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MISCELLANEOUS.

From the New York Illustrated Magazine.

THE LAST HOUR OF A SUICIDE.

BY ANGUS B. BEACH.

Midnight! The brazen clang of the great bell of St. Paul's tolled heavily out, and the chimes from a hundred steeples repeated—Midnight! The solemn, yet unbroken silence, which for a brief period in the twenty-four hours over London, was spreading abroad. The noise and confusion of the early night was passing away, and the rattle of vehicles through empty streets came upon the ear, not as forming drops of the great tide of sound, but each distinct in its isolation. The day population of London had well nigh disappeared.

It was a cold, damp, clammy, cheerless night—the pavements were damp and sloppy. Men hurried by, thinking of the warm blaze which awaited them on their own hearths; and beings who had no homes or hearths to go to, shrunk up in sheltered corners, huddling the limbs close for warmth and praying for the end of the long shivering night.

On the water every thing is tenfold more dismal still. The fog careered in long, heavy wreaths along the stream—the wind howled most drearily among masts and rigging, and dashed the black, muddy water against the piers of bridges and slimy landing places with a chill monotonous splash. No traffle was stirring on the river. It flowed blackly and sullenly, roaring under anchored barges, and hustling the rank grass upon the fat mud banks. It was a dreary sight to look upon—calling up indistinct visions of blue swollen corpses, and men battling madly for life in the cold inky fluid.

Midnight! A woman is pacing the pavement of Waterloo bridge. She is young—she was once fair and gentle. And fair she is still. No sorrow, no burst of furious passion, can destroy the chiselling of those features—the noble height of brow, and the moulded oval of the cheeks. But passion—the passion of madness and despair, is running riot in that face. The eye is wildly bloodshot and swollen—the teeth are clenched and ground together—the hand twisted with a colvulsive grasp in the long dishevelled locks falling down on either cheek. She staggered forward mechanically. And now the paroxysm seems for a moment past; the heart sickness comes on her; she leans upon the balustrade; presses her forehead upon the damp cold granite, and seems to woo the embrace of the chill night wind. She is dressed in gaudy finery, without warmth or comfort. A wreath of flowers encircles her head—a ghastly mockery of the wan, distorted features which they frame. The handkerchief carelessly placed over her shoulders has been all but blown away, but she makes no effort to replace it.

Midnight! The clang of the bell was loud upon the gust of wind. She starts up, leaps upon the seat of the recesses of the bridge, wipes hurridly away the clammy sweat standing on her forehead, and gazes calmly and long upon the river below. How black—how pitchy black! A gurgling, eddying sound moans upward from the gulf. The thought, until then but half formed, rises in her breast. She squeezes her brow in her hands, and then thinks again, and calmly—quite calmly.

'I remember that once I thought suicide a thing almost impossible; I could not realize it how people would willingly quit a snug, happy world, and go into darkness—rottenness! Oh, I said to myself, they are mad, poor creatures, quite mad; none but a madman would do so; and as I looked upon black pools, and heard how people had plunged in, I turned away shivering, blessing God that I had my reason, and would not be a suicide. I have my reason now, but I do not think as I once did; many have died by their own hands—oh, I remember hundreds. In a moment it will be over—what matters it if one be added to the list? What should I live for? I have no hope, no friend, nobody who will mourn me, or care whether to-morrow I be walking the cold wretched streets or floating in the river. No; I will do it—my mind is made up—God forgive—mother, I come to you!'

She nerved herself for the spring, when the noise of voices and footsteps interrupted her. 'Let them pass, let them pass,' she murmured; and slipping down from the balustrades she couched in a corner of the recess.

A man and a woman passed. They were both young and happy. She was muffled up in a dark, warm dress, and clung closely to the arm of her companion. He bent down in speaking to her and her face was turned up—oh, so hopefully, so lovingly to his. The light of the lamp made all this for a moment visible. Their words were not heard; but she saw them go by, knew, felt what they were. Had not that upturned, confiding look told all most eloquently? Yes; they spoke of the bright future they saw before them—of holy domestic love—of hearts mutually trusting and trusted—young and pure, and teeming with unutterable love? It was but the vision of a moment—it came and was gone—but she who witnessed it writhed in anguish at the sight—a thrilling chord was touched—she bent down in her sore affliction, and slowly rocked her body to and fro; 'Oh, God! oh, God! so it was once with *us*—so I once spake to him—so he once listened to *me*—and now—' Her hands, which had been clasped so that the nails almost entered the flesh, relaxed, and she fell insensible upon the stone bench.

The body neither felt nor knew aught, but the subtle mind was active; it soared away, away from the dismal river, out of the dismal night, and the entranced girl saw a vision; it was of a country cottage embosomed in trees—a smiling, happy place, far from dirty bustling towns and cities, delicious in its rural freshness. Lofty trees grew around it, and trailing shrubs clasped the walls with their tendrils, and their blossoms peeped slyly into the open casement. She knew the place—it was Home. She was there once again; a heavy weight, a dimly-remembered sorrow had been lifted from her heart; she was happy, and the sensation was strange. From everything around her soul drank in peace, but from one source it quaffed exceeding joy. Who walked at her side—who spoke so very softly into her ear—whose hand clasped hers, so lovingly yielded to it? There were long pauses in the whispered dialogue, but something sweeter than honeyed words filled up the gap; and this lasted, as it were, for hours—she knew that hours had passed, although they seemed but minutes. Why, evening began to fall; a dim greyness spread itself all around. The silence became more intense. Birds ceased to sing and twitter among the ivy. The peace of the summer evening was a holy thing, and the voices of the lovers did not break harshly upon its stillness.

'Say again you love me.' It was he who spoke.

'You know it, do you not?'

'But it is so sweet to hear the words.'

'I love you!'

There was a long sweet silence; then the whispering tones were renewed.

'I cannot bear to leave you—to part with you, even for a day, dearest; but my family—my father in particular—would not hear at this moment of my marriage.'

'Your family—your father!' was the frightened reply. 'Do they not know all? How we met—how we—we loved?'

'It would have been madness, dearest, to have breathed the secret. In an instant I should have been torn from you. Oh, you do not know my father.'

'Then what is to be done—what? Oh, I never thought of this; my foolish heart never suggested a doubt. Oh, I know not what to think—to say. My mother—

'Does she know our secret?' was the quick interruption.

'I have no secrets from my mother. But what—what makes you look so? You would not have me tell my mother that I cared not—thought not of you—now, would you?'

'No, no, dearest; surely not. But—'

'You are confused; oh, tell me all!—what is wrong? Have I not a right to know?'

'Dearest, you have. I will tell you the truth. I love you—love you as passionately as man ever loved woman. But I dare not breathe a word of this to aught but you; but for you I will risk all—every prospect—every hope. Come, dearest; all is prepared; fly with me. Once in London, we can defy pursuit; and the instant that we arrive home the ceremony shall take place which makes you mine forever.

She listened, stunned—stupified.

He continued—

'You give me no answer—no sign of hope. Oh, dearest, is it possible you distrust me?'

'No, no—not distrust?'

'Then why not fly at once? You have said, you have sworn, that you loved—adored me; prove it now. Show me what you will do for him who has won your heart?'

'But, oh! to leave my poor old mother, who lives but in me—but for me! I cannot, indeed—indeed I cannot!'

'Then I am to understand, love, that I am only second in your affections—that, in short, you spurn the heart and hand I lay at your feet!'

'Oh! for Heaven's sake do not speak such cruel words—I—oh, what shall I do?—what shall I say?'

'Choose between love and miscalled duty. I cannot share a heart—it must be mine.'

'This is cruel.'

'It is kind cruelty, dear one.. When once we are married, your mother shall know all. It is but two days' trouble, to be repaid by a life of happiness. Come with me—come—I see, I feel you are yielding.'

'Dearest, I may be doing wrong. My heart tells me I am, and may God forgive me—but you—you I cannot resist. No, I cannot struggle against it. I will go with you, dearest, to the very world's end.'

There was a very long pause, and she wept upon her lover's breast.

'My own brave girl,' he murmured.

The whole scene became indistinct and confused. The mind conjured up a thousand wavering, fantastic, shapeless images—amid which it wandered, stumbling and bewildered. Gradually a dim light streamed in, and the still fainting girl beheld herself in a small and poor room, with smoky, dusty walls, and breathing a hot, murky, steaming air.

It was a very different place from home.—She sat at the window. Her eyes were red with crying, and swollen so that shs could hardly see. She was very pale—she knew it: and her fingers played mechanically with the long, disarranged locks which fell over her shoulders. A heap of needlework lay unheeded upon her lap, and she looked with a vacant, wandering eye through the dim cracked panes before her. It was a different view from that she had so often gazed upon with a merry face and a tranquil heart at home. Her eye fell upon masses of dingy brick walls, crowned with labarinths of irregular-tiled roofs and chimney-stacks.—There they stretched away in an endless confusion of outline—some roofs broken by graveled garret windows, and others patched up and variegated by extempore erections of crazy boards. Lines, on which swung yellow, smoked, dried clothes, ran from house to house. Squalid, bare-armed women, leant idly out of windows, and screamed shrilly to children in the court below.—The smoke poured continuously from the yellow cans whirling in eddies amid the masses of brick and lime. Upon one little flat space, between two ascending planes of roof, sat a man in his shirt sleeves, with a long pipe in his mouth, a pot of porter before him, and a newspaper in his hand. A whirling iron can was pouring out volumes of smoke behind him—nevertheless, he called sitting there 'enjoying the air!' A char looking sort of a woman was hanging dripping clothes upon a rotten railing beside him, and occasionally screaming out at the full pitch of her voice to a neighbor, occupied in a court below in filling a tea-kettle out of the water butt. It was a true London roof scene in a low neighborhood.

The girl looked long at it, as though she saw it not. A step sounded upon the stair—she clasped her hands, and started to her feet. The door opened. He entered and threw himself suddenly upon a chair with his back toward her. She approached him timidly.

'Dear!'

'Well, what do you want now? You always want something.'

She wrung her hands, and then covered her face with the little apron she wore.

There was a long silence—oh, how different from that silence in the cottage garden.

'I want to make some arrangement,' he said abruptly.

She looked eagerly up.

'Oh, do, do, dearest—be yourself again—speak to me—look on me as you used to do—I will not think of what has passed, never, never, upbraid you—but oh, do, do marry me!'

'Marry you,' he repeated mechanically.

'You know, love,' she continued, trying to smile through her tears, 'you know you said that whenever we came to London, we should be married, then you put it off. I was very unhappy, but did not say so—I trusted in you, may I not trust in you yet?'

And she laid her hand timidly on his shoulder. He turned round abruptly, and shook it off.

There was another silence.

'I left my home, my mother,' her voice faltered, 'my friends, all, all for you. God knows how I loved you, how I trusted in you, I lived in your voice, in your look, I would give up the world for you. Oh, have you deceived me? Speak, speak, I shall go mad!'

She clasped his hand in hers and sunk on her knees before him.

'For the love of God fulfil your promise, your oath, to marry me!'

'And be transported for bigamy!'

She fell upon the floor like a dead thing—as insensible as that moment when her cold cheek was lying against the not colder granite. All was blank, darkness, the wanderings of the mind were for the moment over. A dull sense of re-awakening pain came into the limbs, and she half felt something laid upon her shoulder.

'What's the matter, my girl?' said a rough but not unkind voice. Her eyes half opened and her lips moved, but no sound save a confused meaning came from them.

'What's the matter? come, speak.'

'Marry—bigamy—bigamy!' she faltered forth.

'Oh, bah! let that drunken woman alone, she'll sleep herself sober where she is—there's no fear of her.'

'Yes, I think she is drunk,' said the first voice.

'As gin can make her.' rejoined the second—'Come—we're late.'

And she was left alone.

'A drunken woman!' she murmured; 'better be drunken now, than sober.'

She sat partially erect on the stone seat, and flung her arms about wildly. Her eyes sparkled with a mad glare, and she laughed hysterically.

'Drunken!' she muttered, half unconsciously, 'drunken! and who made me drunken? who drove me to it? Yes, I am a drunken woman—I know it! Drink is my best friend now—it warms me, and makes me forget. Yes, give me but that, and I can shout and laugh!—but such laughter!—never mind—gin is a good friend—it always does its work, it never leaves us sober!'

She gave a long, loud, vacant laugh, and relapsed into insensibility. Presently she revived; and, quite calm, and with all her senses about her, she pressed her hands against her forehead, and looked wildly about.

The soaking rain was still driven by the wind. The river still roared, and gushed, and gurgled beneath. It was more pitchy dark than ever.

She rose, and stood upon the stone seat; the fixed despair of her countenance was awful to see. 'I have had a horrid dream,' she murmured; 'but I am going where there are no dreams.'

She looked long and intently down into the abyss. Hopeless, defiled, and an outcast, I go'——

Suddenly she tossed her arms over her head; a change came over her face; her eye glowed, and she gazed upon the black vacancy.

'Mother! mother! I see you—I see you,—Hush! Wait for a moment, and I will be with you—a spirit like yourself!'

There was a bound—a rush through the air—a flutter of silk and a heavy splash.—It was all over!

A cry was raised, 'A woman has thrown herself into the water. A solitary passenger had just approached her near enough to catch a glimpse of the disappearing form. Hoarse voices echoed the exclamation, and presently boats were put off, drags thrown and lights gleamed on the dark rushing river.

'It's of no use,' said a waterman; 'the tide's running like a mill-stream; she may be at London bridge by this time. And he returned to the public house from whence he had been summoned.

In a day or two a paragraph appeared in the daily papers, stating that the body of a woman, fashionably, but thinly dressed, had been found floating in the Pool. It lay in the dead house of a water-side church for some days, but no one came to claim it. A coroner's inquest was then held. No evidence was produced as to identity of the deceased. There was a verdict of 'Found drowned,' and the next day a parish funeral.

All accidental sorrows may be dwelt upon with calmness, or recollected with gratitude to him who sent them; the sorrows which spring from ourselves preserve their unmitigated bitterness.

A WINTER SCRAP.—The following quaint epitaph was written on a tombstone at Frith, in Derbyshire, England. The comparison is seasonable:

Our life is but a winter's day,
Some only breakfast, and away!
Others to dinner stay, and are full fed:
The oldest man but sups and goes to bed!
Large is his debt who lingers out the day—
Who goes the soonest has the least to pay!

THE GOOD WIFE.

The good wife is a being selected by a benign Providence to scatter the roses of contentment, and strew the dark and serpentine paths of life with the choicest, the most fadeless flowers, and is truly the "best gift of God to man." Formed to charm, to allure and fascinate the whole soul of an affectionate husband, she can at any time transfuse a portion of her own spirit into his, and by the powerful magic of a smile, change in a moment the bitter draught of his existence to dreams of the most delicious nectar.

She is the creature of the powerful attractive system, in which revolve, with uniform motion, all the bewitching graces, all the home-born delights of refined and tranquil love. She gives a new charm, and adds an exquisite delight to all the blandishments of social life. Solitude is a stranger where she dwells; and Melancholy, passing over his mournful story, dares not approach her consecrated mansion.

She is the silver wand which chases away the demon of sorrow, and restores the sunshine of her soul. In her right hand is health, happiness and dawning honors; and in her left, an inverted mirror reflecting the loveliest objects in creation.

A good wife will soften the asperity of thy temper, and smoothe thy brow, clonded with sadness, and whisper in softest accents the language of consolation to thy drooping heart. She will form thy mind to generous exertions, and make thee nobly emulous of real greatness; and when the last faint flashes of life's expiring lamp have quivered out their little moment, her tears will moisten thy clay-clod form; and her prayers ascending for thy final happiness, will gently waft thy disembodied spirit to the garden of the Paradise of God.

A DYING CHAMBER.—Who that has watched beside the sick—the dying couch of a beloved being—does not remember the dreary, desolate blank that succeeds the moment of dissolution? While life remains hope will linger. From the ark of its affections the heart still sends forth the dove over the wide waste of affliction, fondly dreaming of her return with the olive branch of Hope and Joy. The mind too fully occupied with the duties of the sick chamber, has scarcely leisure to dwell upon aught beside. To smooth the pillow—to watch over the unquiet slumber—to sweeten the bitter draught with affection's hand—to read the languid eye—anticipate the broken wish—these, these and a thousand other kindly offices fill up the weary hours, and twine the loved one in its helplessness closer and closer round the heart. But when the last scene has closed on the being we have so loved and tended—when the warm heart can no longer feel our care, nor the beaming eye smile its thanks—then it is that the weary frame and crushed spirit sink together in utter helpless loneliness. Beyond that silent chamber the wide world appears one trackless waste, and as we gaze on the still cold features of the departed, we long for the wings of the dove, to "fly away and be at rest."

LAUGHTER.—Laughter has even dissipated disease and preserved life by a sudden effort of nature. We are told that the great Erasmus laughed so heartily at the satyr by Reuchlier and Van Hutton that he broke an imposthume, and recovered his health. In a singular treatise on Laughter, Joubert gives two similar instances: A patient being very low, the physician, who had ordered a dose of rhubarb, countermanded the medicine, which was left on the table. A monkey in the room, jumping up, discovered the goblet, and having tasted, made a terrible grimace. Again, only putting his tongue to it, he perceived some sweetness of the dissolved manna, while the rhubarb had sunk to the bottom. Thus emboldened, he swallowed the whole, but found it such a nauseous portion that, after many strange and fantastic grimaces, he grinned his teeth in agony, and in a violent fury threw the goblet on the floor. The whole affair was so ludicrous that the sick man burst into repeated peals of laughter, and the resovery of cheerfulness led to health.

IT MUST GO HARD WITH THE FRENCH.—During the late French war, a farmer remarked to the rector of the parish that the contest would go very hard with the French. The rector replied that, if it pleased God, he hoped it would. "Nay," said the farmer, "I am sure it will, then; for He says by the prophet Ezekiel, (xxxv. 1, 2, 3,) 'Son of man, set thy face against *Mount Seir.*' Now, my wife, who is a better scholar than I am, says this can be nothing but *Mounseer*, the French; and in almost the next verse it is still stronger, for there the prophet adds: 'O, *Mount Seir*, I am against thee, and I will make thee most desolate.'"