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Selected Poetry.

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER.

BY MRS. HELEN RICH.

It came from the lips that had pressed the first kiss
On the brow of young innocence sleeping in bliss,
And soft as the sigh of the evening's sweet air
Fank into the bosom—a mother's prayer.

It was murmured in accents soft, tender and meek—
Though the eye-kindled brightly, pale, pale was the cheek—
An angel she seemed, as she lowly knelt there,
For her child softly breathing a mother's pure prayer.

It asked for the loved one not riches or power,
Nor beauty, that fades as the glow from the flower—
But virtue and genius—gifts deathless as fair—
For she was breathing a mother's pure prayer.

It is past—and her child is away on the tide
Of a life ever changing with passion and pride—
Though temptation may lure him, it whispers beware,
And the last thing to fade is a mother's dear prayer.

It may not be slighted—it cannot be vain—
It will cling to its memory through pleasure and pain—
Though his sky frowneth darkly, what saves
From despair? 'Tis the thought of his home, and his mother's last prayer.

It has breathed a deep spell o'er the soul in its
A charm from all evil, by memory worn,
A gem whose clear rays never pale beneath the glare
Of the false lights alluring from her, and from prayer.

It may seem but a trifle, yet do not withhold,
Young mother, that boon far more precious than gold—
Your child may lackinsel of fashion to wear,
But strengthen his soul with a mother's fond prayer.

It was breathed to a God who can feel for our
A father to all whom an him shall repose,
And lost is the spirit which madly would dare
To scoff at the truth of a mother's first prayer.

A ROMANCE OF LIMA.

Many years ago a young Englishman, a medical student named Astley, went to Lima. The love of adventure was strong upon him, and all he met with in his own country was too tame to satisfy it. Proud of the profession for which he was studying, and trusting to it for subsistence, strong and healthy in body and in mind, he left England with a bold heart, and this was the life he led, and what came of it.

At a time when the difficulty of procuring subjects for anatomical study was very great, and when to procure them honestly was impossible, as the prejudice against dissection was so strong that no one was willing to submit the body of any one connected with him to examination, it is well known that there were men who made it their business to obtain no small risk, bodies, generally those of the newly buried, which they sold to surgeons, medical students, or indeed to any one who stood in need of the ghastly commodity.

This class, known as "body snatchers" and "resurrection men" had died out, since there is happily now little prejudice against what has been triumphantly proved to be a necessary branch of scientific study; but at the time of our story their hideous work was a thriving and profitable one.

Richard Astley, in common with the rest of the profession, availed himself of their services, and many times in the black night his door was opened to those who did not knock, but who were expected and waited for, and who, entering silently, stealthily deposited a dread burden upon the table prepared for its reception. Old and young, men, women and children, all in turn lay upon that grim table, and Astley's skillful instruments cut their way to secrets that were destined to benefit the living.

Though he was not hard-hearted, it was not unnatural that in time he should grow so much accustomed to the sight of his "subjects" as to feel nothing but a momentary pity as he put aside the clustering curls of infancy, or uncovered the face of a man struck down in the glory of his years.

One night, as many nights before, the stealthy visit was paid, and Astley took his lamp to examine the new subject. Neither strong man nor tender child this time, but a young and beautiful woman. The dead face was so lovely that it did not seem possible that light in the closed eyes, and color in the pale lips and cheeks could make it lovelier. The fair hair had fallen back, and gave no shade to the white brow, and the long fair lashes were a thick fringe upon the violet of her eyelids.

She was tall and slender, and her features which hung down as she lay upon the table—were long and perfect. As Astley lifted the hand that lay upon her breast, he thought how

beautiful it must once have been, since now, there was not the faintest rose-tint to relieve the deathly pallor of it, it was so exquisite. She wore one garment, a long flannel shroud, very straitly made, through which scanty drapery the outline of her slender limbs was distinctly visible, and below which her delicate feet were seen, bare to the ankle.

Astley was troubled as he had never been before. The idea of treating this beautiful corpse as he had done all others brought to him, was repulsive to him, and he recoiled from it as from the thought of sacrilege. But how could he rid himself of the lovely incubus? It was possible that the men who had brought it might be bribed to take it back again, and if they should refuse—but he was incapable of distinct thought upon the subject, and could only determine that in any case the beautiful thing before him should be treated with reverence and respect. He gently covered it from head to foot with a long white cloth, and locking the door of communication between his bedroom and the room in which it lay, threw himself upon his bed without undressing, for the night was nearly gone.

But his sleep was broken, and his dreams were feverish, and in some way all connected with what lay in the next room. Now it seemed to him that it glided in through the locked door, with hands folded on its breast, and eyes still fast closed, and stood by his bedside; and now the dream was that he had opened a vein in one of the delicate arms, and that warm, living blood poured fast from it; and finally, he woke with a cry of horror from a ghastly dream that he found that he had entered the room and found that some unknown hand had anticipated him in the work of dissection.

The horror was upon him after he woke to know it was a dream, and opening the door he looked in upon the table. No change there of any kind. The long-sheeted figure lay in the half light of dawn as he had seen it in the lamp-light, very straight and still.

It was not until nearly noon that Astley raised the covering to look once again upon the beautiful dead face, and when he did so he saw with wonder, not unmixed with terror, that a change had come upon it. He could not tell what it might be; the deathly pallor was there still, but in some way the face was not the same. He looked into it long and curiously. Surely a change had passed over the eyes, for though they were still fast shut, they looked now as though closed in sleep rather than in death. He lifted an eye-lid tenderly with his finger; there was not death in the eye; unconsciousness, trance, there might be, but not death.

He was certain now that she was not dead, though he could find no life in her pulses. For hours he strove to call back the spirit, until at length color returned, and warmth, and life, and she lay before him sleeping tranquilly like a child. He had placed her on his bed, and now sat by her side with a throbbing heart to await her awakening.

She slept so long, and in the waning light looked so pale that he feared she was again about to fall into the strange deathly trance from which he had with so much difficulty recovered her. In his terror of that he cried out for her to awake, and the sound of his cry awoke her with a start.

He had prepared a speech that was to calm and re-assure her when she awoke, bewildered to find herself so strangely clothed and lodged; but she no more needed calming and re-assuring than an infant too young to know its mother from any other woman. She looked round with a wondering gaze that was almost infantine, and her eye resting upon Astley, she sat up in the bed and asked him in his own language for food. It was evident that she had no recollection of illness, and neither anxiety or curiosity as to her present position.

She ate the food which was brought to her with appetite, and would have risen from the bed apparently unconscious that she wore no garment but a shroud, had not Astley persuaded her to lie down and sleep again.

He left her sleeping, and went to another room, profoundly puzzled. Here was this beautiful woman, ignorant and almost helpless as a child, thrown upon him for protection, as it was clear she did not remember anything which would lead to the discovery of her friends. It was possible that her senses had left her altogether, never to return; the lovely creature might be a harmless idiot all the rest of her days. Her speaking English was another puzzle. She might be an Englishwoman—her beauty was certainly of the Saxon type—or she might only have learned the English language; but if so,

how came that knowledge to have been retained when all else seemed gone?

His perplexity was interrupted by the peepance of the cause of it. She stood at the door wrapped in one of the bed-coverings, looking at him with a sweet, childish, vacant expression, that was touching in its helplessness. "I must call her something," thought he, as she stood apparently waiting for him to speak, "her name shall be Mary."

"Are you better, Mary, and will you sit in this chair?"

She paid no attention to the inquiry, but took the offered seat, and began silently rocking herself to and fro. It had such a ghostly effect to see her there by the lamp-light, robed in the long white drapery, with her beautiful face still pale, though no longer deathly, rocking herself in silence, that Astley felt a sensation very like fear thrill through him. He must do something, for he could not bear this. He took up a book, the first that came to hand—it was an English one—and offered it to her, asking her if she would like to read.

She took it with a childlike smile, and laying it upon her knees, began to flutter its leaves backward and forward, playing idly with them.

"Good heavens!" said Astley to himself, "she is mad, imbecile at any rate; I must do something with her."

But it was impossible to think with her before him, and taking her by the hand, he said:

"Now, Mary, you must go back to bed, and to-morrow—"

She did not wait for the end of the sentence, but rose at once to do as she was bidden, threw down the book, and letting fall the coverlet that had enveloped her, walked quietly back to the inner room.

Astley fastened the door, and felt as if he were mad from sheer bewilderment. She must have clothes the very first thing, and how were they to be procured without taking some one into his confidence? Even if he knew where to go for them, he knew nothing of what a woman's clothes should be. It was evident, then, that some venture, and it was equally evident that it must be a woman in whom he confided, as he required practical help of a kind no man could give him.

The morning dawned before he could arrange any settled plan, and finally decided that he could not if he would rid himself of the charge of her, therefore she should remain in his house, and he would tell all to the woman who acted as his housekeeper, who chanced to be absent at the time, but whose return he was expecting that very day. He would bind her to secrecy by the most solemn oath he could devise, and if she failed to keep it, why—at any rate he was in a terrible scrape, and this seemed the best thing to be done. The woman returned early in the day, and Astley at once told all, and implored her assistance. To his great relief she at once agreed to do all that lay in her power for the unhappy girl, and a few arrangements being made, Astley left the house, for the day, determined to shake off the unpleasant impression the whole thing had made upon him.

Returning at night he found Mary comfortably clothed, and looking less pale and ill. His housekeeper told him that she had been dressed like a child, having apparently no idea of assisting herself at all.

It would be impossible to describe minutely how intelligence dawned, and grew swiftly in the poor girl's mind. It was not a gradual growth from infancy, but came in fitful snatches. The greatest change came first, when her face brightened from its sweet, blank vacancy of expression at Astley's approach, and then she began to wait upon him like a loving child. He devoted himself to her very tenderly, almost as a mother devotes herself to a child, and with infinite patience taught her to read and write. She learned also to sew, and was not unskillful in such woman's craft; but what he taught her was learned quickest, best.

Two years passed, and Mary had developed so rapidly that she was much like other women in knowledge and acquirements, but she had no memory of anything before her trance. Astley told her the whole story, and urged her to try and recall something of the time before, but it was in vain, her memory was clear gone. And the present time was so happy that they cared little for the past. She was something belonging so entirely to him, even her life she owed to his care, and loved him so intensely, there being no one in the world whom she knew or loved beside that he could not fail to be very happy; and the mystery of the bond between them enhanced its charm.

They were married, and still she lived in the same privacy as before; her husband and his love sufficed for every thing;

she shrank from entering a world of which she knew nothing. Astley's acquaintances had long ago decided that if he was not mad, he was at least eccentric enough to make his society undesirable, and had fallen off one by one, leaving him none but a professional circle. He had the reputation of being skillful, and his practice was a large one; his spare hours were devoted to his home, which was his heaven.

Two more years passed, years of the most perfect happiness. Mary differed in nothing now from other women, save for that blank existence of more than twenty years. Her memory of that time never returned. She lived entirely within doors; Astley had one evening taken her for a walk, and the unaccustomed sights and sounds of the streets had terrified her so much that he never repeated the experiment.

At times a longing to introduce his wife to his old friends and relatives in England was very strong, but the difficulties of explanation, or of deceit, which it would involve, combined with her extreme aversion to the project, always prevailed, and the idea was dismissed as the thing was impossible.

Six years had passed since the eventful night when Mary had been brought as dead to Astley's door, when walking one day he met an old friend whom he had not seen since his departure from England. The recognition was mutual, and Astley insisted upon his friend returning with him to dinner. The invitation was cordially given and willingly accepted, and thinking to surprise Mr. Holt by his wife's loveliness, he said nothing of his being married, picturing to himself what his astonishment would be when he saw her.

Though he had anticipated some evidence of surprise, he was quite unprepared for the excess of emotion displayed by Mr. Holt upon his introduction to Mrs. Astley. The color left his face for a moment, and then returning violently, dyed it crimson, and the words of acknowledgment, "Recovered!" almost unintelligibly. Recovering himself, he made a strong effort, he offered his arm to lead Mrs. Astley to dinner, but she declined it, laying her hand upon her husband's. During the whole time of dinner Mr. Holt scarcely moved his eyes from Mary's face, who did not seem at all disturbed by his intense gaze, and took no notice of her guest beyond what hospitably demanded. Astley's suspicions were excited long before the meal was ended, and his heart took a jealous leap as he thought it possible that his friend was falling in love with his beautiful wife. He cursed the impulse that induced him to bring Holt home with him, and busily invented excuses for ridding himself of his guest as soon as possible.

Holt's agitation increased to positive illness before long, and rising, he asked Astley to accompany him to another room. He was scarcely able to walk, and Astley took him by the arm and asked if he were ill.

"Ill!" he groaned. "I wish I was dead!"

He sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"You'll think me a fool, Astley, but the likeness of your wife to mine has overcome me."

"Are you married, then?" said Astley. "I did not know."

"I was married eight years ago. I married an English girl with your wife's hair and eyes; her height, too, and with her sweet voice. I brought her over here directly after our marriage and we lived the happiest life in the world for two years—and then she died."

Astley was silent. He could think of no words of consolation that would not be a mockery to a man who had lost such a wife as Mary.

"Died," Holt continued, after a pause, "while I was away from her. I had gone a three day's journey, leaving her in perfect health, and I returned to find that she had died suddenly immediately after my departure, and was already buried."

"How long ago?" asked Astley, hoarsely. A horrible light was breaking in upon him.

"Six years, I left Lima the following day. I never even visited her grave, but returned to England at once; and now, after these years I find your wife so like her in every feature and every look, that my old wound is torn open afresh, and the intolerable anguish has made me cry out in this way."

"Holt, for God's sake let us do nothing rashly! Come with me to your wife's grave, and let us be sure."

Holt looked up and saw all in Astley's face.

"Speak," he shouted; she is my wife! Tell me how you met her; speak quickly while I can hear you, for there is the sound of a cataract in my ears that deafens me!"

And he fell in a swoon at Astley's feet. He might have died in it for all Astley could do to revive him. He stood blindly staring at the pale face, but he was incapable of so much as holding out a hand to him.

Holt came to himself before long, and rising up haggard and wild, repeated his demand that Astley should tell him where he met his wife.

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"Give me my wife!" said Holt, fiercely. "You will not take her," Astley cried, as the thought of his doing so against her will struck him for the first time.

"She is mine," said Holt. "Go on, tell her the whole story. If she does not understand it, she will believe it when you tell it to her." The sneer with which the words were spoken was a cruel one, but misery had made him cruel, and he scarcely knew what he said or did.

And Astley told her all in a few words. She looked bewildered.

"It must be true if you say so, but I cannot recollect; and oh, Astley, I love only you."

"She must come with me," shouted Holt, savagely. The demon had got the better of him, and the poor wretch, mad with jealous pain, spoke bitter and unjust words, that made the terrified woman cling more closely to Astley for protection.

The scene must be ended for her sake, and Astley besought Holt to leave them till the next day, when if they could not decide upon what was right it should be done. For her sake, too, he consented to plead with the frantic man; and seeing that Mary had fainted in his arms, he laid her down, and led Holt from the room, that the sight of her might no longer madden him. His rage died out from simple exhaustion, and throwing himself into a chair he wept like a child.

Astley roused him. "Holt is a man. This is an awful tragedy. I wish to Heaven I had died rather than played my part in it. There are not upon the earth two men so broken-hearted as you and I. Let us accept what is inevitable, and let us spare what anguish we can to that unhappy woman. Leave me now, and to-morrow I will see you again. Perhaps by that time I shall have thought of something for her."

"Holt rose passively. "You are nobler than I," he said as he turned to go.

It seemed to Astley that his grief was but beginning when he tried to explain the whole thing clearly to Mary. The torture of putting it into words was so intense that all before was nothing compared with it. And when at length she comprehended, and asked him if he wished her to leave him, even that agony seemed slight contrasted with what he endured in telling her that he believed she ought to do so.

Loving as she was, she could not comprehend the sacrifice to duty which Astley was striving to make, and her thorough ignorance of the world rendered it impossible to make her understand what her position would be if she remained where she was. And yet this was a case—so she thought—where duty and affection were at odds; that had never been in the world before; that no law, human or divine, could apply to it. But above all the thought rose dominant, that by whatever mystery of unconsciousness deprived of memory, she was still Holt's wife and not his, and with this thought piercing him like a sharp sword, he said that he believed she ought to leave him.

She rose up, cold and proud in a moment, and would have left him then, but at the threshold her spirit failed, and she turned again to throw herself at his feet, with tears and sobs.

Night has veiled many sights of woe, the clouds of night have many times been pierced by cries of anguish, bitter cries for faith and patience, going up above the stars to the feet of God, but night never shrouded deeper woe than this, bitter cries never pierced the shuddering darkness.

When morning dawned they were both, very calm and still. Their tears were shed, and their eyes were dry. He decided for the right, though his heart was broken in the conflict; and she, woman-like, had accepted the right, not because it was so, but because he said it was so.

"I shall die," she said, in a voice from which all passion had departed. "I can hear no more and live, but I can bear even this and die."

Who can describe that parting? When the sun set, it was upon Astley broken-hearted and alone. Holt had taken away his wife.

Seven days passed, and Astley never left his desolate home. He made no distinction of day or night, but lay down to sleep—if the stupor which from time to time rendered him unconscious could be so called—at any hour that sleep came to him.

At the close of the seventh day he tried for the first time to look his fate boldly in the face. "I am not dead," he said, "therefore it is clear that this grief will not kill me." That night he undressed and went to bed.

The night six years ago, when the decreed figure lay upon the table, and he dreamed fantastic dreams of terror connected with it, came to mind more distinctly than it had ever done before. His sleep was broken and feverish, and haunted by wild dreams. Twice he awoke feeling certain that he had heard a knocking at the door, and twice he slept again when he found that all was silent. But he awoke a third time in gray dawn, and heard the sound again, a feeble knocking at the outer door, which ceased suddenly. He rose determined to ascertain the cause; he unbarred and opened the door, and there fell forward across the threshold the dead body of Mary.

The Portland Argosy notes it as surprising. How quietly and quickly all the Rebel raiders on Northern cities have disappeared since election. Even the Canadian profligate Georgian, which was going to pounce on Buffalo and other lake cities, turns out to be only a harmless profligate. Gen. Hooker has boarded her, and found nothing to excite the slightest suspicion. All the alarms just before the election have thus ended in smoke.