

THREE YEARS ABSENT.

ALL my life I had known Mary Moore; all my life I had loved her. When I was fifteen, the first great sorrow of my life came upon my heart. I was sent to school, and was obliged to part with Mary. We were not to see each other for three long years. This, to me, was like a sentence of death, for Mary was like life itself to me. But hearts are tough things after all. I left college in all the flush of my nineteenth year. I was no longer awkward or embarrassed. I had grown into a tall, slender stripling, with a very good opinion of myself both in general and particular. If I thought of Mary Moore it was to imagine how I could dazzle and bewilder her with my good looks and wonderful mental attainments, and never thinking she might dazzle and bewilder me still more. I was a coxcomb, I know, but as youth and good looks have fled, I trust that I may be believed when I say that my self-conceit has left me also. An advantageous proposal was made me at that time, and accepting it, I gave up all idea of a profession, and prepared to go to India. In my hurried visit home of two days, I saw nothing of Mary Moore. She had gone to a boarding school at some distance, and was not expected home until the following May. I uttered a sigh to the memory of my little blue-eyed playmate, and then called myself "a man" again. In a year, I thought as the vehicle whirled away from our door—in a year, or three years at the very most—I will return, and if Mary is as pretty as she used to be, why then, perhaps, I may marry her. And thus I settled the future of a young lady whom I had not seen for four years. I never thought of the possibility of her refusing me—never dreamed that she would not condescend to accept my offer. But now I know that had Mary met me then she would have despised me. Perhaps in the scented and affected student she might have found plenty of sport; but as for loving me, I should have found myself mistaken. India was my salvation, not merely because of my success, but because my laborious industry had contrived the evil in my nature and had made me a better man. When at the end of three years, I prepared to return, I said nothing of the reformation of myself, which I knew had taken place. They loved me as I was, I murmured to myself, and they shall find out for themselves whether I am better worth loving than formerly. I picked up many a token from that land of romance and gold for the friends I hoped to meet. The gift for Mary Moore I selected with a beating heart; it was a ring of rough, virgin gold, with my name and her's engraved inside—that was all, and yet the sight of the little toy strangely thrilled me as I balanced it upon the tip of my finger. To the eyes of others, it was but a small, plain circlet, suggesting thoughts perhaps, by its elegance, of the beautiful white hand that was to wear it. But not to me—how much was embodied there—all these delights were hidden within that ring of gold. Tall, bearded and sun-bronzed, I knocked at the door of my father's house. The lights in the parlor window, and the hum of conversation and cheerful laughter, showed me that company was assembled there. I hoped that sister Lizzie would come to the door, and I might greet my family when no strange eye was carelessly looking on. But no, a servant answered the summons. They were too merry in the parlor to heed the long absent one who asked for admittance. A bitter thought like this ran through my mind as I heard the sound from the parlor, and I saw the half-surprised smile on the servant's face. I hesitated a moment before making myself known or asking for any of the family. And while I stood silent a strange apparition grew up before me; from behind the servant, peered out a golden head, a tiny delicate form and a sweet childish face, with blue eyes, so like to those of one who had brightened my boyhood, that it startled me with a sudden feeling of pain. "What is your name, my pretty?" I asked, while the wondering servant held the door. "Mary Moore." "And what else?" I asked quickly. She lifted up her hands to shade her face. I had seen that very attitude in another, in my boyhood, many and many a time—and answered in a sweet, bird-like voice: "Mary Moore Chester," lisped the child. My heart sank down like lead. Here was an end to all the bright dreams and hopes of my youth and manhood. Frank Chester, my boyish rival, who had often tried in vain to usurp my place beside the girl, had succeeded at last, and had won her away from me. This was the child—his child and Mary's. I sank, body and soul, beneath this blow, and hiding my face in my hands I leaned against the door, while my heart wept tears of blood. The little one gazed at me, grieved and amazed, and put up her pretty lips as if about to cry, while the perplexed servant stepped to the par-

lor and called my sister out to see who it was that conducted himself so strangely. I heard a slight step, and pleasant voice, saying: "Did you wish to see my father sir?" I looked up. There stood a pretty faced maiden of twenty, not much changed from the dear little sister I had loved so well. I looked at her for a moment, and then stilling the tempest of my heart, by a mighty effort I opened my arms and said: "Lizzie, don't you know me?" "Harry! oh, my brother Harry!" she cried, and threw herself upon my breast, and wept as if her heart would break. I could not weep. I drew her gently into the lighted parlor and stood with her before them all. There was a rush, and a cry of joy and then my father and mother sprang toward me, and welcomed me home with heartfelt tears. "Oh, strange and passing sweet is such a greeting to the way-worn traveller. And as I held my dear old mother to my heart, and grasped my father's hand, while Lizzie clung beside me, I felt that all was not yet lost; and although another had secured life's most choicest blessing, many a joy remained for me in the dear sanctuary of home. There were four other inmates of the room, who had risen on my sudden entrance. One was the blue-eyed child whom I had already seen, and who now stood beside Frank Chester, clinging to his hand. Near by stood Lizzie Moore, Mary's eldest sister, and in a distant corner to which she hurriedly retreated when my name was spoken, stood a tall and slender figure, half hidden by the heavy window curtains that fell to the floor. When the first rapturous greeting was over, Lizzie led me forward with a timid grace, and Frank Chester grasped my hand. "Welcome home, my boy!" he said, with the loud, cheerful tones I remembered so well. "You have changed so that I never would have known you; but no matter about that, your heart is in the right place, I know." "How can you say he is changed?" said my mother, gently. "To be sure he looks older and graver, and more like a man than when he went away; but his eyes and smile are the same, as ever. It is a heavy heart which changes him. He is, my boy still!" Heaven help me! At that moment I felt like a boy, and it would have been a blessed relief to have wept upon her bosom as I had done in my infancy. But I kept down the beating of my heart, and the tremor of my lip, and answered quietly, as I looked into his full handsome face: "You have changed, too, Frank, but I think for the better." "Oh, yes—thank you for the compliment," he answered with a hearty laugh. "My wife tells me I grow handsomer every day." "His wife! Could I hear that name and keep silent still." "And have you seen my little girl?" he added, lifting the infant in his arms, and kissing her crimsoned cheek. "I tell you, Harry, there is no such other in the world. Don't you think she looks very much like her mother used to?" "Very much," I faltered. "Hallo!" cried Frank, with a suddenness which made me start violently. "I have forgotten to introduce you to my wife; I believe you and she used to be playmates in your younger days—yes, Harry," and he slapped me on the back—"for the sake of old times, and because you were not at the wedding, I will give you leave to kiss her once, but mind old fellow, you are never to repeat the ceremony. Come, here she is; I for one want to see how you will manage those feopious moustaches of yours in the operation." He pushed Lizzie, laughing and blushing, towards me. A gleam of light and hope almost too dazzling to bear came over me, and I cried out before I thought, "Not Mary?" "I must have betrayed my secret to every one in the room. But nothing was said; even Frank, in general so obtuse, was this time silent. I kissed the fair cheek of the young wife, and hurried to the silent figure looking out of the window. "Mary—Mary Moore!" I said in a low, eager tone, "have you no welcome to give the wanderer?" She turned, and laid her hand in mine, and said hurriedly— "I am glad to see you here, Harry." Simple words, and yet how blessed they made me. I would not have yielded her up that moment for an emperor's crown. For there was the happy, home group and dear home fireside, with sweet Mary Moore. The eyes I had dreamed of, day and night, were falling beneath the ardent gaze of mine, and the sweet face I had so long prayed to see was there beside me. I never knew the meaning of happiness until that moment. Many years have passed since that happy night, and the hair that was dark and glossy is fast turning gray. I am now grown to be an old man, and can look back to a happy, and I hope a well-spent life. And yet, sweet as it has been, I would not recall a single day, for the love that made my manhood so bright shines also upon my white hairs.

Twelve by the Clock.

ABOUT twenty-one years ago, when Franklin Pierce and the present Senator Clark stood at the head of the Hillsborough bar, in New Hampshire, there was upon the docket a celebrated suit called the "Horse Case." This action was brought by Smith & Jones, livery keepers, against one White, to recover the value of a pair of horses alleged to have been killed by defendant, while conveying an insane man to the asylum at Concord. There was plenty of proof that the horses died soon after their arrival there; but the defendant took the ground that they died of disease, and not from being overheated. And that a sufficient time had been allowed them to travel that distance with ease. Then it became necessary to show the jury the time of starting and the time of arrival. Many citizens were brought forward; among them a tall, bony, slab-sided, lanky, sleepy-looking fellow, who officiated as a hostler at the stable. The following is the substance of the concluding portion of the examination: "What time, sir, did I understand you to say it was when the horses were driven up to the stable?" "Just as I was going to dinner." "What time was it when you went to dinner that day—the clock in the office?" "Just twelve." "To a minute, sir?" "Yes, sir." "And what time did you go to dinner a week previous to the clock?" "At twelve." "To a minute, sir?" "Yes, sir." "Now, sir, will you be good enough to tell the jury what time you went to dinner, three months before the last date—by the clock?" "At twelve." "To a minute, sir?" "Yes, sir." "That is all, sir," replied the counsel, with a gleam of satisfaction on his face and a glance to the jury, as much as to say, "That man has settled his testimony, gentlemen." And so all thought, till just as he was leaving the stand, he turned to his questioner, with a curious comical expression on his face, and drawled out, "That 'ere clock was out o' kilter, and had stopped at twelve for the last six months." There was a general roar. Mr. Clark sat down, and the judge had to use his handkerchief just then.

A Good Dog Story.

Mr. Beecher in his *Christian Union*, vouches for the truth of this story: A narrow log lay as a bridge over a ravine. From the opposite ends, of the log, at the same moment, there started to cross it a big Newfoundland and a little Italian greyhound. Of course they met in the middle; of course there was net room for them to pass; neither could they go back. The height was a dangerous one for the greyhound, and to the water at the bottom he was extremely averse. The Newfoundland could have taken the leap in safety, but evidently did not want to. There was a fix! The little dog sat down on his haunches, stuck his nose straight out into the air and howled. The Newfoundland stood intent, his face solemn with inward workings. Presently he gave a nudge with his nose to the howling greyhound, as if to say, "Be still, youngster, and listen." Then there was silence and seeming confabulation for a second or two. Immediately the big dog spread his legs wide apart like a Colossus, bestriding the log on its extreme outer edges, and balancing himself carefully. The little dog sprang through the opening like a flash. When they reached the opposite shore the greyhound broke into frantic gambols of delight; and the Newfoundland after the more sedate fashion expressed great complacency in his achievement—as he surely had a right to do.

A Wonderful Eater.

Some years since there was in Prussia a wonderful eater, whose appetite was the cause of much astonishment to the physicians. He has been lost sight of for some time but last week makes his appearance at a restaurant in San Francisco where he ate for nearly two hours, to the disgust of the proprietor; and on retiring proffered twenty-five cents in payment, which the saloon-keeper looked on as only one-tenth the cost of the material. His greatest effort was the consumption of the thirty-four pounds weight avoirdupois of what was nearly all oleaginous matter, such as pork-fat, train oil, tallow, candles, etc. He may be justly considered one of the most remarkable men that ever lived, and will ere long, no doubt, attract the attention of our medical men; without doubt he may justly be styled the most remarkable gourmand of history.

The gruff old Captain P.

The gruff old Captain P. was once half bored to death by a certain inquisitive passenger, but he silenced him, however, when the latter, pointing to a cow on the lower deck, remarked—"That's a nice cow, Captain." "Yes, sir." "Is it the only cow on board?" "Yes." "Have you no other animals on board?" "No, sir, with the exception of the animal in front of me." Curious passenger suddenly thought he saw a porpoise and rushed for his opera-glass.

SUNDAY READING.

Thoughtlessness. Young man, in the flush of early strength, stop and think ere you take a downward step.—Many a precious life is wrecked through thoughtlessness alone. If you find yourself in low company, do not sit carelessly by till you are gradually but surely drawn into the whirl-pool of shame, but think of the consequences of such a course. Rational thought will lead you to seek the society of your superiors; and you must improve by the association. A benevolent use of your example and influence for the elevation of your inferiors, is a noble thing; even the most depraved are not beyond such help. But the young man of impressive characters must, at least, think, and beware lest he fall himself a victim. Think before you touch the wine; see its effects upon thousands, and know that you are no stronger than they were in their youth. Think before you allow angry passions to over come your reason; it is thus that murderers are made. Think before, in a dark hour of temptation, you borrow without leave, lest you become a thief. Think well ere a lie or an oath pass your lips: for a man of pure speech only can merit respect.—Ah! think on things true and lovely, and of good report, that there may be better men and happier women in the world.

How to Learn One's Self.

Suppose a man should sail, all the boiling and blazing day, round and round an old Dutch ship in the harbor, and the next day you should see him, like a maguified fly, creeping up and down the masts and spars, and examining the rigging, and you should ask him what he was doing, and he should answer, "I have heard that this ship is a dull snifer, and I want to look at it and see."—Could he ever find out in this way? No. Let him weigh anchor and spread the canvas, and take the wind and bear away; if he would know how she sails. So, if a Christian would learn his true state, let him not row round and round the hull of his self-conscience, and creep up and down the masts and spars of his feelings and affections; but let him spread the sails of resolution, and bear away on the ocean of duty. Then he shall know whether he be a dull or a fast sailer.—*Beecher's Life Thoughts.*

A Startling Exclamation.

A celebrated Dominican friar, Rocco, of Naples, one day was preaching to a crowd in the market place. "This day," said he, "I will see if you truly repent your sins." Thereupon he commenced a penitential discourse that made the hair of the hard-hearted multitude stand upright; and when they were all upon their knees, gnashing their teeth, beating their breasts and putting on all imaginable signs of contrition, he suddenly cried, "Now you who truly repent of your sins, hold up your hand." There was not one present who did not immediately stretch out both arms. "Holy Archangel Michael," then exclaimed Rocco, "Thou who with the adamant sword standest by the judgment seat of God, hew off every hand that has been raised hypocritically." Instantly every hand dropped, and Rocco poured forth a fresh invective against the sinfulness and perversity of his audience.

Anecdotes for Slingards.

A certain man of earnest and undoubted Christian character was invariably in attendance upon all the meetings of the church, but was just as regularly late. A stranger, coming into the church in the midst of the service would not have caused more remark than Brother S— would have called forth had he appeared two minutes before the time of commencing. One day, a brother who had been vainly seeking an explanation of the fact that so good a man had such a "serious fault unchecked, inquired of his pastor whether he could explain this "regular irregularity" of Brother S—. "Yes," readily replied the Doctor. "He was born just fifteen minutes behind time, and never has been able to catch up." The Doctor's explanation was surely original, and ought to be made generally known, for the benefit of the large family circle related to Brother S—.

Long prayers furnished the theme of a discussion at the recent Young Men's Christian Convention in Washington. One of the delegates asked, "What do you do with the people who persistently indulge in long prayers?" The answer promptly given by another was: "Never give them a chance to pray; instantly qualified by another, who said; "Except in private."

There is a sphere in which every one may act and be useful to his fellow-being. No matter what abilities he has, there is a work for him, and by doing it he may render essential service to the church. If the one talent is not improved, what a sorrowful account many will have to give at the last day.

Every transgression shall receive its just recompense of reward. He will by no means spare the guilty. Do not hope to die with the words upon your lips, "God is merciful." I know he is, but he is also just and to those who reject his son there is no mercy.

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