpose, and then the whole devil in him rose to one supreme effort in answer to mine. He passed his hand lightly across his eyes, and leaning over his chief, scored his forehead with a malevolent frown, the glare of his glittering eyes seeming to pierce to the brain of the head they nearly touched. The new spell began to work on the chief. An uneasy, puzzled look came into his face, and this time it was with an uncertain, vacillating movement that he raised his hand to play. Again I looked at the priest. His expression was more bitterly mocking and more exultingly fiendish than ever as he directed my glance by a movement of his own to the hand which hovered over the board. His treacherous design was transmitted in a flash to my mind by some unexplained interaction of our brains. An illegal move with the black knight, in defiance of the rules of the game, was to snatch the nearly won victory from my grasp. I saw the fatal square on which the piece would be placed, and I felt that if it reached it I was lost. There were no spectators to whom I could appeal against the glaring illegality, unconscious, no doubt, on the part of the hypnotized chief, and I should never be able to convince him afterward of having won unfairly. I must prevent the move.

"The struggle entered on the final phase. I had shaken off the priest's mesmeric influence over my own will; now I must wrest the chief's will from the same thraldom by the exertion of a counter influence. It was the critical moment, the culminating point of conflict which must at last be decisive. The chief's hand raised the black knight slowly from the board, and as it began more slowly still to descend, I exerted all my power of will in one burst of straining endeavor to compel another move than the false one the priest intended. Every nerve in my body seemed strung to cracking. The wonderful sensation of my individuality, of the intangible essence which constitutes self, wrestling grimly for life with the demon-possessed priest, became intensified till my brain reeled. The chief's hand came slowly, slowly down; wavered as though uncertain on which square to place the piece. One final effort of will exhausted my faculties of brain and volition.

"The ordeal was over; light had triumphed over darkness as day had risen on night. I knew the priest's influence had been overcome, his spell cast off, without the evidence of the chessboard; I saw him fall backward on the ground, every muscle of his body twisted in horrible contortion, as though some invisible power of the air were wreaking its vengeance on his ghastly, spasm-shaken form. The gruesome sight ended quickly, the violence of the seizure was resistless; the muscles relaxed, the limbs stretched out, and he lay a corpse.

"How I parted from my strange entertainers I can't tell you. I only know that the chief honorably fulfilled his pledge and that, as I galloped away with a guide for the English camp, over the fair, green earth, the woods and fields dancing to the breeze in the sunlight, the bright clouds carrying my thoughts to the depths of the blue expanse they sailed in, I experienced a new sensation of keen, ecstatic enjoyment of life for its own sake. All nature seemed to have a fuller, better meaning to me than ever before, to be the physical expression of boundless power and happiness moving with all-inclusive purpose toward some eternal end, and I myself was filled with a thrilling vitality in the consciousness of being a part of the joyous whole."

The colonel made a long pause, and then, with a reluctant sigh, as he dismissed the wide expanse of glorious landscape which lay stretched out before his mind's eye, to return to the commonplace of his immediate surroundings, he picked up the paperweight from the board, and replacing it on the writing-table, concluded:

"Later in the day, and after my return to the English camp, I found this little fellow in a pocket of my coat. Whether I had put it there myself or how it got there I don't know, and to what extent the incidents of the night were colored by my own excited imagination is a chess problem I must leave to your own solution."—(The Strand Magazine.

ART AND AGNOSTICISM.

The Rev. M. J. Savage in a letter to The Boston Transcript.

Your issue of April 6 contained this editorial note: "The line of ticket-buyers for the three oratorios announced by the Handel and Haydn Society has been unbroken at the Music Hall office through the hours that it has been open for business since Monday morning. Agnostics and questioners have not yet affected the public taste for music inspired by biblical text. And by the way, what have those who doubt and those who do not know, with all the other iconoclasts of various types, done for art in the midst of their attempts to overthrow the traditions of centuries and their persistent charges of stupidity, if not idiocy, against the conservative minded?"

I do not like to see such implications as are contained in the closing part of it pass without a word of comment. I am not an "agnostic," but I am a "questioner," and I suppose I belong in a general way to the kind of people which the writer had in mind. Let us ask one or two questions, for this is the Yankee as well as the Socratic method.

First—Does anybody really suppose that people flock to hear the great oratorios because of the "biblical text"? Is it not rather the great music they wish to hear?

Second—Does anybody really suppose that anybody wishes merely to "overthrow the traditions of centuries"? The changes going on in the modern world are the necessary results of the discovery of new truth. That is, they are wrought by a new and higher revelation from God. They are giving the world a higher thought of God, and a nobler and more hopeful thought about man.

Third—Is not the critic asking a little too much in asking that modern thought shall produce its "art," musical or other, quite so soon? It took young Christianity several centuries before it could embody itself in a fitting and worthy "art." Ideas must first take possession of the popular mind before they can blossom out in art. We are as yet only in the period of discussion, turmoil, transition. Not only do the people not yet completely understand what is going on, but even intelligent persons—like the writer of this note—have not yet done modern thought the honor of comprehending it.

SPRING.

Once more, through God's high will and grace
Of hours that each its task fulfils,
Heart-healing Spring resumes its place
The valley through, and scales the hills.

Who knows not Spring? who doubts when blows
Her breath, that Spring is come indeed?
The swallow doubts not; nor the rose
That stirs, but wakes not; nor the wee.

Once more the cuckoo's call I hear;
I know, in many a glen profound,
The earliest violets of the year
Rise up like water from the ground.

The thorn, I know, once more is white;
And far down many a forest dale,
The anemones in dubious light
Are trembling like a bridal veil.

By streams released that surging flow
From craggy shelf, through sylvan glades,
The pale narcissus, well I know,
Smiles hour by hour on greener shades.

The honey'd cowslip tufts once more
The golden slopes;—with gradual ray
The primrose stars the rock, and o'er
The wood-path strews its milky way.

I see her not—I feel her near,
As charioted in mildest airs
She sails through yon empyreal sphere,
And in her arms and bosom bears

That urn of flowers and lustral dews,
Whose sacred balm, on all things shed,
Revives the weak, the old renews,
And crowns with votive wreaths the dead.
—(Aubrey De Vere.

MY LAST PROPOSAL.

I had made other declarations of love, all of them unsuccessful. I was glad to think, and yet here I was at forty—well, let us say between thirty and forty—shivering on the brink of another proposal. I had just come home to my rooms in King's Bench Walk after dining at the Barndores. Of course, I had met little Mrs. Winterton there; of course, I had taken her in to dinner—the world we both lived in was always bringing us together in that sort of way—and equally of course I was soon dreaming over the fire, of her slim, taut little figure in its dainty black silk setting. I had always liked the name of Kate, I thought; it was homely, comfortable, and yet not commonplace. Yes, it would do very well. Neither had I any narrow-minded aversion to widows. I felt that if Mrs. Winterton, who had tried the holy estate of matrimony once, cared to try it again, it was scarcely for me, who had no experience, to raise objections. I had always regarded Weller the elder as a dull man of blunted sentiments, who somewhat deserved his fate. The exigencies of his profession, too, were not calculated to promote connubial bliss. In legal slang, his case was not on "all fours" with mine, and I knew that Mrs. Winterton and I could easily refute what one may call the Wellerian fallacy, if we wished to do so. But did we wish to? and why should we wish to? These were the questions troubling my mind at this moment.

I was too old to pretend to a mad, despairing passion, Kate was too sensible. But we were both almost alone in the world, and this, I think, had brought us closer together and made us rather like old friends than new acquaintances.

She was bright, witty, cheerful, and—yes, I think she was pretty. She had a nice little fortune, too, people said, but I had charged myself a hundred times with caring for that, and always acquitted myself honorably with cheers in court. I did not lack money; my wants were few, and I could supply them without painful or anxious labor. No; I was in love with Kate Winterton, that was the fact, let me face it bravely.

Lighting a candle, for the shaded lamp was insufficient for my purpose, I rose and looked in the mirror over the mantelpiece. The candle made the worst of things, I thought; it seemed to bring out all the lines in my face, and there certainly were a good many firmly etched on my forehead.

But where is the harm in a few lines in a man's face? They give it character. And when I looked at my features, there was no doubt about it, they were clean-cut, shapely—well, I might almost say—handsome. My mother had said it—I was her only child—over and over again, and there are things that one learns from one's parents that are never forgotten in after life. So far I was passing my examination creditably, if not with honors; but when I lifted the candle above my head it shone upon a wider parting than was either necessary or ornamental. Jackson, the hairdresser, used to say with a professional sniff of sympathy, "Ah, sir, them barrister's wigs do bring the 'air off;" but he knew as well as I did that I did not put my wig on twice a year, having indeed no occasion to do so. So I lowered the candle hastily, and then, stepping back a few paces, took a long look at myself, deciding that my mustache fairly cancelled the parting, and that I felt happier with my figure in the middle distance than I had in the foreground. I have heard people call me modest; others I know said I was dull; one or two—chiefly those whose books I had reviewed—said I was stupid, meaning by that, honest. Well, well, I said to myself, taking a last look in the glass, things might have been worse for a man who is over for—I mean between thirty and forty.

I made up my fire and lit my pipe again. Kate liked tobacco, I thought to myself with a smile, or the thing would never do. Then I began to dream again. Yes, I would propose to Kate. "Propose!" The very word called up a host of memories. I had proposed before this, I began to recollect, and had been rejected. Well, that, too, might have been worse. I might have been accepted, and then I should never seen Kate. I shut my eyes and travelled in memory through strange scenes of the past. I was at Lady Haberly's standing in the large conservatory that leads out of the drawing-room—it must have been at least fifteen years ago—with a tall, bright girl of two-and-twenty. I could see her brown honest eyes and truthful face framed in ruddy curls floating before me. Had she led me on, dangling about my quiet paths, or had I rushed out of my native element and jumped at her open-mouthed like a silly trout at a well-made West-end-fly? Never mind now! I shall never forget her haughty indignation, her superb astonishment; and she was only an earl's granddaughter. I don't think I ever had a pedigree, and I know I cut a very poor figure on that occasion in consequence. She married a wealthy American soon afterward. I wonder what sort of a pedigree he had! As for me, I kept a lock of her hair, and wrapped it up in a newspaper cutting two years after her marriage, when she was the heroine of some sad legal proceedings that many will remember. But it was a cruel, ugly way of keeping the foolish relic, and I burnt it long ago, I am glad to say. I saw her at Brighton quite recently. Her eyes were still brown and beautiful, still honest, perhaps, to those who did not know her story. Why should I recall it? I escaped.

These old memories and dreams were scattered into thin air by a rap at my outer door. I knew the knock, it was Harold Etheridge's. I saw a good deal of Harold at that time.

"I noticed your light, old fellow, and just dropped in."

"You don't intrude," I said, for I was always pleased to see him in those days. "I've only been dreaming over the fire. Sit down and have a last pipe; I must turn in in half an hour."

Harold sat down opposite to me on the other side of the fire-place. He was ten or maybe fifteen years younger than I was, and a good-looking, dashing, straightforward man, both in face and manner. There never was such an open-hearted, honest-looking fellow as Harold to all appearance. I had nicknamed him "The Saxon," and the name stuck to him, for it was appropriate. He lived a gay, reckless kind of life, and was always talking of marrying money, or going out to the Cape, as the only alternatives to the Bankruptcy Court; but I believe he was comfortably off. I liked him. I thought him one of my few friends. I like to remember him as I thought he was, even now, for I believe he was my friend in those days, as far as such a man could be anybody's friend.

I do not know what there is about the small hours of the morning, or whether sympathy is an absolute necessity to a lover, but within five minutes we were talking of Kate Winterton.

"A fine woman? I should think she is," cried Harold enthusiastically; "and a fine fortune too."

"Bright, witty, good-tempered and pleasing, if not pretty," I added continuing my description.

"Why, you might be in love with her, Penrose, to hear you talk."

It was very foolish of me, I know; but lovers are foolish, and it was early in the morning, and of course I did not know then that Harold was my rival. Had I suspected it, I think I should have entered a nolle prosequi and dropped my suit, leaving him a clear field. After all, it was perhaps only a natural effect of my ailment that I should long to tell some one my secret. The glory of a secret lies in imparting it. Keeping a secret is very poor fun, and I have no secrets at 2 o'clock in the morning—it is a sympathetic hour. I rose and stood by the fire.

"Harold, old boy, I've something to tell you. I am in love with Kate Winterton."

The Saxon nearly dropped his pipe. He gave a long whistle and said nothing. I was disappointed; I expected congratulations, pleasant laughter, good wishes—something.

After a moment's silence, he said, with hesitation, "You haven't actually proposed, eh? Have you?"

"No, not of course not. No one knows but you, and why the devil I told you I don't know," I added testily. His coolness irritated me.

"By George! old fellow, I'm sure I wish you joy. Benedict Redivivus!" He laughed heartily, and shook me by the hand. The Saxon was himself again, and so was I.

"Ah! Harold," I said, "I hardly know now whether I shall ever tell her. Let me see, this is Monday night."

"Tuesday morning, you mean."

"Yes, yes. I shall not see her until Sunday; I have a week before me yet. Ah, my boy, give me your good wishes on Sunday. 'The better the day——' you know." I shook him by the hand again. He did not seem very enthusiastic, but he listened to my garrulous ravings, and that was all that I wanted then. "I feel young again," I continued, "and when I think of her loving face and sweet gray eyes——"

Gug! gug! gug! It was that confounded lamp; out it went, and put a period to my rhapsody.

"Let us take it as a gentle hint to me, and not as a lover's omen," laughed Harold pleasantly. I groped about, found a candle, and bid him good-night. Then I sought repose and dreamed real dreams, haunted with Kate's bright eyes and silver treble laugh.

I think I have said that I reviewed for the "Slasher" in those days. It was poor stuff, and I had long ceased to be proud of it; but it provided my daily bread, or rather my daily cutlet and pint of claret, and I was at least honest about it. I certainly worked very hard at my learned reviews, and crammed my subjects thoroughly. I was always at work. Etheridge used to say, "I worked like the devil, but with a little intelligence;" the truth is, they were all a little jealous of my position. For I was the "we" who taught the Darwin science, instructed Tennyson in the laws of metre, and patronized George Eliot. It was admitted, too, on all hands that I was excellent at turning out those readable reviews that the public enjoys, and that used to drive weak-minded authors to early graves in my time. Nowadays weak-minded authors are difficult to drive; more's the pity. I was writing something the next evening for Saturday's "Slasher," when Harold came in with a merry smile on his face. I saw no devilry in it then.

"Do you want a subject for one of your real good things?" he asked. "Here is a new volume of poems just out; they are screamingly funny."

"Where did you get them?" I asked.

"I found them in a fellow's rooms and borrowed them for a few days. No one you know," he added hastily.

He handed me a thin volume, daintily got up in a white and gold boudoir binding, lettered in scarlet on the cover, "Sighs from my Heart," by Sappho.

"Modest young lady, isn't she?" suggested the Saxon, quizzically.

"If she is a lady," I replied sententiously, with the air of one who was too old a hand to jump at obvious conclusions.

"Listen to this, then," cried Harold, snatching the book from my hand, and reading with very comic effect a poem addressed "To my Hero," the each verse of which ended thus:

His locks are gold,
His looks are bold,
My Hero!

"Just suits you, Penrose," he said as he finished. "You have red hair and your looks are perfectly brazen."

"Who publishes it?" I said, smiling at his vagaries. "Ah, I see. Well, I'll run through it, and if it is all like that stuff it will come in useful. I've a lot of dull, solemn things here, nothing to make fun of."

"Now do write a good one. Let us have a specimen of your cayenne pepper papers, as Crofts calls them. I shall come in and keep you up to it.

His locks are gold,
His looks are bold,
My Hero!"

Etheridge struck an attitude as he recited this, laughed aloud at me in his merry, high-spirited way, and went off leaving me the volume.

I read the poems, and found them just the weak sort of rubbish I expected, and knocked off a notice of them. I sent down to the publishers to find out why we had not got a copy for the "Slasher," and was told that it would come in on Friday. I wanted something light for half a page, so I did the ordinary kind of sneering, smart review that the public chuckles over and enjoys. Even as I wrote it I sighed to myself, as I often did, for I never grew callous about other people's feelings, and I thought of the author's friends as much as of the author for the nonsense he publishes. I shall never forget that review; every wretched word of it is burnt deep into my heart, and when I remember the hundreds of equally cruel, and equally just notices I must be fair to myself—that I had written, I feel happy to have left the trade to others who have less tender consciences and tougher hearts.

On Sunday morning I rose early. I had not slept well—I do not wish to pretend I had, neither did I eat a good breakfast, but I was awake to the necessity of dressing carefully—particularly carefully—and this I did. I strolled northward toward Park Crescent, where Mrs. Winterton lived; it was early, and people were coming out of church, and the dinners were coming to meet them out of the bakehouses. It was a clear fresh morning. Every one seemed cheerful and contented. I had never known London look so bright and happy. As for me, I walked on air, erect, with swinging steps, smiling pleasantly at the passers-by, for I did not know what was before me.

Of course Mrs. Winterton was at home to me, just as she had been for the last ten Sundays at this hour. No one was there, and she would be down in a minute. Jane smiled at me as usual, for I was a very regular visitor, and remembered Jane handsomely in my Christmas boxes. I wandered through the drawing-room into the boudoir, where I was privileged to enter. She would come there, I knew. A copy of the "Slasher" was lying on the table—cut, too. I wondered if she had read my article on "Romola." It was a careful, well-considered thing, I thought. She used often to say she could tell my hand at once. Poor Kate!

I saw, the moment she entered, that something was amiss. Women can hide everything but tears—tell-tale tears. I remember hearing an American girl say she envied a baby its power of crying for an hour or two and turning up fresh at the end of the bout. From a feminine point of view the accomplishment is undoubtedly worth acquiring. We tried to talk, but it was a failure. I dare say I was nervous, but then so was Kate. She was quite distraite, and not in the least her own bright self. Instead of our usual frank, open conversation, it was the weather and Disraeli's last good thing. I was determined to break through her reserve. My eye caught the "Slasher" lying open by her side.

"Well, Mrs. Winterton, you have been reading the 'Slasher' I see?"

She darted a keen look at me, and with something of her old fire, but with a trace of bitterness in the laugh that accompanied her answer, she replied, "Oh, yes, I have read the 'Slasher.'"

"Did you look at 'Romola'?"

"No, I only read one thing, a short notice of some poems or something," she said, taking up the paper and looking at it carelessly.

I rose and seated myself on a chair slightly behind her.

"I can show it you," I said: "'Sighs from My Heart.'"

"Did you write that review?" she said, half rising and bending forward to make up the fire.

I could not see her face, or I might have been tempted to tell a lie.

"Yes, I wrote it," I said. "It's smart; don't you think so?"

"It is smart," she replied, after a pause, as though she was reading it over again,—"very smart."

"I'll lend you the book to look at," I continued. "It's the greatest trash you ever read. Awful rubbish."

"Thank you," she answered coldly, still reading the paper, with her face turned from me.

"Such irresistibly comic stuff, that 'To my Hero!' I couldn't help quoting the refrain—

His locks are gold,
His looks are bold,
My Hero!

Ha! ha!"

My laughter stopped almost in its birth. I was looking over her shoulder on to the paper, when a full round tear fell with a "blob," as we used to say in the nursery, on to the page in front of her. That "blob" went straight to my heart. I caught her hand, and the next minute I was on my knees, I don't know why.

"Mrs. Winterton! Kate!" I cried. "What is it? What is the matter? Tell me! I can't bear to see you unhappy. How can I serve you? I came here to-day to tell you—yes, indeed, to tell you I love you."

She drew her hand away from mine, and was speaking to me from the other side of the room. I was half kneeling by her chair, I think, and rose slowly as she spoke.

"You love me! You! Why, you wrote that!" she cried indignantly, pointing to the wretched review.

I looked at her in surprise. Then it began to dawn upon me as I gazed at her dear little figure quivering with indignation.

"Why you—do you mean—to say," I stammered out, "that you—that—you——"

"You great booby, of course I'm Sappho. What a fool the man is!"

She stamped her little foot impatiently, and was almost laughing through her tears at my stupor and amazement. I had never seen her look prettier.

"But—I never knew," I began feebly. "You never told me."

"Of course I didn't—I should have told you to-day. I only got the first copy on Tuesday, and Mr. Etheridge came in and found me with them, and he likes them."

"Did he tell you so?" I shouted.

"Of course he did, and you can say so now, you know. Don't get excited. Please go on. Say they are lovely, and beautiful, and soul-stirring, and all the rest of it. Praise me up. Do. They are works of genius, are not they? Worthy of the great poetess herself."

"No, Kate," I said. "I will be quite honest with you; they are rubbish—great rubbish."

She was not prepared for this, and did not know what to say. Something prompted me to cross the room toward her. She allowed me to take her hand.

"Kate," I continued, "I love you too well to tell you a lie. They are rubbish—dreadful rubbish. I did not know whose they were. If you had shown them to me before, they need never have been reviewed at all, here or anywhere. I love you so well I would not have told you a lie about them—no, not to win you for myself forever. Do you believe that, Kate?"

She had let the miserable paper fall into the fender, and her head was turned from me again.

"Yes, I believe you," was all her answer. I gathered the paper up and thrust it into the fire. Turning to her, I took her hand once more, and we both stood over the mantle-piece watching the paper writhing in the flame.

"Etheridge gave me your book," I said.

Her hand tightened involuntarily on mine. She was about to say something angry, but I checked her.

"He, too, loved you," I said, "and all is fair in love and war, they say. Never mind him, what about me? Am I to be forgiven? Can you forget this miserable affair? You are the only friend I have in the world. Is this to part us?"

She said not a word, but gazed into the fire.

"Kate, you heard what I said just now. I have told you I love you. May I come back when this is past and forgotten and say this to you again?"

The ashes had whitened in the flames and were now burnt into nothingness, and she turned her face up toward mine.

"You may stay and say it now, My Hero," she whispered with a smile, and the least suspicion of a twinkle in her bright eye. And that is how I made my Last Proposal.—(Cornhill Magazine.

THE HUNTING OF ROTHIEMUIR.

From The Art Journal.

Lord Graeme has come to his own again,
He'll roam no more o'er sea,
And all for the love of a low-born lass,
For a winsome maid was she.

He's courted her on the green brae-side,
Beyond her father's fold;
He's wedded her for her comely face
And her locks like the burnished gold.

Long made she moan for her mother dear,
And the house where she was born,
But she spake no word of the lither lad
Who reaped in her father's corn.

"Weep not, weep not, my lady gay,
Though I ride o'er the lea;
Ere seven short days are past and gone
I'll come again to thee."

But so it fell at the third day's end,
About the midnight hour,
That good Lord Graeme from the hunting came
And stood in his lady's bower.

"O, why do ye come so dark and late,
When all men are at rest?
And why is the steel cap on your brow,
And the buckler on your breast?"

"And why hath my good lord left the chase,
That is but scarce begun?
Now, have ye lost your bonny bay steed,
Or is the hunting done?"

"O, I have hunted the long day through,
From the rising of the sun,
But or ever he rise the morrow's morn,
My hunting will be done.

"Now, what was yon, my lady gay,
Slipped past me at the door?"
"O, 'twas nothing but your good greyhound
That sleeps on my chamber floor."

"Now, what is yon gear of hodden grey
That tangles in my spurs?"
"O, my maid Jean was here but now,
And 'tis but a clout of hers."

"Set wide, set wide, your bower window,
And look out o'er the lea;
And such a hunt as never ye saw,
At day-dawn shall ye see."

He's mounted him on his bonny bay,
And let the hounds run free,
And fast they followed a fleeing man,
Who rode towards the sea.

They hunted high, they hunted low,
The hounds ran swift before,
And aye they harried the wildered man,
And aye they pressed him sore.

The cold sweat stood upon his face,
As they drave him here and there,
And he turned and doubled in his dread,
As doubles a hunted hare.

O, never a word Lord Graeme he said,
And little did he haste;
With the first dim ray of the dawning day
They turned o'er the Castle Waste.

But he hummed the o'erword of a song,
And his lips were smiling gay,
As he bared his broadsword sharp and long,
And galloped beside his prey.

And still as the doomed man cursed and wailed,
And cried in his strong despair,
Lord Graeme leaned over his saddle-bow,
And played with the broadsword bare.

And now he would make a feint to strike,
And now he would seem to spare,
But ever he spurred his bonny bay
By the flank of the spent white mare.

And when the man seemed like to swoon,
And his arms swung to and fro,
The grey steel struck his body through
And pierced him at a blow.

O, red and golden rose the sun,
Beyond the castle plain,
But never more Lord Graeme's ladye
Was seen on earth again.
GRAHAM R. TOMSON.

UNFORGOTTEN.

From The Gentleman's Magazine.

The morning hours were merry,
The genial moon is calm,
The fragrance of the wild rose
Is like a healing balm;
The birds within the woodland
Carol a happy song,
But in my heart abides still
A sorrow deep and strong—
My poor lost love!

The glittering streamlet murmurs
Over its pebbly bed,
The fleecy cloud is sailing
So lightly overhead;
The southern breeze is playing
Among the hazel boughs;
But, ah! remembrance dies not
Of hopeful, happy vows—
My poor lost love!

The calm lone hills ascending
Toward the clear blue sky,
O'erlook the smiling valley
Where here at rest I lie;
Those lone hills are the emblem
Of that far silent land,
Where she I loved is resting,
One of a countless band.
My poor lost love!

A vision of a yew-tree—
A narrow, turf-clad grave—
The winter of a country
Where winds tempestuous rave;
A little torrent falling,
With moaning, mournful sound,
Fills my imagination
Far more than all around.
My poor lost love!

Ah! gentle joyous Nature,
Thy wearied, mourning child
Delights in thy rejoicing,
But may not be beguiled
From thinking of that dear one,
With dull heart aching sore;
My own, my vanished loved one,
My soul's light evermore—
My poor lost love!

WHEN WILLOWS GREEN.

By Helen Gray Cone.

When goldenly the willows green,
And, mirrored in the sunset pool,
Hang wavering, wild rose clouds between;
When robins call in twilights cool,
What is it we await?
Who lingers and is late?
What strange unrest, what yearning stirs us all
When willows green, when robins call?

When fields of flowering grass respire
A sweet that seems the breath of Peace,
And liquid-voiced the thrushes choir,
Oh, whence the sense of glad release?
What is it life uplifts?
Who entered, bearing gifts?
What floods from heaven the being overpower
When thrushes choir, when grasses flower?

MARGRETE'S CRADLE SONG.

By Henrik Ibsen.

Now roof and rafters blend with
The starry vault on high;
Now flieth little Hakon
On dream-wings through the sky.

There mounts a mighty stairway
From earth to God's own land;
There Hakon, with the angels,
Goes climbing hand in hand.

God's angel babes are watching
Thy cot, the still night through.
God bless thee, little Hakon,
Thy mother watcheth too.