NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

Edith M. Thomas, in Manhattan for November.

Ye climbers rest not when ye gain
The sightly ground above the plain;
Far up the mountain's ancient snow,
We wait to see your signal glow;
Now speed, since all return is vain,
If, looking downward, ye wore fain
In the sweet valley to remain,
A voice would warn you from below—
Noblesse oblige!

Ye burden-bearers, that sustain,
And give no sign of cark or pain,
On you their loads will many throw,
Make broad your shoulders; blessings go
With those who help the moiling train—
Noblesse oblige!

A RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION.

I

My house, like that of the American patriot immortalized in "Martin Chuzzlewit," is now "beyond the setting sun"—that is to say, in the uttermost regions of Western Manchester—but there was a time when it wss situated at the opposite extremity of Cottonopolis, from which I fled, for reasons to be hereafter stated, with the feeling that I could not put too great a distance between myself and it. My former habitation was a semi-detached villa (of which I was also the proud proprietor) in Paradise Row. My occupation lay in the town, but it had, in truth, but small charms for me. It was there I made the wax from which I derived the major portion of my income, but my honey—and I was a very busy bee at that time—was made at home after office hours, still, indeed, by the pen, but in a very different fashion. My soul was devoted to literature, and all the time that I could spare from Messrs. Bale and Crop, cotton corners, was given to composition. Except for the interval consumed in getting home, I might indeed have been said to have stepped from my high stool on to the back of Pegasus, which took me flights which lasted from seven o'clock to ten.

Let me hasten to say that this expression is metaphorical. As a man who is still connected (at all events on one side) with business I should be sorry to have it supposed that I ever wrote peotry. No, it was only prose, though prose (if I may be permitted to say so) of a high order. I wrote stories for the magazines, and leading articles for a local newspaper or two—what, in short, may be fairly called imaginative literature. I had a young wife and a growing family, and the addition I thus made to my official income was very welcome, yet not more so than the work itself. With my quill pen in my hand—I could never use a steel one, such as sufficed me in the city, for these flights—my knees in there snug haven under my writing table, and a good stock of ideas in my head to draw upon, I felt as happy as a king. It is a modest pleasure, known to few and envied probably by none, but, believe me, there is none more satisfying or supreme.

When our little children had been put to bed my wife used to come down and sit with me, occupying herself with needlework. It was understood that (like a ghost) she was not to speak unless she was spoken to, lest she should interrupt the flow of composition. I could trust her for that, implicitly. There are some good women who can never keep silence when they work for two consecutive minutes, but must be always making some muttered observa- about their stitches. Clementina was not one of that sort, which was fortunate for both of us.

There might have been two opinions (that is, my opinion and that of other people) as to whether my work may have been of a meritorious or valuable kind, but, such as it was, it required perfect silence. If there was the least noise—a coal flying out from the fire, a door banging in the attics—all was over with me; if a nightingale had begun to sing in the back garden, I should have been paralyzed; our two maid servants always went about during those hours of composition in list slippers.

For a month after my purchase of Eden Lodge, Paradise Row, the house in no way belied its name; but in the fifth week the serpent raised its head among the flowers, and hissed out: "Sir, you are mistaken about the name of your residence, this is Purgatory Villa."

It was about 7:15 P. M., and I had as usual sat down alone to my beloved occupation, when from the party wall at which my desk was placed there issued forth a bang as if a cannon had gone off, followed by three or four shrill explosions, such as are caused by rockets. For a moment I really thought they were rockets, and that the sticks had penetrated my brain, which indeed was scattered in all directions.

My faithful wife who had felt the shock in the nursery, rushed down stairs, and was at my side in an instant. As she entered the room the hideous cannonade was resumed, and with such effect that the hearth brush fell down (stunned) in the corner of the fireplace, and the top of my ink bottle shut of itself with a click.

"Merciful heavens." I cried, "what is it?"

"I feared it would annoy you," began Clementina, in trembling tones.

"Annoy me! It has destroyed me," I exclaimed. "Not another line shall I be able to write to-night. What is it?"

"My dear Charles, I am sorry to say it is the daughter of our neighbor, Mrs. Brown, who has just come home from school, and is practicing 'The Battle of Prague.' Jemima, whom we took with Edeh Lodge, you know, says she does it all through the holidays. The foolish girl never said a word about it, or I am sure you would never have bought the house."

"But do you mean to say this is to go on always, always?" I exclaimed despairingly. "Hark at it!"

It was like a magnificent pyrotechnic display without the fireworks. No human being could stand it; no one but a fiend could have inflicted it.

"It goes on, Jemima says," replied my wife despondingly, "for six weeks from seven to ten; only on Sundays she plays sacred music."

I am not a passionate person, but I am impatient, and if at that moment I could have got at that girl next door, I believe, notwithstanding her sex, her age, and her piety, that I should have strangled her. The question was not one to be put aside or debated about for an instant, and I sat down at once and wrote to Brown (as well as that infernal melody would permit me) a letter of courteous remonstrance. I was on something more than speaking terms with him, and believed him to be on the whole a good-natured fellow, but I had a suspicion that he had a termagant for a wife. Mrs. Brown laced too tightly not to have a temper, but still she must have a woman's heart beating somewhere, and surely in a Christian country—but I anticipate—if that can be called anticipation which is the very reverse of what one has ventured to expect.

My letter ran as follows:

DEAR MR. BROWN: In thus addressing myself to you, I know I am relying upon our relations as friendly neighbors, and by no means urging a legal right. In the eye of the law an Englishman's house is his castle, and he can, if he pleases, fire royal salutes from his battlements night and day. Unfortunately, I am so constituted that noise utterly destroys my power to do literary work, in which (as you are aware) I am of necessity engaged from seven to ten every evening. Your dear little daughter's piano playing is quite wonderful for her age—[this was very true; no fullgrown demon, I should have thought far less an imp of her years could have created such discord]—but if you would kindly contrive that she should pursue it during the daytime instead of between the hours aforesaid, you would lay me under an eternal obligation.

Awaiting your kind consent, for which I thank you beforehand,

I am yours truly,
CHARLES JONES.

I was in such a state of anxiety and excitement, the hideous cannonade continuing all this time without one instant's cessation, that I wrote upon the envelope "Bearer waits," and bade my messenger bring back the answer. It came quickly enough, but put an end to my suspense ouly to substitute for it an agony of despair. It was, as I guessed in a moment from the handwriting, all sloping like the ears of a donkey in a state of obstinacy, the female Brown who addressed me as follows:

DEAR SIR: My husband is from home, but your application is one of which I have no hesitation in answering in his name in the negative. You are, as you very properly remark, urging no legal claim whatever, and you must forgive me for adding that your request is preposterous. It is not convenient for my daughter to pursue her musical studies except between seven and ten, to which hours as hereto-fore she will confine them. Yours truly,
ABIGAIL BROWN.

Late as it was I clapped on my hat, repaired to the house agent of whom I had purchased Eden Lodge, and procured from him an advertisement board, which I stuck up on a pole in front of the house that very night: "This villa residence to be sold, with immediate possession; no reasonable offer will be refused."

After that I walked about the streets till ten o'clock, and returned home a little comforted. My wife assured me that the noise had ceased precisely at that hour, but the echoes of it seemed to be still ringing through the house; I felt that I was on the brink of a nervous fever, and wrote to my employers to say that my return to business must for the present be uncertain. I intended to stop at home de die in diem, (until seven o'clock,) so as to miss no chance of any one calling to bid for it, till that house was disposed of.

The very next morning a card was sent in to me with "Mr. Joseph Plumlin" on it. He was a thickset man of by no means aristocratic appearance, but I welcomed him as if he had been one of the royal family. His manner was curt in the extreme, but I thought he looked an honest man, and the city side of my character assured me at the first glance that he was the sort of person who means business.

"I see this house is to sell," he said. "I am a builder, and I know when a house is worth buying; if we can come to terms I mean to buy Eden Lodge; now what do you want for it?"

I mentioned the sum I had fixed upon as a reasonable one, but in truth, I would gladly have taken half the money rather than not have got the place off my hands.

"Too much," he said, shaking his solid head—"too much by a hundred pounds."

If I had been a Frenchman I should have got up and kissed him on both cheeks; being an Englishman (with half my time devoted to the main chance,) I concealed my joy and shook my head almost as resolutely as he had done. "The house is cheap," I said, "at the sum I have put upon it."

"No doubt it is; I know that as well as you—indeed a deal better," he answered cooly. "But a man don't put 'with immediate possession' on his notice board unless he has reasons for wanting to quit. Now, look here, I am a man of action." [I am sorry to say he used an aspirate.] "I am always for setting matters off the reel. I will split the difference between us, and give you your money less £50. I'll draw you a check for it if you like, this very moment." And he actually produced from his breast pocket a large and greasy check-book, and threw it open like a front door.

"My dear Sir," I answered with effusion, "there is no need to be so precipitate; a letter from your lawyer tomorrow will be quite sufficient, but on the terms you mention, the house is yours."

"By 'immediate possession' I understand that I can come in at once," pursued Mr. Plumlin—"say in a week?"

I nodded assent: I could hardly prevent myself from saying. 'Come this evening," which would have been fatal indeed; if he had heard that piano, the bargain would surely have been off at once. I felt that, since he was coming to live in the house himself, I was about to take his money under false pretenses; for the poor fellow was looking forward to "a home!" Still, the city side of my character reminded me that my first duty was to myself—and I performed it.

Having made inquiries about Mr. Plumlin which convinced me to his solvency, I went out that very day to look for a new house, and fortunately found one, this time, you may be sure, "a detached residence." Within a week we had "shifted," bag and baggage, to my intense relief; every night, in the meantime was made hideous by that dreadful child's piano. I should have thought nothing could have been worse than her tunes, but the serpent of Paradise Row had more terrible things in store—on alternate nights she played her scales.

II.

Six months afterward, on getting into an omnibus on my way home from the town I found myself next neighbor to Mr. Plumlin. He recognized me at once, though, in any case, I think I should have spoken to him. One always feels a little constraint with the stranger to whom one has sold a house or a horse. We know its little imperfections, which the other gentleman does not till he has bought it; and though there had been nothing particularly wrong about Eden Lodge, I felt that as a residence (even independent of its musical neighbor) it was not faultless. I took the bull by the horns, however, and at once observed, "I hope you like your house, Mr. Plumlin?"

"Yes," he replied quite naturally (thereby lifting quite a load from my perhaps too tender conscience,) "I am not one in any case to cry over spilt milk, or to complain of a completed bargain; besides, being a builder, you see, why of course I did not expect perfection. There's a little damp in the front attic [there was,] but I flatter myself I know how to treat it; I've just given it a coat of Paris cement and that'll soon be all right."

I said to myself, "I'll back the damp," but did not pursue the subject. The whole topic of Eden Lodge was a delicate one, still I could not conquer my curiosity to know how he had exorcised that musical little fiend next door; that he had done it somehow I took for granted, or he would never have looked so cheerful.

"And how do you like your neighbors, Mr. Plumlin?"

"Oh, pretty well—not, indeed, that I know much of them." Then, as if moved by an afterthought, he added, "To be sure, there's that Brown; he's a queer one. What do you think he's been doing, or rather his people, for I believe his wife was at the bottom of it."

"Now," thought I to myself, "it's coming; Plumlin has had the benefit of that piano." I replied, however, with a blush I strove in vain to conceal, that I could not possibly guess what Brown had been doing.

"Well, the fact is I've a large family, most of them girls, so of course they are all for music; they practice on the piano—one or other of them—mostly all day long, as is only natural. Why shouldn't they?"

"Why indeed!" I echoed. An unholy joy began to fill me. I began to think that all the poets and moralists have taught us about the retribution that awaits the wicked even if this world might not be without foundation.

"Just so," he continued contemptuously, "and yet this man, or his wife, for it looks like a woman's hand, had the impudence to write to me one morning. I've got it somewhere," he observed parenthetically, bringing about forty letters out of his breast pocket and selecting one after an animated search; yes, here it is."

He read the letter aloud in the omnibus, with many interpolations and interjections of contempt and wrath.

"DEAR MR. PLUMLIN:

["It was like her impudence to begin 'dearing' me, just because she wanted something, but she little knew J. P."] "In thus addressing myself to you, I am relying upon our relations as friendly neighbors, and by no means urging a legal right.

["Legal right, indeed, I should think not; I should like to see her trying legal rights with me upon a matter of that kind!"]

"In the eye of the law an Englishman's house is his castle, and he can, if he pleases, fire royal salutes from its battlements night and day. [Well, of course he can.] Unfortunately, my wife is so constituted that noise—such as constant piano playing—"

"Now did you ever hear such a thing as that?" inquired Mr. Plumlin, laughing wildly. "As if I had anything to do with his wife's constitution. Well to cut a long story short, the lady objected to 'noise;' not very complimentary, said Mrs. P., to call our girls' piano playing noise; but that's by the way. It's her coolness that fetches me. Did you ever see such a letter?"

"Never," I said, "or hardly ever." I was obliged to put that in because I recognized, as far as it had gone, in Mrs. Brown's plaintive appeal the very epistle I had addressed to her. She had copied it out verbatim, without the least respect for the laws of copyright, but not, I hope, without bitter reflection that she herself had once turned a deaf ear to its touching eloquence.

"And what did you reply to her?" I inquired, with irrepressible curiosity.

"Reply to her?" echoed Mr. Plumlin. "Why, what would you, or any other fellow who was not a born idiot, have replied to her? I wrote to her husband, of course, since the letter purported to come from him, though I knew it did not, and that gave me a better opportunity of speaking my mind. I told him that not only had he no legal claim—which, indeed, he had the sense to acknowledge, but that his application was preposterous." [A very good word to use, was my reflection, and also one that would be familiar to her.]

"'If you don't like our music,' I added," continued Mr. Plumlin, getting himself together for his exit from the 'bus, "'then go somewhere else. Buy a house at the other end of the town;' that's what I told him. Good morning, Sir."—The Cornhill Magazine.

Flower Selling in New York.

From the New York Times.

"The flower business is a rather curious one, and a little more complicated than one would at first suppose," said an old florist, as he deftly twined a spray of smilax in and around a bunch of roses, so that lines of delicate green separated the rich colors.

"How so?"

"Why in keeping a stock on hand which will gratify a variety of tastes. It is easy enough to have an abundance of the fashionable flowers, even though the fashion seems to change in flowers just as it does in dress. The fashionable flowers are used, of course, in receptions, lunches where each lady has a bouquet placed at her plate, and in funerals. But when you come to individual tastes, when ladies want flowers to harmonize with their dresses or with their china, and when people want their favorite flowers which perhaps have gone out of fashion, why, you can never tell what kind of a flower is going to be asked for—and that's where the complication comes in. Some people wear flowers simply because it is fashionable. Others love some particular kind of flowers, and want it whether they wear it or not. Then, if you havn't got the flower they get displeased, and when they have a big reception they go to some other florist; so, you see, we have to watch the tastes of our customers. These buds here were all the rage two years ago, and, although they are out of the fashion now, we have to keep a stock on hand for certain customers, who call for them every day almost."

"How do ordinary baskets of flowers sell?"

"Oh, from $5 to $25. Sometimes they run much higher. We sent one out not long ago which cost $150. You can have no idea how the custom of sending flowers has grown. All the young people buy them when they can afford it, and just now the wealthy young men are beginning to pour in and get flowers to send to their young lady friends who have just gotten in from the summer resorts. Whenever a young man takes a lady to a party or to the theater a nice bouquet is one of the necessary accessories. Flowers go ahead of all other gifts in winning a woman's heart, and every young gallant knows that."

"Why so?"

"Well, nearly all women love flowers, and there is something so delicate, so much unsaid yet suggested in flowers that the simple gift of one is always appreciated by a woman—not to speak of the different sentiments that are associated with different kinds of flowers. It is very interesting to note how differently people regard flowers. Why, I can tell almost the moment a woman enters whether she is fond of them. Women who love flowers always have sweet faces, soft ways, and gentle dispositions. One of that kind rarely asks for the fashionable flowers because it is the fashionable. She loves flowers for their own sake, and consequently she is almost sure to call for her favorites, whether in fashion or not. The woman who cares for flowers simply because they are fashionably is one of the cold, haughty, airy kind. She will look around critically, seize some flower and pull it out of a bunch, sometimes breaking off a leaf or catching one of its thorns in another rose and tearing the petals. That's the difference, you see. The other lady handles them with a gentle caressing touch almost as if they were human.

Did you know that the ladies use flowers for perfumery? In France it is very common, and it is getting quite usual in America. They take a bunch of violets and place them in the bosom of the dress. No manufactured perfume can come up to the odor of the flowers, you know! Every morning, rain or shine, an old doctor comes in here, gets a bunch of violets, unbuttons his vest, places them next to his heart, and walks out. I often wonder if he does it for the perfume. I guess it is a case of sentiment, however.

"The florist sees plenty of pretty little romances. Very often a young man has flowers sent to a certain house in the city every morning. Then there comes a big order; the marriage, you know, and then they dwindle down; he comes less and less often, until he ceases altogether. The old tale, you know. Last spring I used to notice a couple going by here, a fine, manly young fellow and a girl pretty and dainty, with lovely brown hair and dark blue eyes. They didn't know each other, but when the young man went to business the girl was sure to be somewhere around where she could see him. She lived right round the corner, and she used to come in here and pretend to be examining the flowers as he passed. Then she would look up and watch him as he went down the street. One day as he went by she looked up and said to me, 'Oh, what a funny hat,' and then carelessly, as she began picking among the flowers, 'I wonder who he is?' I came very near laughing, for the previous day the young fellow had been in to ask me who she was, and had sent her some flowers. About a week afterward she came in with a friend, and I heard her telling the friend how somebody had been sending her flowers every morning, and she did wish she could find out who it was. Well the best part of all came afterward. One Morning he came in as usual and the gardner took him back into the conservatory. While he was there the girl entered and stood near the counter loooking toward the window. Presently he returned, and, as he started for the door briskly he said, 'Well send those flowers as usual up to 24—street.' Neither knew the other was near, and, hearing the number of her house mentioned, she turned around and they met face to face. Well I never saw such an embarrassed couple in all my days She had a big Jacqueminot near her face, and it would have been hard to tell which was redder, the rose or her cheek. She turned to the flowers and he passed out. They didn't come any more, but not long ago I saw them going by together. They both looked in and when they saw me he laughed and she blushed.

NEGRO LIFE IN FLORIDA.

Wild and Weird Performances at a Camp-Meeting.

Florida Letter to San Francisco Chronicle.

After dinner it was arranged by a few among the crowd to go to camp-meeting, which was held about a mile from the house. Accordingly vehicles were made ready and away we started. Long before we arrived upon the grounds we were made aware of the vicinity by stentorian shouts, and presently we came in sight of the sheds, log huts and cottages built for the accommodation of the campers. The Florida darky knows his value and does not look up or bow down to the white population as a rule, like his black brothers of southern states. Not he; rather patronizes them, except in the cases of old family slaves who have not outlived their good manners. It must have been one of these, an aged man with stooping shoulders and a patriarchal face, who invited us to "witness de exercises." We had already "witnessed" some of the exercises of a few outsiders who were very full of whisky, but they were probably not of the brothers. There were no seats. The people were standing, reclining on the ground and in some instances kneeling. An African preacher with a peculiar countenance and immense ears was holding forth on "De Day ob Jedgment" "Yo'll be dar, Broder John; 'n you, Sister Sally Mudge, 'n yo'll hef to 'par befo' de great jedge ob all de yeth, 'n wha'll yo' say when he axes yo' fo' yo' record? What'll yo' say? I'll tole yo' what; yo'll call on the san' ob Floridy to jes' scoop'n swallow yo' all up, Dar ain't no hills, nor rocks, nor mountains her', but de san' is mighty shifty n' de sun mighty hot; dar's a place hotte'n Floridy." Terrible groans burst forth at this, and as the daring preacher pictured the torments of that opposite condition to paradise the yells and shouts and even skrieks became deafening. One big black woman, whose vociferations were louder than the rest, managed to keep one eye on us and one on the preacher during the entire sermon.

The preacher's description of heaven was amusing, the principal delights of that reigon seeming to consist in having no work to do, no corn to shuck, no 'taters to hoe, no cotton to pick, and the hallelujahs were correspondingly intensified. Then the singing! The most graphic pen could not do justice to that. One song, in which even the children participated, swinging and rolling their small black bodies, was something like this:

Ho, wo! Come into dis meetin',
Come, pore souls;
Come, git yo' sins all pardoned,
Come, pore souls;
Come'n carry de big cross onward,
Oh, pore souls!
Git on board de gospel train, Oh!
Come, pore souls.

And so on, to a wailing, dirge-like tune. I did not hear any very cheerful music, but all smote the ear with sadness, no matter what the words were. Presently the sexes separated, the men standing off in a circle, the women massing together, led by a tall crone of a most unearthly countenance, her hair carried up from her temples to a point, two long tusks falling over her lower lip and growing longer every time she opened her mouth. This strange woman began the exercises, lifting one hand after the other, wagging her head, stamping right and left, with a curious monotony, and soon every woman and child in the meeting engaged in the holy dance, the men looking on and appearing to be affected by the rhapsodies of their wives, sisters, sweethearts and children.

The Lime-Kiln Club.

Detroit Free Press.—There was great general satisfaction among the large number present as Brother Gardner took his accustomed seat at the opening of the meeting. Since the accident mentioned at the last meeting several wild rumors had been flying around. One was to the effect that he had made his will and resigned in favor of Sir Walpole; another that the doctors had held a council and found that his liver had been pressed two feet out of plumb; a third that the heavy weight resting upon him so long had given him such a crook to his legs that a wheelbarrow could be run between them with plenty of room to spare.

"Gem'len," began the old man as he smiled benignly down upon the shining pates of the first row, "de Presumdenshul 'leckshun am a thing of de past. It am gone foreber. It am gathered into de archives of de forgotten, dar' to be kivered wid de cobwebs of decay, It am well. Dar' am some things we doan' want too much of.

Let us now turn ober a new leaf. If political bigotry has fur de pas' three months prevented us from borryin' coffee of a Democratic naybur, it need no longer stan' in de way. If the bias of our feelings has made us hesitate to lend our flat-irons to a Republican, we mus' now offer him our wheelbarrer as well. It has been a long, dark night. We hev called each other liars, horse thieves, cheats, swindlers, robbers, nabobs, tyrants, an' corrupshunists. We has sot each odder's houses on fiah, an' burned each odder's hay stacks. We has pizened each odder's dogs an' shot each odder's cats. We has stood an' glared at each odder wid murder in our hearts, an' we has skulked along de alleys wid clubs an' brick-bats in our hands.

"De long night am ober, an' daylight has broken. Let us forgive an' forgit. De kentry am all heah yit, an' sich of us as hev survived de struggle mus' purge our hearts of rancor an' bank up de house agin cold weather."