

WHAT IS NATURE?
BY JOHN STANTON BLACKIE.

What thing is nature? What I don't know. To make a clatter. Like Hegel, Hamilton and Coates. Concerning mind and matter.

Yet, I have had my thoughts at times; since you are fond of rhymes. That won't hurt your digestion.

Nature is a growth, a coming forth. Into new fashion ever. That many a man knows no birth, whose virtue dies never.

What substance? That which to define. My grasping reason smothered; But what is least I call divine. And what is most I call a snore.

You are a materialist? Not at all; If I could speak, I'd find a snore. The best name for what best I call, I'd rather call it mind.

And mind is one, and what we call. That would take God into your school; And make the world a schoolroom.

And last of nature, god, and man. With technic demonstration. As if yourself had sketched the plan. Of boundaries, vast creation!

And dress means thoughts in phrases grand, And thoughts sobering sober.

That you have got, in your clutched hand, Two things called mind and matter.

Go to! you know not this nor that; Man has no measuring rod. For nature, force, and law, and what The wisest man call God.

For law and life, and all the course Of nature, force, and law, All but the play of one wise force, Which Moses called Creator.

Think on your knees: 'tis better so. Than without wings to soar; What blushing strains strain to know We find when we adore.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

On a distant prairie, at midnight, a weary and worn traveler was overtaken by a snow-storm. When the first few flakes came softly dropping down, he looked eagerly around in the hope of discerning a place of shelter; but none was to be seen—only the trackless waste of rolling lands, and far-off hills in the distance. The snow increased, and off that he feared he should never reach them. With the departure of light the snow began falling faster, the winds blew keener, the road over the prairie was soon hidden from view, and the traveler felt that he was lost on a trackless waste, without a star to guide him across the dangerous country.

"This is terrible," said he, aloud. "I fear much I shall never reach my destination. I had but a compass and a light I should not fear, for I could resist the effects of cold long enough to reach the hills, and there I should find human habitations, or at least the shelter of a rock. Now I may go in a circle till I freeze, and be no nearer help. What a fool I was to leave the river side and cross the prairie, just for the sake of a few miles more or less journey. No; a man can even battle it out now, Heaven helping."

And battle it out he did, most manfully. He drew his can down over his ears and brow, and his fur collar up over his mouth, and thrusting his hands deeper in his pockets, pressed on through the yielding snow. The gloom increased, the wind came sharper, and through his heavy clothes, the traveler began to feel the effects of the cold. His feet grew numb, his arms chilled, and after an hour's rapid walking, he suddenly paused.

"How do I know whether I am going?" he exclaimed. "Perhaps I have already turned aside from the straight line, and am wandering on the verge of destruction. Oh, that I could shake off this drowsy feeling that is stealing over me!"

I know not; it is—the shadow of Great Heaven, I am freezing to death!" shrieked he, bounding forward with renewed energy. "Action—action—action is life, and life is too sweet to let you!"

He hurried along with a springing motion, stamping his feet vigorously at every step, and swinging his arms to keep the blood in circulation. Yet, with all his efforts, he knew that the angel of death was hovering over his winged silent host.

"Despair—not!" he cried, "not while the memory of my loved wife and dear children is left to me. I will struggle on for your sakes, and fight the storm to the last extremity. Oh, just Heaven, for the sake of the innocent ones whose only stay is my right arm, help me to resist—help me to triumph."

At this moment he plunged into a hollow, his feet trod over ice, and he heard the voice of a streamlet singing of life and action beneath its icy crust. At the same time the smell of wood-smoke scented his nostrils.

"Oh, thou who reignest above," he ejaculated, "I thank Thee that thou hast heard my prayer. Help is near me."

He reeled heavily onward through the blinding snow, and saw just before him a low sited, one more struggle, and he fell again. In an instant he divined its character. With a last desperate effort he found the door, threw it open, and, rushing up the floor, knowing only that he was in an atmosphere reeking with the fumes of smoke and carbonyl, he saw the smoke which rose from a wad of smouldered coals in the center of the place. It was a settler's rude smoke-house, left to care for itself during the long winter's night, and the traveler's grateful heart sent up a tribute to Heaven for this place of refuge in the desert of snow.

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In a large log cabin in the valley of the streamlet, Mrs. Dean sat alone. Her husband had gone to town, and the young wife was left with a baby. Accustomed to the solitude, she felt safe, and sat in contentment before the blazing fire; the flames leapt right joyfully up the chimney, and the green logs sizzled and crackled in the heat like things of life. Out doors the wind was howling drearily, and the snow falling heavily, but the fire was not for it only made the fire more cheerful. There came a rattling at the door.

"How strange! Who can be at our door in this wild night?" she said to herself, as she rose and went into the little entry.

The rattling was repeated. "Who is there?" she asked. "For Heaven's sake let me in; I am freezing to death," was the reply.

"Who are you? and how came you in this lonely place on such an evening as this?"

"I am a traveler from below. I lost my way, and am dying with cold. For pity's sake let me in, or I shall perish!"

Milly hesitated. She was alone, and it was three miles to the nearest neighbor's. What should she do? She paused in perplexity.

"Oh, come in, and let me! I am dying!" were the words that met her ear. There was a heavy fall against the sill, and then 'ow moans. Her woman nature could stand no more; true to the instincts of her being, she unbared the door and threw it open. A closely-muffled figure reeled by her into the room, and, shutting the door, she followed.

On hearing the fire-place the stranger threw off his cap and stood erect and strong, without a sign of inconvenience from the effects of the weather. Milly retreated from him in amazement; but, recovering herself, and putting the best face on the matter, she tremulously addressed the man.

"I am sorry, sir, you are so cold. It is a bitter night to be abroad. Will you

not sit by the fire?" And she pushed a chair forward.

The man made no response, but, stooping over, ran his fingers through the blaze; then he slowly stood at her with a look which made her blood run cold. A bright thought came into her mind. She would pretend there were others in the house, for she already felt afraid of the man, and bitterly regretted having admitted him.

"Would you like to see some of the men folks, sir?" she inquired. "If so, I will call them from their rest."

The man laughed hoarsely and replied.

"Milly Dean, for that I believe is your name, you cannot deceive me. You are all alone in this house. I took particular care to ascertain that before I came. So you may as well make yourself easy on that score; and do as I bid you."

"As do you bid me!" exclaimed Milly, in terror; "What do you want of me?"

"I want to take your clothes for my husband, and then I will be free. The Power that shapes the skies."

And you, sir, doctor, are a fool.

With logical application,

The world would find out the secret;

And last of nature, god, and man,

With technic demonstration.

As if yourself had sketched the plan.

Of boundaries, vast creation!

And dress means thoughts in phrases grand,

And thoughts sobering sober.

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THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

AGRICULTURAL AND DOMESTIC.

The American Farmer. Farm labor, 'tis the primal toll. That dates from Eblon, when all the world was tilled in the hand, and the hand in the soil. The plow was then the only tool.

Now, some sixty and seventy men gathered at the house of Mr. Dean. The robber was recognized as a notorious horse-thief who had long infested the neighborhood. There was a summary trial, and then, in dogged silence, the wretched who had burned a harmless infant and murdered a faithful and gentle woman, submitted to his inevitable fate. A rudely constructed gallows and a noose took up his existence.

Now the thin, settled frontier of the West they made out justice to offenders against property and life.

There were about \$1,700 in bills found on the person of the robber, besides the gold he had taken from Mrs. Dean. As he had been saved from the anger of the winter storm by the shelter he found in the smoke-house, \$1,000 of the \$1,700 was given him to go his way.

Milly sprang into the entry and would have fled, but the stranger caught her by the wrist and dragged her roughly back.

"You cannot escape me, young woman," said he. "You will find it most convenient to make a clean breast of it at once. It will be better for you."

He tried to release her arm. The rough treatment she received aroused her temper, and indignation overcame all other feelings.

"Let me go, you scoundrel, let me go, or I will call for help," she cried.

"Call, you fool," said the brutal fellow, "and much good may it do you. Keep yourself still, and tell me where the money is."

"I will not!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing fire.

"You will not?" he replied; "we shall see!"

He released her wrist so violently that she reeled half across the room. Then he siezed the sleeping infant from its cradle, and held it at arm's length almost into the blazing fire, so that the terrified mother expected to see its light garments catch the flames.

"Now, where's the money?" shrieked Milly, with a look of infinite agony.

"Monster, give me my child!" shrieked Milly, endeavoring to reach the little one. "Let me have my baby!"

But every effort was frustrated, for again and again the strong hand of the robber held her.

"See, its clothes will be on fire in a minute," said the man, putting the helpless innocent closer to the flame. The mother looked into his eyes.

"Anything, anything, only give me my child!" she cried. "The next instant it was handed to her, and sank upon the floor and folded it to her bosom.

"Come," exclaimed the man, touching her rudely with his foot, "you have not told me where this money is."

"In the box on the upper shelf," she replied, pointing to the closet.

"I have found it," she replied, placing it on the table, and opened it saying:

"So far, well. It is nearly all gold. I will pocket it with your leave, or without it, just as you please." He filled his pockets with the golden coin, and threw the empty box in the fire. Then he came and stood beside her.

"How shall it be?" asked the ruffian.

"Hurry, the child dies. I have no time to waste, and you will be dead."

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