

Weekly

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Poetry.

HOME.

BY JAMES MCGOWERY.

There is a land, of every land the pride,
Beloved by heaven o'er all the world beside;
Where brighter suns dispense serene light,
And milder moons emprise the night;
A land of beauty, virtue, valor, truth,
Time-tutored age, and love-exalted youth:
The wandering mariner, whose eye explores
The wealthiest isles, the most enchanting shores,
Views not a realm so bountiful and fair,
Nor breathes the spirit of a purer air,
In every clime the magnet of his soul,
Wounded by remembrance, trembles to that pole;
For in this land of heaven's peculiar grace,
The heritage of nature's noblest race,
There is a spot of earth serenely blest,
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest,
Where man, creation's tyrant, casts aside
His sword and scepter, pagantry and pride,
While in his softened looks benignly blend
The sire, the son, the husband, brother, friend;
Here woman reigns; the mother, daughter, wife,
Strew with fresh flowers the narrow way of life!
In the clear heaven of her delightful eye
An angel guard of loves and graces lie;
Around her knees domestic duties meet,
And freetide pleasures gambol at her feet.
Where shall that land, that spot of earth be found?
Art thou a man—a patriot?—look around;
O, thou shalt find, how'er thy footsteps roam,
That land thy country, and that spot thy home!

Select Tales.

[From Godey's Lady's Book.]

THE MYSTERIOUS BOX.

BY MRS. SARAH JOSEPH HALE.

"What a shame it is, that we have not one real poet among our twenty millions of people!" said Edward Blakely, as he entered the apartment with the "Edinburg Review" in his hand.

"You forget Edward!" cried his sister, Lucy, eagerly. "there is Bryant, and Longfellow, and Willis, and—"

"No, no, Lucy, I forgot no one. I remember well every American who has written a stanza worth remembering, and I could almost worship the writers. But I repeat that we have not, and it is a national disgrace, a single individual among our twenty millions of people, who devotes himself to the service of the masses."

"Because there is no adequate compensation offered for poetry," said Uncle Thomas. "We have the poetic temperament in profusion among us."

"I fear not," replied Edward; "I fear this dulness is constitutional. When I read the sarcastic observations of Englishmen and Scotchmen" (and Edward drew his breath hard) "on our want of genius and originality, I am often so mortified with feeling that the accusation is true, that I almost hate the name of American."

"We shall have poets when we have Mæcenas," remarked Uncle Thomas, dryly.

"It is possible. But, dear uncle, what reasons have you for believing this? None of the immortal bards have written for hire."

"But they were rewarded, nevertheless; or most of them, with whose histories we are acquainted, attained, in consequence of their writings, situations of honor and profit; or, at any rate, they were better provided for than they would have been had they never made rhymes. Most of the poets have been what the aristocratic language of the Old World styles *low-born*, and their genius exalted them to be companions of the titled, learned, and wealthy; and this envied privilege, these *low-born* poets could not in any other way have obtained. So that you see, Edward, there is a reward, and one too exceedingly coveted, where the distinctions of rank are established by law, for men of genius to devote themselves to works of imagination and taste. America has not, as yet offered these rewards in a sufficient measure to foster that inclination which genius, I believe, always feels, to indulge in the studies which would elevate and refine society, rather than make it comfortable."

"And so, I suppose, you are intending I shall infer that the brave spirits among us republicans, who might have been distinguished as poets, are employing their powers to invent steamboats, cotton gins, telegraphs, &c. &c."

"I mean to say, Edward, that our men of genius have hitherto found useful inventions more surely the path to fame, wealth, and respectability, than sublime fancies would have been. And so they have been utilitarians when they might have been poets. But we will leave this discussion for

the present. I had promised the girls a story, and was just beginning as you came in; and I believe they will prefer my story to your logic."

The young ladies laughed, and declared, as young ladies usually do, that they infinitely preferred stories to logic.

Edward looked a little blank; for he had just graduated, and thought, as graduates usually do, that all wisdom was learned at college, and that whatever did not savor of logic must be nonsense. But still his early habit of listening to the stories of his mother had made him love stories, and he could not with his logic, cure himself of the silly habit, as he called it. So now he sat down a little without the circle which drew around Uncle Thomas, and though keeping his eye on the open page of the "Edinburg Review," he heard every word of the following tale:—

"About twenty-five years ago, I made an overland journey to New York city by the way of Windsor, Vermont, thence across the Green Mountains to Albany; but from that place I went by water; so that, after all, it was not exactly a land journey. But it was long enough to tire me prodigiously. The roads then were rough, and the company I met in the stage duller than the milestones, for these last always reported progress. I recollect, in particular, how disgusted I was with the affectation and chatter of a party who entered the stage—a railroad and a rail-car had never then been dreamed of—the morning we started from Windsor. There was a young fellow who fancied himself a great man because his father could afford him money enough to spend. I knew his father well—a painstaking, plodding drudge in the service of mammon he was—and he had been rewarded for his servitude. He was rich. His son has not long since been in the debtor's room, and I believe, taken the poor debtor's oath. Little did he think of such a downfall when I saw him in the stage. Then he was all pertness and flippancy; and the two ladies he was escorting, the young Miss to whom he was engaged, and her maiden aunt, were delighted with his pertness, which they doubtless thought wit; and they laughed at every silly, stupid observation he made."

"I did not think it strange that the young lady was pleased; she was blinded by her love or vanity; but I did not think an elderly spinster, who I could see, wore false hair, and, of course, was gray, for it was not then the fashion for ladies to dye their heads, might have been more wise. But to tell the truth, the ladies were as shallow as the coxcomb, and that is a case which seldom occurs; for though women are rarely found so wise as wise men, they are as rarely found so weak as foolish men. The fair sex have, as I think, an instinctive capacity for social intercourse, and seldom appear so dull, odd, or awkward, even when ignorant of established rules and the subjects of colloquy, as do their lords; and then they have a kindness in their smile, an attentiveness in their manner, which makes one believe they comprehend every word they hear."

"I always like to talk before ladies, for I am then incited to use my best language, and bring out my purest thoughts and feelings."

"And tell your best stories, too," said Lucy.

"Yes, my love, when I do not forget them in my old-fashioned digressions. But I shall go on regularly now, for I am just coming to my hero."

"Then the young beau in the stage is not to be your hero?" observed Edward.

"No, no, Edward; I shall never take a coxcomb for a hero of mine. But I don't mean by a coxcomb one who likes to dress and dash, even though he may carry his extravagance a little too far. I mean a conceited prig, who has nothing but extraneous qualifications to entitle him to his place in society. He depends on his father's fame, or friends, or wealth, or else on the eclat of graduating at a popular university, or traveling over Europe, or residing in a city; such a fellow is all pride and pretension, and seems to think Nature has given him a patent of nobility, when, if it were not for a combination of lucky circumstances in his favor, he would probably have been a wood-sawyer or an old clothes man. It seldom, however, happens in our country, that such an one is fortunate to the end; and when the time of trial comes he falls, like Lucifer, to rise no more."

There's poetry for you, Edward. I am glad you listen so attentively to my story."

"Your lecture, you mean, uncle."

"My story, I say. Where was I? Oh! the stage coach. Well, we had just crossed the Green Mountains, and during the whole ride I had hardly opened my lips. I felt truly rejoiced when a man, who had come from a cross-road which seemed to lead through the woods on our left, halloped for the stage to stop, and, after inquiring if there were many passengers, said a gentleman wished to go on as far as Rutland."

"The traveler soon came up, for he had not ridden in the wagon, and, taking a small bundle from the wagon seat, he handed it to the coachman to place on the top of the stage, and then taking a box from a buffalo skin in which it had been wrapped, he spoke a few words earnestly and in a low tone to the wagoner, and then entered the stage. I tell all these circumstances because they are essential to the catastrophe."

"When the stranger entered, I bowed, as I always do on such occasions, but the coxcomb I have before named turned up his nose with a scornful smile, and instantly removed from the front seat, where he had hitherto sat, to gaze, I supposed, uninterestedly on his Dulcinea, to the middle seat, which I had hitherto occupied alone, and thus left the whole forward seat for the new comer. He, however, did not seem to wish for much space in which to display himself. On the contrary, I thought he appeared to shrink from observation, and drew his hat down over his eyes, and his red silk handkerchief up over his chin. These movements might not have any particular motive, but there certainly was a mystery in the curious box he carried with him. It was a queer shaped box, nearer a triangle than any other form; perhaps eighteen inches on the longest side, and about twelve inches in height. This box the wagoner had handed to the traveler after the latter entered the stage. It was handed very carefully, and kept his eyes fastened on it in a way which seemed to me very odd. I noted these things more, perhaps, because I was glad to have a subject to employ my thoughts, and prevent the silly, simpering conversation, which was going on between the lovers and the duenna, from entering my sober ears. But I could not wholly escape hearing, and I found their witticisms were directed against the stranger. I knew, too, that he must hear them for once or twice the color rose on his pale cheek, and he held down his head and closed his eyes, as though he would have us think he was asleep."

"I always feel pained to see a fellow-being suffer so contentedly when it is so undeserved, and endeavored, by paying him particular attention, to reassure him. But it was all in vain that I talked to him. I could not draw him out. He would answer my questions, but as briefly as possible, consistent with civility. To my several remarks on the country, the weather, the news &c., he would not add a single syllable. He seemed to be laboring under some excitement or anxiety of mind which entirely unfitted him for conversation. I did not think it was bashfulness, as what he did say was spoken in an easy, assured tone, and there was no lack of information in his answers. But he would not talk; and so I contented myself with taking the inventory of his apparel. He was not shabby, yet his clothing augured poverty; it was unsuited for the season. The day was a chilly one; it was the last of October, and the traveler had no overcoat or gloves; and his shirt was thin and threadbare, and his boots were patched and did not fit him very well."

"Yet still there was something in his appearance and manners which interested me very much; something like the sympathy we read of in novels. He was young, and his face, or air of it I could see, was pale and scholar-like. His eye was blue, deep, dark blue, and I thought expressed melancholy or suffering; but there was, at times, a quickness in his movements which betrayed a hasty temperament, or it might belong to a suspicious one. Perhaps I should have thought the quick changes of feeling which I observed pass over his countenance were the inspiration of genius, and have set him down as a scholar, a poet, had it not been for his hard, sinewy hand, which showed too plainly that manual labor had been his calling. All these particulars I

noted before it grew dark; and, on the whole, I made up my mind that he would prove no common character, but whether inclined to do good or evil I could not decide. But tavern-keepers know everybody, thought I; so, when we reach Rutland, I'll find out who this young adventurer may be."

"We reached Rutland about 9 in the evening. Now I never thought I was so much given to the luxuries of the table, but yet, when I am traveling, I confess my mind is quite too much taken up with what I shall eat and what I shall drink. At this time I was cold as well as hungry; the landlord had a good fire and a good supper, and I was so completely engrossed with self, that I never observed the young traveler was not at the table with us, nor in the parlor with us; nor did I see him or think of him till the landlord was lighting me to my bed. Then I inquired for him."

"What, the fellow in the surcoat?" answered the man. "Why, he called for a chamber and lights, and carried up his box and budget, and then went out, and after a time returned with some one, and they are now, I guess, in that chamber." He pointed to the one next that I was entering.

"Did he take supper?" said I.

"No! he did not look like one who could afford to eat my suppers." The landlord laughed, and I felt as though I would have been willing to have gone without my own supper to have been certain that poor young man was not hungry."

"After the landlord had departed, I sat down in a huge arm-chair that stood close to a door which was then partly open. I had not sat there above a minute, when I was certain I heard voices."

"The door opened into a large closet, which separated the two chambers; I saw a glimmer of light through the plastering near the top of the wall, and I could now plainly hear, for the plastering was very thin, some one talking earnestly and rapidly. My curiosity was awakened. I softly entered the closet, and, standing on a chair, could just look through a chink in the wall, which had probably been made by the removal of a nail, or large wooden peg, which had once been driven into the plastering on the closet side. The hole was sufficiently large for me to see the two men plainly. They sat by a table, one on each side. The young traveler was facing me; consequently I could only see the back of his companion. But I judged, by his thin hair, and the appearance of his dress, that he was an elderly man. I noted him but little, tho' for my whole attention was engrossed with the mysterious traveler."

"This young man had laid aside his hat, and his bold forehead, from which he often brushed back the dark hair that clustered thickly on the top of his head, gave much more of dignity to his appearance than I had thought he possessed. But the charm of his face was in his eyes, I told you they were blue, and I had thought melancholy; all that expression had now passed away. They seemed to burn, and literally flash, with energy, and hope, and joy, as he went on showing paper after paper to the other gentleman. The papers seemed to be filled partly with writing, and partly with plans, or drawings, which the youth was describing. He had taken these papers from his queer looking box, which stood open on the table; but they did not, I found, constitute his chief treasure. Presently he took very carefully some little wheels and models in blocks of wood and metal, and other strange fashioned articles from his box, and he placed them together, and then he stood up, and rubbed his hands, and went up close to the other man and talked. My stars! how fast he talked! You must know that I could not hear a connected sentence, for he spoke low as well as fast, so that the whole scene was pantomime. It was the most animated one I ever saw; the embodiment of real feeling and passion in the changes of noble features, and the gestures of a fine and powerful form."

"You probably wish to know what I thought of the scene and the youth. I could not, for some time, form any guess of his character. At last, I saw the old gentleman take from his pocket-book a bank bill, which he seemed comparing with some of the drawings and paintings before him; and then the truth flashed on my mind at

once. They were counterfeiters! The whole mystery of the scene was unraveled. I now knew why the young man had come from that cross-road with so much precaution, his whispering with the wagon driver, his skulking in a corner of the stage, his silence and downcast looks; why, I read the whole history at a glance. It is wonderful how the possession of one link in a confederacy will enable you to put the whole fabric in motion, like pulling the string of a dancing Jack. But so it is. And after the mystery is understood, how very weak appear the devices of the art which had before blinded you! and how manfully you go on tearing in pieces the whole fabric, and accounting for every appearance, probable or improbable, with as little hesitancy as you would balance an account when the items are all before you."

"I had heard, when in Windsor, of the recent escape of a young and ingenious villain, who had been detected in passing counterfeit money. I believe I read the advertisement offering a large reward for his apprehension; at any rate, I heard him described, and the youth before me answered the description. He had 'dark hair, and blue eyes, and was nearly 6 feet in height, and could appear like a gentleman, as the description ran."

My first impulse, after making this discovery, was to call the landlord, and have the rogues secured. Then I recollected I had heard the misguided man was the only son of a widowed mother, who, it was thought, would never survive the disgrace of having him condemned to the state prison. I remembered, too, that extenuating circumstances were named—how the youth, who was clerk in a store, had been inveigled by older villains, and a bad woman, the worst of tempters in a human form. I had heard more of this sort, and I thought of the poor fellow would escape, for he might reform if not degraded by public punishment, because he was young, and had naturally a fine disposition."

"These thoughts so overpowered me that I could scarcely stand; and so I crept softly from the closet, and sat down in the arm-chair, to reflect what was my duty in this case. On one hand, my sympathy for the unhappy culprit, who I saw was really a noble creature, that is, as God had made him, strongly inclined me to let him take his chances of escape. Then his poor mother—I fancied I heard her beseeching me not to expose her son, her only son to disgrace; and I was decided, for a few moments, to let him go."

"Then the responsibility of an American citizen to protect those laws from violation which he has helped to make and impose, came vividly on my own mind. How could I connive at the escape of the guilty from justice, without forfeiting my own esteem, even though my secret should never be known? Those bonds of law which freemen impose upon themselves, are far more obligatory upon the conscience and honor of individuals than are those statutes enacted by despots or self constituted leaders. The freeman has no mental reservations. His secret purpose, as well as his solemn oath, is pledged to support the laws. He knows and feels this responsibility, and he can not escape it. There is no subtlety. He can not say these things belong to the Government—let the proper officers look to it. Our police are the citizens, our guards the citizens; and, as an American citizen, my duty was plain; I must expose the guilty."

"But before I went to call the landlord, I thought I would look at the counterfeiters. The old man had gone, and the youth was pacing the room with an anxious and troubled air. The bright flush that had given such animation to his features during the discussion had faded entirely. He was pale as a statue, and when he stopped in his walk, as he several times did, and stood still as a statue, had it not been for the glarble of his eye, he would have seemed a marble figure. I pitied him deeply—I think it no shame to say it, though he was a counterfeit—for I saw he was miserable. Finally, I resolved to go to him, and expatiate with him, and see if I could not find in his penitence some reasons to justify me in letting him escape."

"I went, and knocked at his door, which he immediately opened. He seemed a little startled, however, and asked me, abruptly enough, what I wanted of him. I answered that I came to warn him of consequences which must overtake him soon if he pursued the course he had begun."

"He looked wonderfully amazed, and asked me to explain. This I did as quickly as possible, for I think a frank, straightforward manner always succeeds best with the young. Had he been an old offender, I should have gone more cunningly to work—and endeavored to entrap him with woful questions, and asked for a sight of his box, and so on; but I went right to the point at once—told him how I had seen him and his partner in iniquity, and the contrivances I knew he had in his box for forging bills; and lastly, I told him who I suspected he was."

"He had listened to me without speaking, but once or twice I thought he seemed inclined to laugh; and when I named the counterfeit P—, he could restrain himself no longer. He burst out, not with a laugh of mirth, as it seemed to me, but of scorn and derision, as though he set warning and advice, as well as law and honesty, at defiance."

"I was tempted to knock him down. It seemed to me, as I turned to leave the room, in order to call the landlord, that such a reckless villain well deserved the state prison."

"But, when he saw me going, he checked his laugh, and begged me to have a little patience, and he would show me his box. He brought it forward, and took out everything it contained. He then unfolded his bundle, and placed that too in my inspection. And then he asked me to take a seat at his table, and sitting down himself, he arranged all his models before me. What do you think they proved to be, Edward?"

"How can I guess?" said Edward.

"Nothing very wicked, I hope, uncle?" said Lucy.

"Why," resumed Uncle Thomas, taking a huge pinch of snuff, always his custom when he was talking, "they were made to think of this part of the affair, so we will pass over it as lightly as possible. The models and drawings were those of a machine for grinding tanner's bark, which machine the young man had invented, as well as made some improvement in the process of tanning leather, for which he wished to obtain a patent; and he had been explaining all these matters to an old uncle of his, in order to induce him to advance a sum of money necessary to secure the patent right."

"I never felt myself less a man than when looking on the models before me, and then on the animated face of the youthful projector, where every feature seemed now instinct with enthusiastic honesty as well as energy of purpose. And I had judged him to be a base counterfeit! Well, I have one comfort. If I sometimes judge wrong, I am always glad to act right. And so I made my apology to the youth; not a half way, cautious apology, as if I was

apprentice to a tanner and currier, never had prevailed with him to begin his trade."

"But the tears of his widowed mother decided him. He saw he must lay aside his books, and forego his dreams of being a scholar, a poet, and a gentleman, to prepare himself to assist her. He went to his trade; but he told me that even then these wild visions of fame and greatness continued to haunt him, and he had no doubt it was these promptings which, as he grew older and wiser, took a more reasonable shape, and incited his restless ingenuity to attempt experiments and plans which had finally been successful in his present invention."

"I had determined," said he, "to succeed. I labored during the day, and studied my inventions through the night. For the last three years—I was then nineteen—I have scarcely allowed myself common necessities, because all my earnings I expended on my experiments. My blessed mother bore with all my plans and whims, even encouraged my projects, and she shall now be rewarded. If I can only go to Washington and secure my patent, I shall soon be independent."

"You should have seen him, Lucy, while he was saying these things, to know fully how much interest genius and enthusiasm can give to the most common, or, as it is called, vulgar employment. I thought, while he was talking, that *tanning leather* was an office of great and dignified importance. So much did I enter into the spirit of his feelings that, as I happened then to be a representative in Congress, I gave him my name, with an invitation to call on me when he came to Washington, and promised to assist him all in my power. As an earnest of my goodwill, I offered to advance him an hundred dollars then, if he

unexpectedly by him, for he had never found a patron, and his old uncle, as I afterwards learned, only lent him five dollars. His lip quivered, and it was some time before he spoke; at last he thanked me, and accepted my offer."

"I saw him at Washington. He secured his patent, and soon disposed of shares to such advantage that I had little doubt he might be a rich man, if his poetic temperament did not hurry him into hazards and extravagances. I took the liberty, if I hint of our confidential conversations, to hint this to him. 'Never fear me,' said he, blushing, and half hesitating, 'I am under bonds to be a reasonable man.'

"Under the bonds of the heart, I presume," said I. He smiled, and we parted."

"Ten years after that I met him on the floor of Congress, a Representative from the great State of New York. Our recognition was, I trust, mutually pleasant. I was not surprised to meet him there, for I knew he had talents and energies which would make him distinguished, if he only persevered; but I confess the extensive knowledge he displayed, and his perfect gentlemanly deportment, somewhat disconcerted my old prejudices. I had held it to be impossible that one whose early training was neglected could ever excel in liberality of ideas and refinement of manner; those who married the advantages of a public and polite education. But after he had introduced me to his wife, a lovely and accomplished woman, I wondered less, and I know well the influence of a gentle and intelligent spirit over such a mind as Hugh Griswold possessed. He told me he was rich, very; but he valued his wealth only as it made him successful in love and fame."

"Had that man been born in a sphere of military glory, he would have been a hero; or had literary reputation been the best passport to honors, he would have been a poet. In our country, where the skill that contributes to make life comfortable has been hitherto more regarded, and better rewarded than the talents which defend and amuse it, he devoted his genius to the construction of machines for grinding *tanner's bark*. But this predominant influence of bodily wants will not much longer enslave. Our people are becoming rich. The rich will search for expedients to make their wealth contribute to their renown. The age of warriors and spectators has gone by. Physical strength must yield to mental power; and the indulgence of the senses be considered poor and vulgar when contrasted with intellectual and moral pleasures. Yes, Edward, the rich will find that their surest, greatest, most durable distinction must be the distinction of superior intelligence. They will encourage literature either from taste or for pretensions; genius will be excited and rewarded. And then, Edward, we shall have both Mæcenas and poets."

