

"I OWE NO MAN A DOLLAR."

BY CHARLES P. SHIRAS.

On, do not say, my dear wife,
The wealth of our next-door neighbor,
But bid me still be stout of heart,
And cheerfully follow my labor.
You must know the list of those little debts,
That have been our lingering sorrow,
Is paid this night; so we'll both go forth
And share with the world tomorrow.
Our debtor is but a shamed dog,
With the creditor's name on his collar,
While I am a King and you a Queen,
For we owe no man a dollar!

One neighbor we saw in his coach to-day,
With his wife and his shambling daughter,
While we sat down at our cheerless board
To a crust and a cup of water.
I say that the tear-drop stand in your eye,
Though you tried your best to conceal it;
I know that the world is not your heart,
And you could not help but feel it.
But knowing now that our scanty fare
Has feed my neck from the collar,
You'll join my laugh, and help me shout
That we owe no man a dollar!

The neighbor whose wretchedness has dazzled your eyes
In fact is a wretched debtor;
I'll lift him off, from my very heart;
And I will be his friend and master.
Why, this man is the wretched slave slave;
For his dashing wife and daughter
Will live in style, though ruin should come,
So he goes like a lamb to the slaughter.
But he feels it tighter every day,
That terrible debtor's collar.
Oh, what would he give, could he say with us
That he owed no man a dollar!

You seem amazed, but I'll tell you more:
Within these hours I met him
Sneaking along with a shamed air,
A stiff stand had been him,
Yet he fled from a worthy man,
Whom I met with the greatest pleasure,
Whom I called by name and forced to stop,
Though he said he was not obliged to do so.
He stopped, and last night I held him fast
Till he freed my neck from the collar;
Then I shook his hand as I proudly said,
Then I owe no man a dollar!

Ah, now you smile, for you feel the force
Of the truths I've been repeating;
I knew that a downright honest heart
In that gentle breast was heating!
To-morrow I'll rise with a giant's strength
To follow my toil's labor.
But ere I sleep I'll nobly pray
For my wretched next-door neighbor;
And we'll pray for the time when all shall be
free.

From the weight of the debtor's collar,
When he who was crushed in the vice may cry,
"Now I owe no man a dollar!"

"THE STAGE WAITS."

"I will drink the toast," said Monsieur Grattin. "Our noble profession, the lyric art." I have no great fancy for your gin, but I will drink the toast in the liquor of your country." He was on his legs at this time, and bowed forward left and right before he drank, so as to include all the company under his condescending compliance in pledging the art to which he belonged in a product of England.

"Hear, hear, hear!" cried several voices cheerfully. The Frenchman emptied his glass and sat down with a look of profound satisfaction.

They were all men present—a dozen

—and they all appeared in the very best humor and spirits. They were seated in the dining-room of James Walford, a professional singer, and the occasion of the meeting was to commemorate Walford's signature to an agreement with the lessee of the Cremona theater. A few days ago the document had been fully completed. Walford was to have £20 a week, the largest salary he had yet reached, and was to create the leading tenor part in a new comic opera.

To be sure, the Cremona was not a first-class theater, but Walford was glad to get a leading part anywhere, and £20 a week was a great advance upon £10, which he had been formerly earning in subordinate parts.

Walford himself was hardly as glad as his friends, for he was the best natured, best tempered, kindest hearted tenor that ever lived, and all his friends wished him well. There were other reasons also which made those who liked him glad of his success. A few months ago he had lost a young wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, and he was left a widower with an only child, a boy of 4 years old. Now that his wife was gone, this boy was the very apple of his eye. He took the child with him wherever he might, and when he came home, whether it was early or late, his first act was to visit the boy. Those who knew him best said it was well he had the child to yet reach, and was to create the leading tenor part in a new comic opera.

He was not one of those who wear their hearts upon their sleeves. He was made of stubborn stuff. But then all knew that when he married his late wife he had given her the love of his whole nature, and that the very quietness of his manner, upon her death, meant a stubborn nature terribly controlled. To one or two of his most intimate friends he had said confidentially that if anything happened to his boy he should not care to live.

One of the pleasantest things in connection with the present social meeting was that M. Grattin had come, and shown himself most cordial and agreeable. Everyone regarded this as exceedingly good on his part, for it was known to all that the choice of a tenor for the Cremona Theater lay between him and Walford. Thus he had come, as it were, to signalize the triumph of his rival over himself.

M. Grattin was a man of medium height, black-haired, sallow, with dark brown eyes, a slightly aquiline nose and good figure. He was a strikingly handsome man. His manners were refined and gentlemanlike, and the only objection Englishmen found to him was that he seemed to be anxious to show elaborate kindness in small things at the expense of "sincerity" in greater.

Thus it happened that, although the men present in Albany Lodge, Canonsbury, that night greeted his arrival enthusiastically, and told him he was a good fellow for coming, next morning, when they thought more quietly over the matter, they agreed it was only what was to be expected from so polite and courteous man.

It was but natural that, under the circumstances of the death of Walford's wife, his curly-headed little boy Freddy should be made much of by the Bohemian friends of his father. For a time no one came to the house without bringing him some little toy or sweet-stuff; and if the boy had not a very good disposition and a gay and airy manner, which made him take the gifts with the laughter of delight rather than the gravity of greed, he would have run a fair chance of being hopelessly spoiled.

Albany Lodge was a much more modest house than one might suppose from the name. For, taking the times he had engagements with the times he had not, Walford could not hitherto count

on earning much more than £300 a year. During his wife's time she had had a general servant for the house, while she herself looked after the boy. But, upon the death of his wife, Walford having no woman relative who could take her place, dismissed the general servant and hunted up his old nurse, Martha Grace.

She was now at least 60 years of age, and of course nothing like as active as she had once been. But he knew he could rely on her to do justice to his boy, and that was the great consideration in his heart then. When she came to stay with him, he said to her with all the earnestness he was capable of:

"Martha, I am not particular about the house. I shall not want you to do much for myself. If you will just keep the little place only, and get me some thing simple to eat and drink when I want it, I shall be quite content. But I am particular about the boy. You must not let him get into harm of any kind. He is all I now have in the world, and if any great harm came to him I should break my heart."

The old woman promised, and kept her promise faithfully during the time she had been with him.

At last the great night was at hand. Walford was full of spirits and confidence. The rehearsals had been most satisfactory. Everyone connected with the theater had complimented him upon his singing and acting in the part, and the whole company were in the very best of humor, for the belief was general that the opera would run a hundred nights, at least.

It was a dreary, cold, damp, disheartening evening, when Walford prepared to leave his home for the theater. Some months ago, when his wife died, he had had an engagement, but it was now two months since his latest appearance in public.

"Now, Martha," said he on leaving, "you'll be king of the castle while I'm away. I shall not be back till past midnight. You need not sit up for me. I shall get my supper in town. It's time now, isn't it, for Freddy to go to bed?" He took the boy in his arms and kissed him fondly, and stroked his brown curls, and called him his Fred, his little man, his fine boy. Then added: "I think, Martha, in honor of the occasion, I must give Freddy a shilling."

The boy clapped his hands with delight, and laughed. He never had had a whole shilling before. Pennies of course often came his way, and although he had no definite idea of the purchasing powers of a shilling, he knew they were much greater than those of a penny.

The father handed the boy a shilling and having kissed him again long and lingering, rose with a sigh and said to Martha: "You'll take good care he gets into no trouble while I'm away. The safest place for him is in bed. Put him to bed, Martha, at once, there's a good soul."

She promised to do so, and he left the house, got into an omnibus, and made his way as quickly as possible to the Cremona.

Here all was bustle and excitement. Everyone who was anyone was in front. By the time he had dressed he was told that the house was filled crammed, from top to bottom, and that from the parts where it was possible to book seats they had been turning money away. Everyone behind was in the best of good humor, and he himself felt more elated than on any other occasion since his wife's death.

If this piece were a hit, and he a success in it, his upward progress in his profession would be certain. He should not only be able to live in comfort, but to save up money for his boy, and for the time when that most delicate of all properties, a tenor's voice, ceased to have a market value. He still lacked of 30, and with care he might calculate on twenty years' lease of his voice. Supposing his voice lasted twenty years and this opera gave him a command in the market, in those twenty years he could save enough money to insure his old age against want and to provide handsomely for his boy.

He did not come on very early in the first act. He felt in no way nervous. He never was in better voice and the part suited him perfectly. What more could any tenor desire?

There was, of course, an under-study to his part. Mr. Grattin was the under-study, and, singular to say, he did not arrive in the theater before the curtain went up. This was grossly improper. For, supposing any accident had happened to Walford, there would have been barely time for Grattin to dress and make up from the moment the bell rang until the leading tenor was required on the stage: Grattin had belonged to the Cremona company for a considerable time, and during that time had always sung second or third tenor parts. He had been paid 8 guineas a week, and for a while there had floated before him the hope that he might be promoted to a front place with an additional salary of £20. This hope had been dispelled when Walford got the engagement, and now he, Grattin, had no part at all, and no chance of an appearance during the present run, unless Walford broke down.

Just as the curtain was rung up there was a great commotion behind. Grattin had arrived in a state of the highest excitement, and there were sounds of consternation and dismay from the men's dressing room. Before the curtain had been up a couple of minutes the opera was stopped, and the manager stepped forward to explain that owing to a sad calamity, news of which had reached the theater but that very moment, Mr. Walford would not be able to appear that evening. In the face of such a misfortune, Mr. Grattin, with whom they had so long been favorably familiar, had kindly consented to sing the part.

The manager said more, but this is all that is material. The audience were docile, and accepted the situation without a murmur.

What had occurred behind was this. Grattin had, in a state of wildest excitement, rushed into the men's dressing room, and announced that Albany Lodge was on fire, and there was reason to suppose the boy had perished in the flames. He explained that what must have been from three-quarters of an hour to an hour after Walford left his home, he, Grattin, was passing by with

the intention of calling for his friend, when he found a crowd around the house, and flames bursting through the windows. He learned from the police that from the first alarm it was impossible to enter the house. Hence their fear that the boy and possibly the old woman had perished.

In the face of such horrible events it was clearly impossible for Walford to sing. Grattin had taken a hansom the whole way down for the sake of speed. The best thing for Walford to do was to take a hansom back and let Grattin go through the part. So said everyone. And one of the good-natured members of the company, who had nothing to do that night, volunteered to accompany him. So the poor father, assisted by those around him, took off the gay trappings of the stage and resumed the sober garb of every day life, and went off merrily with his friend to the scene of desolation.

When he got there the house was all ablaze, and he was assured that nothing could be done until morning.

Had anything been heard or seen of his boy? No; nothing. Had anything been seen of Martha? Yes; she had come back, and her story was a strange one. It ran as follows:

Very shortly after her master had left the house, and just as she had put the boy to bed, a knock came to the side door. She went down, leaving the paraffine oil lamp burning on the table close to the bed. She found at the door a ragged little boy, who handed her a note. This she read in the kitchen. It was to the effect that if she came to a certain public house the writer would tell her something which would be great to her advantage and the advantage of her master. She did not at all like the notion of leaving the house. In the first place her instructions about the boy were clear. In the second place, the fastenings of the house were not satisfactory. The spring lock on the side door little better than touched the hasp, and as the master himself knew, a strong push was sufficient to open that door from the outside, except when it was bolted within.

For a long time the woman hesitated. Then, thinking there might really be some advantage to herself and her master behind this note, she resolved to risk going. Before leaving she went upstairs, and left the boy might feel lonely—she had been accustomed to sit with him while he went to sleep—she told him she would leave the lamp alight on the condition that he lay still, and did not get out of bed while she was away. The boy promised and she went.

At the public house indicated she found a stout slatternly woman, who appeared to be the worse for drink. This woman said she was the writer of the note, and then, to Martha Grace's horror, assured the faithful old servant that she had no intention whatever of benefiting the master of Albany Lodge, but her design was that Martha, being in a position of confidence, as she was informed, should gradually pillage that house that she, the strange woman, would dispose of the goods, and that they two should divide the money between them.

Martha broke away from this wretch indignantly, and hurried back with all speed to the house. She had been more than half an hour absent, and when she got back the place was in flames, and all possibility of getting at the room where she had left the boy was over. No doubt the child had got out of bed, and while playing with the lamp, it fell and fired the house.

There was nothing for the disconsolate father to do but to wait there through the dreary watches of that desolate, dim night, looking at the uncertain flicker of the gradually dying fire.

With morning came the possibility of search. Then the remains of the lamp were found, but no trace whatever of the boy. This puzzled people skilled in fires. They owned they could make nothing of it. They could trace portions of the bedding and the floor, but nothing whatever that spoke of the presence of a human being. Walford urged the searchers to renew their quest, but in vain. Absolutely nothing belonging to the boy was found, except, strangely enough, some buttons which were known to belong to his clothes and a shilling. Both the father and the nurse agreed that there could not possibly have been another silver coin in that room than the one given by the father to his son the evening before.

The coin, too, was found in a place close beside the iron bedstead, which would roughly correspond with where the nurse had put his clothes. What mysteries upon mysteries were these?

Even now, although it was 9 o'clock in the morning, Walford refused to leave the ruins, and his friend, who had stayed with him loyally all the time, set off in search of some refreshment. He came back very shortly, and, preoccupied as Walford was, he could not but see that some new and startling surprise had overtaken his friend. He asked hastily what it was.

"I don't think I ought to tell you, Walford, but if I don't some one else will in a few minutes. There was a bad break down at the Cremona last night."

"I know there was, and I was the cause of it," said Walford, sadly. "But who can blame me? Look at this. Where is my boy?"

"I don't mean you, Walford, but Grattin. He fell on the stage in a fainting fit, and the opera had to be stopped. They say he's seriously ill. In fact, the doctors think he can't recover. The papers say there is something wrong with the heart."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Walford. "Poor Grattin! the sight of my house in flames, and the knowledge that my little one had perished, and then having to dress and go on in a comic part, was too much for him."

While the two men were speaking, a third man came up and said: The police tell me one of you is Mr. Walford. I have a note for Mr. Walford."

When the owner of the burned house had read it, he turned to his companion and said: "It is from poor Grattin. He asks me to come to him at once for God's sake, or he may never see me again. He lives quite close. I will not be half an hour. Wait for me."

Walford found Grattin exhausted, but

able to speak fluently. "The doctors tell me I may go at any moment. I will not waste a word. I have been unconscious until just now. I want you to forgive me if you can, if you will. I was jealous of you. I made my mind up to destroy you if I could. The whole plot was mine. I got a woman to decoy your servant away. I set fire to your house—"

"And the boy—the boy?" whispered the father, pale as death.

"Is sleeping there." He pointed to a door leading off the room in which he lay. "I used chloroform on a handkerchief with him, and then brought him here. He is safe. Open the door and look. I shall never sing the part. I was a better voice than you, but I wasn't as good a man. Forgive me and let me die in peace with all on earth, since there is no hope of my gaining peace hereafter. I have earned damnation, but I did not kill the boy. Mercy!—mercy, James Walford! Hark! There is your boy's voice. Is it not sweet enough to your ears this morning to take away your anger? Hark! That is not the voice of your boy. That is the call boy, Monsieur Grattin, the stage waits."

And with this word Monsieur Grattin answered his Last Call.—*Belgravia*.

Fear Held Him.

Novel-writers have tried, with more or less success, to depict life in Washington; but if the real inside history of men and parties there could be given, it would surpass any picture in wild improbability.

Take, for example, the following bit of actual history. During the last generation, one of the most familiar faces on Pennsylvania avenue was that of a well-known party leader, who was popularly supposed to be an aspirant for the highest political honors.

He was known as a man of great intellectual power and unstained probity. He had the control of vast national interests. His personal popularity was very great throughout the country, and his ambition was known to be insatiable.

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