



Poetry.

"LILL" insists that we write "poetry," says we need to do it, ought to do it, &c. The lady having settled the matter in her own mind, it is useless to urge the conviction of ours; consequently, aiming at nothing beyond obedience, we turn, from playing with the baby, to trifling with the Muse and give our fair remonstrant a "see-saw" rhyme upon

THE BABY'S FIRST STEP.

BY ONE WHO SAW IT TAKEN. What a helpless little creature, As she stands upon the floor! With fear in every feature, Yet with faith and hope, the more. How trustfully she gazes, With the little arm extended, On the eager parent faces, Where pride with joy is blending. See! the dreading step is taken— The victory is achieved, And tho' the world itself were shaken, She is safe, for she believed.

Holy Faith! the blessed mother Of more than human power, The jewel of our birthright,— Burning light, of darkest hour; From the cradle ever leading Up to manhood's sternest time, Turning children into giants— Making men almost divine! How glorious is thy shining On that little baby face! Its soul now first divining The strength of thine embrace.

Select Tales.

SARA'S VENTURE.

One morning, just as I had finished breakfast, I received a note from my friend Sara Hall, begging me, if possible, to go over for a few hours in the course of the day. "Don't be alarmed," she added in a postscript. "Nothing is the matter." I was therefore not alarmed, but I was somewhat curious; and as I hurried over my light domestic duties, being housekeeper in my mother's absence, I taxed conjecture as to what could have prompted so urgent a summons. I had seen her but two days before; what could have arisen since then? The character of my friend stimulated my anxiety. I was afraid lest the self-willed, vehement, over-indulged girl should be meditating some wild, unheard-of scheme, in which she wanted my co-operation. "I will not give it," decided I with laudable firmness, "unless I heartily and spontaneously approve." At length I had seen my two brothers fairly off on their way to the City of London School; had made every necessary arrangement for their early dinner at one o'clock, and my father's and mine, at five; and felt myself at liberty to follow my wishes, and make my way to Mr. Hall's house. It was an intensely cold day in the early part of January, but I enjoyed such weather: I walked quickly, but taking in, as was my wont, the effect of things. The buildings stood out hard and well-defined against the deep blue sky; above all, I greeted with kindling glance the superb cupola and majestic proportions of St. Paul's. I loved and admired that magnificent cathedral, as perhaps none but one born under its shadow can. I have studied it from childhood; I knew how it looked under every aspect of season and weather, from every point of view; without ever having set my foot out of England, I was prepared to maintain its absolute superiority over every edifice in Europe. I gave it now my proud all hail as I hurried past. When I got into Cheap-side, there was nothing but human faces to study and I was amply occupied with them, and in taking my somewhat presumptuous measure of the individual from attire, expression and gait. There was one point, however—a picture-dealer's shop windows—at which I always halted, and did so now. There was a large painting prominently

exhibited, and it deserves its position. It represented a wild sea-shore, girt with low black rocks, the peaks of which were wonderfully aglow with the setting sun, as were the foaming crests of the incoming waves. There was not a trace of vegetation, not a symptom of human life. A sterile subject, some would say, but it captivated me. The setting sun poured its rays through a boundless atmosphere: the sea stretched beyond the limits of the picture into fathomless immensity; those rocks conveyed palpably a sense of silence and solitude. Amidst the turmoil of the great thoroughfare, my imagination had penetrated into the very locality. "Now," I thought I, "beneath this clear frozen sky that sea is at this moment raging." I walked on to my destination in a somewhat dreamy mood, until my proximity to the house recalled my thoughts to the matter in hand. Mr. Hall was a surgeon in excellent practice, and it was at the door of one of the stately but not aristocratic mansions in Finsbury square at which I knocked. Sara was an only child, and uncontrolled mistress of her father's household, for Mr. Hall had lost his wife many years ago. A few moments more found me in my friend's pretty private room; it was as elegantly fitted up as a fashionable lady's boudoir, and deserved to be so called, but Sara set her face resolutely against all unnecessary Gallicisms, and never would suffer the appellation. "I am glad you are come," said Sara emphatically, as I entered, and giving me a chair by the blazing fire; but then came a pause, and she resumed the occupation I had for a moment interrupted—that of walking up and down the room. Knowing her temper, I felt free to dole out her business in her own time and way; and divesting myself of bonnet and shawl, encoined myself in the luxurious easy-chair, crossed my feet which I had effectually cooled on the wild sea-shore, over the fender, defiant of the impropriety, and prepared to wait in patience and in comfort. While waiting, I made a few observations; I saw that Sara's escritoire was covered with scattered manuscripts, and that upon them lay a letter sealed and addressed. "I know my friend's avocation too well to be surprised at the sight of manuscripts, but the letter, the direction of which I could not help reading, puzzled me not a little. Amongst other things, I noticed the character and beauty of Sara's face, and that its habitual expression of pride and dissatisfaction was more strongly marked than usual. Her figure was particularly small and girlish, but what an air of resolution it nevertheless possessed. Presently she drew the escritoire close to the fire, sat down before it, and folding her arms over her papers, fixed her glittering black eyes on my face. "Carry," she said, pointing to the letter, "do you see what I mean to do?" The letter being addressed to a celebrated West End publisher, and seen in conjunction with a heap of manuscripts, did not leave much to natural sagacity. I mentioned the conclusion I drew therefrom. "But, Sara," I asked, "what has become of your old opinion? What is the motive, when you do not want money, and have always asserted that you did not care about fame, at least such as you were likely to get?" "I have the reputation of being capricious," was her answer, "and I am disposed to think, if I get what I deserve, I shall care about fame. Do you think I shall be likely to find any difficulty in getting my novel published?" "I was quite ignorant of such matters, but I asked, with an air of competent authority. "On what terms do you mean to offer it?" "On condition that I may publish it under an assumed name, and that my secret is sedulously kept—that is the first and most important item. Secondly, that all pecuniary risk is borne by the publishers; as for pecuniary profits, I care nothing about them; Messrs.—may easily make out me an unfair bargain." "Perhaps," said I, dryly, "they won't attempt to take advantage of your indifference to profit; if reputation is all you care about, you ought to be pretty sure of the deserts of your work." "I am pretty sure," said Sara, turning over the leaves. I reflected, then ventured to say, "I am

not restrained her. My secret anxiety was—of course never breathed to Sara—that the manuscript had never found its way to the proper persons. Life, however, did not stand still in sympathy with our suspense. Sara, indeed, seemed fuller than ever of that restless vitality which I sometimes found almost burdensome. It was evident to me it was not only the chances of her novel that harassed her; but she was a strange girl, and I did not venture to question her. At length a light fell upon my understanding. I came one afternoon to spend a few days with Sara, leaving strict orders at home that any letters addressed to me should be brought by my brother Charles. My friend was dressing for dinner when I entered her pleasant warm bedroom, and I had not been in it many moments before I discovered that she was taking especial pains with her toilet. "Is any one coming?" I asked. "Yes," said Sara with a sudden glow and a scornful laugh; "Mr. Godfrey Knight is coming." I was completely puzzled. I had never seen, but I had heard a good deal of this gentleman. By profession he was a barrister, and of rising repute; but in society he was less successful. I had heard some of my young lady-friends mercilessly ridicule the plainness and insignificance of his appearance; and even Sara had made some ungenerous, but ironically witty observations thereon. From better authority, I had heard strictures on his displeasing deportment in society, his uncourteous silence, as if he considered himself a spectator of the scene, or his cynical severity, as if he had the right of censorship. On this behalf. "What are you going to do?" asked I, anxiously; "not condescend to play the coquette, surely?" Sarah smiled, but without giving me any satisfaction to find with Mr. Knight. Plain indubitably he was, and what was far worse—short; but then, he had an expression of intelligence which would have refined coarser features. True, he spoke but little; but he was attentive to the courtesies of the table, and Mr. Hall's organ of language prompted him at all times to take the burden of conversation upon himself. Sara, too, talked a good deal—that is whenever Mr. Knight said anything sufficiently near an opinion for her to oppose, or whenever her father's discourse gave her an opportunity of stating some unheard of or paradoxical sentiment. I had never seen her in such a mood before, or heard her say so many extravagant or absurd things in the course of an evening. Mr. Knight let her have all her own way, listening to her with an irritating smile, and never defending his own words. When we retired to the drawing-room I expressed my feelings. "You must have been trying to appear ridiculous," said I; "is Mr. Knight's contempt worth such pains?" She gave me an angry, almost fierce look, but softened immediately. "I am playing no part, Carry; that is what his presence always makes of me. He despises girls from the bottom of his heart: he tempts me beyond my power of resistance to justify his estimate." "I saw her lip quiver as she spoke, but it might be with wounded pride; to the same feeling I attributed the glow of her cheeks, and the unusual glitter of her eyes. I did not pursue the subject, and when the two gentlemen came in to tea, they interrupted a debate on the usual topic. After tea Mr. Hall asked his daughter for some music; she complied with unusual eagerness. "But Mr. Knight," she said, pausing on her way to the piano, "detects music." "The feeling is not quite so strong," said that gentleman taking up a book. "I shall scarcely hear you." Sara sat down to her instrument, and played for about half an hour certain elaborate tuneless rondas and diversements she had learned at school. I felt it must be by design, for music in the true acceptance of the phrase, was her particular talent, and her present performance had no merit but exactness. Her father fell into a doze at length, and then Sara rose. Mr. Knight had been reading his book very diligently, but he closed it politely enough as the music ceased, and the

musician drew near to the fire. Sara leaned over the mantel piece in the graceful, careless attitude which was habitual to her. "That is an unnecessary courtesy," said she, addressing Mr. Knight, and stretching out her hand to take from him the book he was on the point of putting down. She turned to the title-page, and remarked with rather a doubtful smile, "I should never have supposed you read poetry." "I read so little, that your supposition is justified." Sara stopped here, but I asked: "Don't you like poetry?" Mr. Knight smiled, perhaps at the ignorant way in which I proposed my question, and Sara added: "I should like to know whether you consider it above or below your attention?" "I have never given attention to it—lacking time and opportunity; so I can scarcely answer the question. Amongst the talents committed to my keeping, leisure is not one." "A strong natural love of poetry," said Sara, "would have enabled you to make leisure to indulge it." "Well, then, I can safely say, I have not such a love. Pray," he added, smiling, "is this deficiency very great in your eyes?" "Very. It is a deficiency that involves so many others." "Perhaps," said I, "you are not a reader of books at all?" "No; not what you understand by a reader.—The few books I do read indispose me for the many." "I am happy to say," remarked Sara, "Mr. Knight smiled very comfortably under the satire, and took his leave as soon as Mr. Hall aroused himself. I made no comment to Sara on her behavior, but drew, quietly, my own inferences. The next morning the servant brought me a letter, left by my brother on his way from school. I recognized it at once as a missive from Street. On one point I am convinced; no letter received before or since ever excited such a tumult of feeling. It was not for me, however, to break the seal, and I carried it to Sara. I had a hunt through nearly all the rooms in the house before I found her, and when I did find her, she was in no responsive mood. She was standing in the cold, cheerless, drawing-room—the fire never being lighted till mid day—with the morning newspaper spread out on the table before her, over which she was bowed in a posture indicative of no ordinary absorption of its contents. "Sara," I cried, holding the letter above my head, "look here!" She did not seem to guess what it was, for she made a movement of impatience, and looked down at her paper again. I threw the paper playfully on the paper before her eyes. She snatched it up as if it could have conveyed some kind of pollution to the page, and in so doing perceived what it was. Then her indifference changed to excitement. "Open and read it, Carry," she said, "I can't." The first glance was enough. I made a little bound of joy. Sara, catching the result from this very expressive gesture, took the letter from me and read it herself. "Madame: I am desired by Messrs. — to inform you, that they are willing to undertake the publication of your novel on their usual terms." Then followed a business-like statement of their terms, which, novice as I was at that time, seemed so me very magnificent. "That will do," said Sara; "but I must know how soon they will publish it." There was an expression of softened exultation in her face, and I observed that her eyes dwelt on the newspaper. "You see," said I, reading over the letter to myself, "we have no means of contradicting their statement. We have only their word for it that these are their usual terms." "True, but I care nothing about the money; let them publish my book, and they can't cheat me of my object." In a few days the whole matter was settled; formal agreements were drawn up and signed, and the book was to appear immediately. Popular authors, during the preceding months, had been

pouring forth their favors on the public, and were now resting on their oars and receipts.—The novel-reading world just then was unemployed; it was the exact point of time for a new writer to make her appeal. No objection had been made to her pseudo name, and in order the better to preserve her secrecy, the correction of the proofs was taken off her hands. It was evident to my mind, from the complaisance of the publishers, that they considered they had got a good thing. "Sara," I said one day, "I begin to think this book will make you famous." Sara shook her head. "If it does," I asked, prudently desirous of preparing for an event that might never be realized, "will you declare yourself?" "I will wait till I am famous before I decide," said Sara, who, so far as I could see, was almost as indifferent to the fame as to the profit. During this period, Mr. Knight was so frequent a visitor, that we had little chance of forgetting him. Why he came I could not tell, for he was a very different man from Mr. Hall, whose loquacity obviously wearied him; and Sara did not seem to attract him. He watched her a good deal, it was true, but it seemed less from individual interest, than from the philosophical tendency to examine carefully every new subject presented to him. Sara, too, always showed under her worst aspect in his presence. In her behavior to him, she was rude and satirical; in her behavior to others before him, extravagant and even frivolous. I tried to hope that Mr. Knight might detect her real character beneath the disguise she so it was requiring too much from his penetration. For my own part I had a growing admiration and esteem for him. I had learned that of his public and private life which indicated a character of no ordinary decision and purity of principle. A late political lawsuit, in which he had borne a distinguished part, had raised his reputation beyond all dispute; in society far higher than ours, we knew that he was courted and flattered. Moreover, more than once at Mr. Hall's I had heard him defend certain principles and opinions which had been carelessly or maliciously attacked, in a manner that had aroused a warm response from all the best part of my nature. He was not by any means a rhetorician: his strength lay in the clearness and force of his thoughts, and in the pure relation his words bore to them.—Truth never received any artificial adoration at his hands; it was her naked beauty he worshipped and presented for worship.—Then he was thoroughly in earnest; his strong self conviction carried conviction to the candid hearer. My friend Sara had a far more emotional and passionate admiration than I for moral greatness; and at such times as those to which I have referred, it was beyond the power of her art to check the glow of enthusiasm that rose to her cheek, or to hide the kindling glance and recognition and sympathy. My only regret was, that it was precisely at these moments that Mr. Knight, interested in his subject, did not look at her. Then, also, I knew that Sara secretly admired him, she followed the lawsuit through all its windings, and read Mr. Knight's speeches with a diligence I was unable to emulate; for, good as no doubt they were, they were very dry. I had heard her once defend him with an eloquence from which he might have learned a lesson, and with so minute an acquaintance with his individual excellencies, that I discovered that hitherto I had done him very imperfect justice. With all my female ingenuity and knowledge of my friend, I could not quite reconcile her conduct with her sentiments, and her own explanations thereupon only involved the matter more and more. At length a new interest called me off from Mr. Knight. Sara's novel was announced for publication in a way calculated to whet public curiosity, but that strongly displeased the author. "Such tricks of the trade humiliate me," she said. "I almost hope they will defeat their own end." There was one singularity in this transaction that I had noticed before: Sara always spoke as if her interests were quite separate from those of her publishers. The book came out duly, and to sum up

its success in a phrase, created a perfect furor.—Sagacity was on the rack to discover the author, but sagacity was at fault. Sara Hall, together with the rest of the world, read the new novel, but was more sparing of her opinions thereupon than was her custom.—What she had said about her indifference to fame, her conduct justified. I was far more full of exultation than herself; she would hear, with scarcely a change of color, I had repeatedly expressed my curiosity to know whether Mr. Knight had read it, and one evening, when he happened to call during one of my day visits, abruptly put the question to him. "I never read novels," he answered. "I have not time." "But so remarkable a one," I suggested, studiously avoiding looking at Sara. "Well," he said, reluctantly, "if it comes in my way." I longed to ask him if he expected the book would meet him, but I dared say no more.—He appeared to be reflecting on the subject, for presently he asked: "Have you read it, Miss Hall?" "Yes," said Sara, with a self-possession no amount of training would ever enable me to attain. The next question was inevitable. "What do you think of it?" he asked. "More than I can say at a moment's notice," replied Sara, turning away with her usual civility. A few minutes after Mr. Hall came in with an evening paper in his hands. "Here's a cut up," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, as if it were a personal new novel! Late in the field, but the slaughter is tremendous! Sara, my girl; you are a capital reader, let us have it aloud—we have all read the book." I was never so near committing myself in my life, but Sara restored me to a sense of the present necessity. She took the paper quietly her father held out to her, and his perceptions were not quick enough to perceive that her hands trembled. It was the only sign of agitation. She sat down, and carelessly glanced it over before commencing aloud. "Mr. Knight has not read the book," she said, glancing up at him; "it is, perhaps, hardly fair for the author." There was a vibration in her voice that I am sure the person addressed must have felt. "A disparaging criticism," he replied, "has often disposed me favorably toward the book condemned." Sara began to read, and read the article through to the end, with no interruption beyond Mr. Hall's keen enjoyment of its course wit. Merciless ridicule was the sole weapon employed; it had evidently been dictated by a mind thoroughly antagonistic of the writer's; for there was much hearty cordiality in its invective. A book such as I have before described Sara's; presented strong temptation to such a mode of attack—my wonder was that it had not been had recourse to before. "It is clever," said Sara, putting it down; "and perhaps the writer is honest! but it is unjust." I marvelled at her self-command, but it was not perfect; there was a deep flush on her cheek; a scintillation in her eyes she could not control. I observed that Mr. Knight sat gazing at her; seemingly in a state of abstraction. When he took his leave, he said to her, "I shall read that book, and form my own judgment; it is but an act of justice." I could see that night that Sara was strongly excited, though she repressed the signs as well as she could. I attributed it to the review, but on saying something in the way of sympathetic indignation, I found my condolences were quite superfluous.—The next few days, Sara was very quiet and self-contained, but I detected an undercurrent of emotion and anxiety, which always seemed at its flux as the evening drew near. It was evident to me that she was expecting Mr. Knight. After the lapse of a week, he came late one evening. If anything had been needed to confirm the idea I entertained, Sara's flush of color would have supplied it. To my extreme disappointment and annoyance, Mr. Hall at once engaged him in some political discussion. Sara went to her piano, and played some of the exquisite airs in Norma as no one else could, in my opinion, have done. I watched Mr. Knight

leaving over the mantel piece in the graceful, careless attitude which was habitual to her. "That is an unnecessary courtesy," said she, addressing Mr. Knight, and stretching out her hand to take from him the book he was on the point of putting down. She turned to the title-page, and remarked with rather a doubtful smile, "I should never have supposed you read poetry." "I read so little, that your supposition is justified." Sara stopped here, but I asked: "Don't you like poetry?" Mr. Knight smiled, perhaps at the ignorant way in which I proposed my question, and Sara added: "I should like to know whether you consider it above or below your attention?" "I have never given attention to it—lacking time and opportunity; so I can scarcely answer the question. Amongst the talents committed to my keeping, leisure is not one." "A strong natural love of poetry," said Sara, "would have enabled you to make leisure to indulge it." "Well, then, I can safely say, I have not such a love. Pray," he added, smiling, "is this deficiency very great in your eyes?" "Very. It is a deficiency that involves so many others." "Perhaps," said I, "you are not a reader of books at all?" "No; not what you understand by a reader.—The few books I do read indispose me for the many." "I am happy to say," remarked Sara, "Mr. Knight smiled very comfortably under the satire, and took his leave as soon as Mr. Hall aroused himself. I made no comment to Sara on her behavior, but drew, quietly, my own inferences. The next morning the servant brought me a letter, left by my brother on his way from school. I recognized it at once as a missive from Street. On one point I am convinced; no letter received before or since ever excited such a tumult of feeling. It was not for me, however, to break the seal, and I carried it to Sara. I had a hunt through nearly all the rooms in the house before I found her, and when I did find her, she was in no responsive mood. She was standing in the cold, cheerless, drawing-room—the fire never being lighted till mid day—with the morning newspaper spread out on the table before her, over which she was bowed in a posture indicative of no ordinary absorption of its contents. "Sara," I cried, holding the letter above my head, "look here!" She did not seem to guess what it was, for she made a movement of impatience, and looked down at her paper again. I threw the paper playfully on the paper before her eyes. She snatched it up as if it could have conveyed some kind of pollution to the page, and in so doing perceived what it was. Then her indifference changed to excitement. "Open and read it, Carry," she said, "I can't." The first glance was enough. I made a little bound of joy. Sara, catching the result from this very expressive gesture, took the letter from me and read it herself. "Madame: I am desired by Messrs. — to inform you, that they are willing to undertake the publication of your novel on their usual terms." Then followed a business-like statement of their terms, which, novice as I was at that time, seemed so me very magnificent. "That will do," said Sara; "but I must know how soon they will publish it." There was an expression of softened exultation in her face, and I observed that her eyes dwelt on the newspaper. "You see," said I, reading over the letter to myself, "we have no means of contradicting their statement. We have only their word for it that these are their usual terms." "True, but I care nothing about the money; let them publish my book, and they can't cheat me of my object." In a few days the whole matter was settled; formal agreements were drawn up and signed, and the book was to appear immediately. Popular authors, during the preceding months, had been





