

Poetry.

OUR CHILDHOOD.

BY GEORGE D. PRENTICE.

'Tis sad—yet sweet—to listen,
To the soft wind's gentle swell,
And think we hear the music
Our childhood knew so well;

There are many dreams of gladness
That cling around the past—
And from the touch of feeling
Old thoughts come throbbing fast—

Those bright and lovely maidens
Who seemed so formed for bliss,
Too glorious and too heavenly
For such a world as this!

Whose smiles were like the sunshine
In the springtime of the year—
Like the changeful gleams of April
They followed every tear!

And yet—the thought is sadning
To muse on such as they—
And feel that all the beautiful
Are passing fast away!

And can we but think of these
In the soft and gentle spring,
When the trees are waving o'er us,
And the flowers are blossoming!

Select Tale.

SOMETHING ADVANTAGEOUS;

OR, A FAMILY FRAGAS.

I once attended a very poor old man, of the name of Jordan, in his last illness. I call him poor, yet he was not in want, and had about him the comforts of life. When he was near his end he said to me:

'Doctor I want to know the truth from you. I am not in the habit of being flattered by the world. There was a time indeed, when it fooled me to the top of my bent; but that was long ago. Do not flatter me, but tell me your real opinion. Shall I soon die, or shall I yet linger a brief career in a world I am quite willing to be done with?'

'You desire me,' replied I, 'to be candid with you, and I will. You are on your death bed.'

'How soon shall I be immortal?'

'That I cannot say. But your hours, as far as human experience can teach me to predict, are numbered.'

'He was silent for a few moments, and a slight spasm crossed his face.'

'Well,' said he, 'it is the lot of all. I have lived long enough.'

'Is there no friend or relation, Mr. Jordan,' said I, 'to whom you would wish to send? You are here as you have often told me, quite alone in lodgings. Perhaps you would like to revive some old recollection before you leave the world.'

'Not one,' he said.

'Are you so completely isolated?'

'Most completely. I have tried all relations and found them wanting. But still I have remembered them, and made my will.—It is now between the mattress and sack of this bed, and Mr. Shaw, the only honest attorney I have ever met with, and who resides in Lincoln's Inn Fields will carry my intentions into effect. I was rich once in early life. How dark a day!'

'What day?'

'To-day. How dark and misty it has come over, doctor!'

'His sight was going fast, and I felt certain that it would require but little patience and a small sacrifice of time, to see the last of Mr. Jordan.'

'Yes,' he continued, 'speaking in odd spasmodic fashion, 'Yes I was rich, and had many a crawling sycophant about me, many smiling faces at my board; but there came a reverse, and like fair flowers and a sudden frost, my friends hid their heads. I was nearly destitute, and believing that the tie of blood would be strong enough to bind me in my distresses to those with whom I claimed kindred, and who had been delighted to claim kindred with me, I went to them a visitor.'

'And failed.'

'And failed as you say. They dropped from me one by one. Some remembered slight offences; some were never at home, some really thought I must have been dreadfully im-

provident; and until they were convinced I had not been, could not assist me. Doors were shut in my face—window blinds pulled down as I passed. I was shunned as a pestilence—my clothes were in rags—my step feeble from long want of common necessities; and then an old school companion died in the West Indies and left me twenty thousand pounds, which I received through the hands of Mr. Shaw.'

'A large fortune. And relations?'

'I heard of it, and were frantic. I disappeared from them all. From that day to this they have never heard of me. Do you love wild flowers?'

'Wild flowers?'

'Yes. Here are herbs, just from the teeming garden. Look, too, how you cherub twines them in her hair! The streams flows deep to eternity!'

'Mr. Jordan, sir,' I cried, 'Mr. Jordan do you know me?'

'Come hither, laughing, gentle spirit,' he said. 'Bring with you your heap of floral gems. Yes, I know this is the sweet violet, Mary, my Mary! God knows that I loved you.'

It was a strange thing at that moment, but the blind of the window, which I had drawn up to the top, came suddenly rattling down and the room was quite dark: I raised it again and then turned to the bed; Mr. Jordan was a corpse!

What a remarkable change had in those few moments come over the old man's face! The sharp lines of age had all disappeared, and there was a calm, benign expression upon the still features, such as in life I never saw them wear.

'A restless spirit is at peace,' I said as I felt for the will where he told me it was placed, and found it. It was merely tied up with a piece of red tape, and addressed to Mr. Shaw, 20 Lincoln's Inn Fields, so I resolved to trust it to no other messenger, but to take in hand myself. I told the landlady of the House that her lodger was no more, and that she would no doubt hear immediately from his solicitor; and then I said:

'Well Mr. Shaw,' I said after I had mentioned to him the manner of Mr. Jordan's death 'here is the will, sir. I presume I have nothing further to do than to thank you for your courtesy and bid you good evening.'

'Stay a moment,' he said. 'Let me look at the document. Humpf! a strange will. He leaves the form of an advertisement here, which is to be inserted in the morning papers, calling his relations together to hear the will read.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes. Well, I shall, as I see that I am named trustee, do as he wishes. He states that he is very poor.'

Why he spoke to me of £20,000!'

'Did he really? A delusion sir, quite a delusion, £20,000! He had that amount twenty-five years ago. But, sir, as you have attended him, and as I happen to know that he had a high opinion of you, I should like you as his friend to aid me, as it were, in the future proceedings connected with this will.'

'In which there is a mystery, oh, Mr. Shaw? A little—perhaps a little bit of post mortem revenge, that is all which I am not now at liberty to discuss upon. But I will take care to coincide with you, and I shall hope that you will follow an old friend to the grave.'

I promised that much, and duly attended the funeral. It was a quiet walking affair, and from the manner of it I felt quite convinced that there was no funds to make it otherwise. A mound of earth marked the spot in the little church yard at Barnes, where Mr. Jordan slept the sleep that knows no waking. A drizzling rain came down,—The air was cold and eager, and I returned home from the funeral of Mr. Jordan about as uncomfortable as I could.

The next day the following advertisement appeared in the morning paper, and caught my eye as I sat at breakfast.

If any of the relations of Mr. John James Jordan, deceased, will call at the office of Mr. Shaw, 20 Lincoln's Inn Field, they will hear of something advantageous.

I made up my mind to call upon Mr. Shaw during the day, and about three o'clock reached his chambers; or rather reached the staircase leading to them, and there I had to stop for it was besieged by men and women, who were all conversing with great eagerness.

'What can it mean?' said one old woman; 'I'm his aunt, and of course I speak for my Ned!'

'Well, but bother your Ned,' said a man; 'he hardly belongs to the family, I'm his brother. Think of that Mrs. Dean!'

'Think of what? ye two legged goose!'

'Poh, Poh!' said another man; 'I knew him very well—I'm his cousin. Hilou!—what's this, who are you?'

A woman in tattered garments, but who still looked like a beautiful one, stood hesitatingly at the foot of the stairs.

'Is this Mr. Shaw's?' she said. 'Hush Mary hush! don't, my dear.'

'But I'm hungry mammy,' said a little girl, who was holding by a handful of her dress.

'Oh, Mary, do not dear; we shall soon go home. Hush, dear, hush! Is this Mr. Shaw's?'

'Yes,' said a fat woman; 'and who is you, pray?'

'I saw an advertisement. I am his sister Grace's only child. My name is Mary Grantham. This is my only child. She—she is fatherless and has been so for many a day.'

'What,' cried a man, 'are you the Mary that he broke his heart about?'

'Broke his fiddlesticks,' said the fat woman, 'he was fifty when he died!'

'Broke his heart for me!' asked the poor-looking woman with the child. 'Good God, do I live to hear that?'

'You had better go up to the solicitor's at once,' whispered I. Come I will show you his door.'

I made a way for her through the crowd of persons, and we soon reached the chamber—'Here is another of Mr. Jordan's relations Mr. Shaw,' said I. 'I find that you have had quite a love.'

'I have, indeed, doctor. You must come at twelve o'clock next Monday, madam, when the will of Mr. Jordan will be read by me to all around.'

'I thank you sir.' She was about to leave the chamber when I interposed.

'Pardon me, madam,' I said. 'But as I was the only person with Mr. Jordan at the time of his decease, I wish to ask you a question. If I mistake not, your name was the last that passed his lips. Mary, my Mary,' he said, 'God knows that I loved you!'

She sank into a chair and burst into tears. 'You, then,' I added, 'are the Mary whom he loved. Ah why did you not, if you can weep for him now, reciprocate the passion?'

'I did love him,' she cried, 'God knows, and he is now with his God, who knows how I loved him. But evil tongues came between us, and we separated. He was malign to me, and I was wearied by entreaties and tears until I married another. She who has turned me from him, and severed two hearts that would and should have been all the world to each other, confessed the sin upon her death bed.'

'Who was it?' said Mr. Shaw.

'His mother! From no other source could I have believed the tales that I was told. But I did not then know enough of the world to think that there were mothers who could malign their own children. We were separated—my husband died, leaving me that last little one of many. We are very, very poor—no one will help us—an acquaintance showed me the advertisement, and urged me to come—it was a false hope. But I find there are strong arms and brawling tongues below that I cannot contend against.'

'Never mind that,' said the solicitor, 'it is my duty to read the will on Monday, and as a relation, it is your duty to attend at the same time. I tell you to have no expectations.'

I saw Mr. Shaw try to slip some money into her hand, and I saw a crimson flush come over her face as she said, 'We can still work, and then fearing that she had been harsh to one who wished to be kind, she shook his hand in both of hers, and said, 'God bless you, sir; I thank you from my heart.'

Bang, bang! came to the door of the chamber, a minute after Mary left, and upon its being opened, a man of about five or six and thirty made his appearance.

'Something advantageous!' he gasped, for he was out of breath; what is it?—Give it to me? How much? Good God, don't let any body else have it. I'm his youngest brother, give it to me.'

'If you will attend here at twelve, on Monday the will will be read.'

Bang, bang, bang!

'I'm thoroughly besieged,' said Mr. Shaw. 'Now, madam, who are you?'

'Something advantageous,' screamed a masculine looking woman 'I'm a relative—what is it—come on my dears. Here's my five daughters and my baby—come along.'

'Bo off with you,' cried the youngest brother.

'Did you speak to me, you wretch,' said the lady, and she planted a blow in his face that made him reel again. 'Take that; I know you are a sneaking bound, you used to be called the chimpanzee in the family, you poor scorch-ed up looking bundle of cat's meat.'

Several more arrivals now took place, and poor Mr. Shaw was fairly bewildered. Sounds of contention arose on the staircase. Shrieks from family combatants came upon our ears, and finally, I advised Mr. Shaw to paste a placard on the outer door of his office, on which was written—

'The will of Mr. Jordan will be read here on Monday next, at twelve o'clock precisely.'

The riot gradually subsided. The evening came on, and all the relations of the deceased had been gone. Mr. Shaw and I supped together, and I promised to be with him punctually at twelve o'clock on Monday, for I was curious as any body could be to hear the will read, and at all events, anticipating a bustling scene upon the occasion. I was not doomed to be disappointed.

It is a habit of mine rather to be too early than to be too late, and in the present instance I found it a most useful one, for I really almost doubt if I should have got into the chambers of Mr. Shaw at all if I had been later than I was. I had fairly to push Mrs. Mary Grantham in despite a vigorous opposition, and a man stopped my own entrance crying—'Who are you? what relation are you?'

'His grandfather's uncle,' said I; 'and if you don't make the way there I'll pull the nose off your face.'

It was well that Mr. Shaw occupied a very spacious chamber, or otherwise he could not have accommodated one half of the persons who came to the reading of the will, and never in my life did I see such malignant looks pass from one to another as shot from the eyes of the relations. It was a most pitiful picture of human nature.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Mr. Shaw, 'ahem! ahem!'

There was a death like stillness.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' I am commissioned to read you the—the—what shall I call it—it is hardly a will—of the late Mr. Jordan. No certainly ought not to be called a will, properly speaking, it is a testamentary—'

'Read, read, read!' cried a dozen voices.

'Well, ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to see you are all in respectable mourning.'

'Except one,' said the younger brother; 'there's his Mary that he was so fond of. Oh, dear me, she only comes to see what she can get.'

Mrs. Grantham burst into tears. There was a little shabby piece of black crape upon her arm, and another upon the arm of her child.

'I could not, she said; 'I could not do more. God help me: I had not the means.'

'Read, read!' cried all the voices.

'Ahem,' said Mr. Shaw, reading; 'I John James Jordan, being very poor, and having in vain called upon every relation I have in the world for assistance, and found none, have to state that my heart was filled with bitterness and uncharitableness towards them. But still I think they are not dead to all feeling; and this being my last will and testament, I desire that my debts, amounting to the sum of one pound three shillings and eightpence, be paid forthwith out of my estate; that my funeral be strictly private in Barnes churchyard, where I last parted with one whom I loved, but who has gone abroad, I am told; and to that one of my relations who will erect a tombstone, I bequeath—'

'Hark! will you?' cried one; be quiet. Go on—yes, yes. Oh! you wretch, where's your feelings? Go to the!'

'Really, ladies and gentlemen,' said I, 'this is most indecorous.'

'I bequeath,' continued Mr. Shaw, 'my dying blessing and forgiveness.'

Mr. Shaw then folded up the will, and put it in his pocket, saying—

'I wish you all good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I sold the few clothes and other matters he died possessed of and paid for the funeral, and his debts; being myself minus one shilling and fourpence, which I hope some of you will pay.'

It is quite impossible by any words to fairly depict to the reader the appearance of Mr. Jordan's relations at that moment. If the fabled Gorgon's head had suddenly appeared, and transformed them all to stone, they could not have looked more completely paralyzed and panic stricken.

'A tombstone,' said Mr. Shaw. 'A small one would not cost much. You could put on it a suitable inscription. Here lies,—'

'Lies here—never mind,' said the brother. 'Never mind,—oh, that's all, is it?'

'You are a humbug,' said the masculine woman to Mr. Shaw, 'and so was old stupid Jordan.'

'Go to the deuce, all of you, shouted another, 'a tombstone, indeed.'

Mr. Shaw was wiping his spectacles.

'Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to add—'Oh, stuff, stuff; brother. A tombstone in deed. I shan't stay another moment. An old thief! I wish a tombstone had been down his throat. Come on. It's a do.'

'But, ladies and gentlemen!'

They were quite deaf to the remonstrances of Mr. Shaw, and in a few moments the chambers were quite clear, with the exception of Mrs. Mary Grantham, who was sobbing bitterly. She then rose and looked at me hesitatingly. Then she looked at Mr. Shaw, and she seemed to be struggling to say something. She placed her hands in her bosom, and drew forth a ring tied to a black ribbon, and then with a convulsive effort, she spoke—

'This—this ring—it is my only valuable possession. It was given to me thirty years ago by him who loved me. I have clung to it in pain and sorrow, in difficulty and distress. I have never parted with it. I seemed to be not wholly separated from him while I had it near my heart. But now, great distress forces me to—to part with it. Will—will neither of you, gentleman, buy it of me? I shrink from its going into the hands of utter strangers.'

She took the money, and then, after one long lingering look, and a fervent kiss at the ring, she laid it on the table and tottered from the place. I was about to follow her, but Mr. Shaw held me back.

'Hold! hold!' he said.

'You're a brute, sir,' said I. 'Take your hands off me; I will buy the ring of you and give it back to her. It breaks her heart to part with it, I see.'

'I shan't part with it,' he said; 'you are a very hasty man, doctor.'

I was very angry, and bounced out of the office. I looked eagerly about for Mrs. Grantham, but could not see her. I walked hurriedly across the square, and as chance would have it, I went in the same direction she did. My first impulse was to speak to her, and my second thought was to follow her, and see where she went. She crossed Holborn, and traversed some of the long streets that head in the New Road, where she arrived at last, and finally paused at a stone mason's yard.

I could have shed tears at that moment, for now I felt why she had parted with her cherished ring. She stayed about a quarter of an hour at the stone mason's, and then she came out and walked slowly away. I did not follow her further, but went into the mason's yard, and said to him—

'Did that lady give you an order?'

'Why, yes, sir, such a one as it was. She has got me to do a stone for two pounds, and she's paid me. I'm to meet her at the churchyard at Barnes, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, with—, and put it up. It's only to have on it the name of John James Jordan, and under that, 'God bless him.'

I walked with a sort of mist before my eyes, and it was an hour before I recovered my composure. 'I will meet her,' thought I, 'at the grave of her last love, and I will be a friend to her if she has never another in the world. She shall have her ring again, if I force it from the lawyer. She shall have it. I'll go and get it now at once.'

I suppose I looked in a very tolerable passion when I got back to Mr. Shaw's chambers, for he got behind a table when he saw me, and said—

'Come, come, no violence.'

'Hark you, sir,' said I; 'you have got the ring. There's your money. Give it to me directly, sir. Mrs. Grantham, poor thing, is going to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock, to place a stone at the grave of Mr. Jordan, and I intend to be there and give her her ring.'

'Oh, very well. Both the ring—I don't want it. It ain't worth half the money I gave for it. There it is; don't bother me.'

I took up the ring, and then put down two sovereigns, and casting upon him a withering look, which to tell the truth he did not seem much to care about, I left the chambers.

A soft, damp, white mist covered up all objects, and made the air uncommonly raw and chilly, as on the following morning, just as the clock of the church at Barnes chimed the three quarters past eight, I entered the churchyard.

The first thing I then did was to fall over somebody's grave, for I was looking for Mrs. Grantham instead of minding where I was walking; and then a voice said—

'There you go again, as violent as usual, doctor,' and in the dimmist I saw Mr. Shaw, the solicitor, to my great surpris.

I was going to say something, but at that moment I was nearly knocked down again by somebody brushing past me. A gleam of sunshine came out, and the mist began to clear away, when a most singular scene presented itself. A few yards off was the grave of Mr. Jordan, and kneeling by it was Mary, his first love, with her child by her side. Mr. Shaw stood to my left, and at his feet there knelt a respectable looking young man I recollected as Mr. Shaw's clerk.

'Good God! Richards,' said Mr. Shaw, 'is that you? What is the matter?'

'Oh, sir,' said Richards, 'I have come to ask your forgiveness. The spirit of my poor old father stood at the bedside all night. Oh, God! Oh, God! it was dreadful; and I knew what it was for. Oh, sir, forgive me. I peeped into the will while you went out to dinner—Mr. Jordan's will—and—and I went round to all the relations, and sold the secret for two pounds apiece, and—and—'

Mr. Shaw gave a jump that astonished me.

'Doctor, doctor!' he shouted, 'for God's sake run down the London road and bring the man with the gravestone. Oh, good gracious! Oh, curse you! Richards! Ha, ha, ha! Oh! bless you for a prudent stone mason; you shall go well paid for this job! Hip, hip,—hurrah!'

I thought to be sure that Mr. Shaw must have gone mad. There was a man looking over the railing of the churchyard with a spade on his shoulder, and to him Mr. Shaw said:

'Five guineas for that spade.'

The man thought he was mad, and tried to run away, but he dropped the spade, and in another moment Mr. Shaw's coat was off and he was digging away like fury.

'Where's the stone?' he cried; bring the stone. That's right! Poke it in—prop it up! That's the thing—all's right'

'Lor!' said the stone mason, as he lifted up his hands, 'look there!'

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