

A QUESTION.

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why doth the spring return,
To scatter flowers beneath our feet,
And the wastes of winter spurn?

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why do the birds sing,
Send forth new harvests for men to reap,
And whiten the spreading plain?

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why the ocean's restless flow,
When the plenteous billows journeys keep
And never weary grow?

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why do we hope for heaven,
When we approach the mercy seat,
And seek to be forgotten?

If death be an eternal sleep,
When will justice come,
To those who toll for other's meat,
And receive but scanty crumbs?

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why did the angels go,
The poor man to bear to Abraham's seat,
While the rich man was in woe?

If death be an eternal sleep,
Why was man e'er born,
And why should he his vigils keep,
If there is no coming morn?

LADY BEST'S MISTAKE.

They lived in a creeper-covered cotage, nestling among verdure in the highly cultivated valley of one of the Home counties. There was a small dairy farm attached to it, upon which Lady Best bestowed all her leisure hours, and thereby managed to add no inconsiderable sum to her income, which since her husband's death had been rather limited.

With the money derived from this source she had been able to send her only son, Arthur, to Oxford—Arthur, who was the apple of her eye, the one only being for whom she really cared. She had given him a first-class education, and it had not been received on stony ground, for Arthur was clever, and a book-worm, too much so for worldly purposes, since he had indulged in study and contemplation till he had become a dreamer. By the time he reached the age of 25 it had been declared by all the neighbors, and Lady Best's circle generally, that Arthur would never do any good for himself in life—a hard verdict, considering that he had not a single vice, and was handsome and manly looking. Not that his habits and pursuits were exactly manly; fishing was the only sport in which he had ever been known to indulge, and he spent his time for the most part in wandering listlessly about the valley, wearing clothes of a somewhat aesthetic cut, which was particularly distasteful to his rural neighbors, a slouching felt has on his head, and a book—generally poetry—in his hand.

Idolizing Arthur though she did, it depressed Lady Best not a little to see him take to an effeminate, do-nothing style of life; and since he had now wasted more than a year in this sort of dream, she began to despair of seeing him embark in any of the professions for which she had hoped his education would have fitted him. What she was to do—how she was to change the current of events—she did not know.

"Was he in love? Had he had a disappointment?" her acquaintances asked her till she was tired of answering. The question, however, at last suggested a remedy. Why should not a touch of the very disease from which people thought he was suffering, bring about his cure?

Girls! she would surround him with girls; of course, while she had a due regard for good looks, never forgetting that, in her estimation, nothing made the eyes glisten with so much pleasure as the sight of gold.

So Lady Best gave a tennis party, and invited all the beauty of the county, including two or three heiresses; but before the afternoon was half over, Arthur had disappeared. He had wandered down the valley, away from "the noise," as he called the musical laughter of these maidens, promising himself to return as soon as they should all be gone.

Lady Best was disappointed, but not crushed; she would try again, this time in a quiet, but she hoped, more effective way.

"Arthur was out so much, she was at times very dull," she told him; "merely she wanted some assistance in effecting one or two dairy reforms. Her eldest brother's daughter—Hannah Milton—aged 19, was, she understood, a decidedly practical, energetic girl. She had not seen her since she was a baby, but she should like to invite her on a long visit, and make her acquaintance. Had Arthur any objection?"

"No; none whatever. Of course she liked him; he was perfectly free to do as she liked."

But would he be civil and kind to this unknown comrade when she came?"

"If she pleased him, certainly; but doubtless, she would in my way interfere with his pursuits."

Not very encouraging if Lady Best had any serious intentions in reference to Miss Hannah Milton, who—we will observe in parenthesis—she believed, would sooner or later come into the possession of at least a hundred thousand pounds.

Not a word of this did she, however, utter to Arthur; but, without further discussion, wrote an affectionate letter to her niece, asking her to come and stay at the cottage as long as she could endure the fragility and smallness of their impecunious life.

Miss Hannah Milton answered by return of post that she would be delighted to avail herself of her aunt's invitation, more especially as her father was going abroad on business, and she should be her own mistress for the next two months. She might be expected to arrive, bag and baggage, at the cottage on the 5th of July. It was, then the end of June.

To this announcement followed a postscript that she hoped her dear aunt did not object to living animals, as of course she could not leave hers all alone at Milton Hall during her own and her father's absence.

Lady Best was delighted at the success of her letter, and wrote again to say that both she and Arthur were particularly fond of pets.

Arthur had read Miss Milton's letter, and merely said that he hoped the dogs, if they were dogs, were thoroughbreds; he hated everything that was not perfect.

So, till the 5th of July, the Cottage, whenever Arthur went out—for it could

not be expected that he should endure fuss and clatter—was convulsed with preparations for the arrival of the heiress-niece and her retinue. A bedroom was turned into a boudoir for her private use, and two bedrooms adjoining were set aside for herself and her maid.

The Cottage was one of those elastic establishments, with countless small rooms, capable of taking in a far larger number of people than its exterior would lead you to imagine.

Hannah Milton was in the north; it would be quite evening before she would arrive, and Lady Best passed all the day in a state of feverish excitement, wandering from room to room. She seemed to feel that there was a destiny at stake; while Arthur—the individual who was in all probability the most concerned—was perfectly cool and collected, and passed the hours in his habitual placid enjoyment of a book.

The musical shade of twilight was already creeping up the valley when wheels were heard approaching the cottage, and Lady Best went out into the porch to receive her guest. Fain would she have persuaded Arthur to accompany her, but he preferred an arm-chair by the window.

At last the carriage is at the door, and Hannah Milton, having sprung out, is clamorously kissing her aunt.

There is nothing aesthetic or dreamy about her. She has a broad, plain, honest, open face, with fine eyes, and a large mouth full of strong-looking white teeth—not the slightest pretension to beauty, but you can see at a glance that Hannah Milton is a thoroughly good, kind, sincere woman. Her voice is very loud, but it has the ring of a true heart. It frightens Lady Best, however, as she thinks, "What will Arthur say? Will he run away from Hannah, or allow himself to be subduced by her?"

The carriage besides Hannah—half concealed by bird-cages, a Persian cat, and three small dogs of different breeds—is a girl; the maid, of course. The dogs and the cat spring out after Hannah, and the footman takes the bird-cages. Just as the unnoticed occupant of the carriage is stepping out, Hannah turns round.

"Oh, I forgot; let me introduce my dearest friend, Agatha Burghley. Of course you expected her; she never leaves me, you know."

Lady Best held out her hand in a welcome to which her heart did not respond; nor did she speak, except to say:

"And your maid, Hannah?"

Miss Milton burst out laughing. "That is a luxury in which we don't indulge—do we, Aggy? We arrange our toilette ourselves, and very effective they are sometimes—eh?"

Lady Best looked again at this companion of whom she had never heard before. No, decidedly not; if she had known of her existence she would never have asked Hannah to the cottage. For Agatha was beautiful to that refined, spiritualized beauty about which poets rave.

For an indefinite period she had invited Hannah, and this companion, this Agatha, was also to be their daily associate for weeks?

The meeting with Arthur, however, could not be deferred, and Lady Best led the way into the drawing-room.

He was as cordial as it was in his nature to be in his reception of his cousin, but when the same formula of introduction with which Lady Best had been greeted was gone through, and Agatha, dragged forward by her energetic friend, stood before him, with the pale gleam of the rising moonlight on her face, he started back as though he had seen a specter, more in fear than admiration, as it seemed to his anxious watching mother.

There was no time, however, for speculation as to what feelings Agatha had awakened in Arthur's breast, the necessities were asserting themselves, and Hannah, in her blunt way, declared herself to be famishing.

"A rapid toilet and dinner. Come on, Agatha, we shall not keep Lady Best waiting long," and the two girls went quickly up into the rooms that had been prepared for them.

In less than a quarter of an hour they came back, looking as spic-and-span as if they had made no long journey. It was very obvious that the services of a maid were unnecessary.

The evening, however, was scarcely a merry one. Arthur was more than usually silent and meditative. Agatha very tired; she was not so robust as Hannah, who was the only lively one of the party, and chattered ceaselessly to Lady Best, who, for once in her life, was not a good listener. All her attention was riveted on "that young person," as she, already, in mind, designated the somewhat lackadaisical Agatha.

Hannah was very full of the projected dairy reforms. She loved everything that gave her practical tendencies full vent; but Lady Best was by no means as keen as she was.

"While they were reforming, what would Arthur and his beautiful Agatha be doing?" she asked herself. "Oh, if Hannah would only turn her full attention on the far more important work of reforming Arthur!"

Lady Best was, however, too much of a diplomatist to let her thoughts appear in words; no, she must act, maneuver, watch.

Of course the first thing next morning Hannah expressed a wish to go over the farm, and, accompanied by Agatha, she and Lady Best started on a tour of inspection. Arthur had seen the farm ad nauseam, he said, and it did not amuse him; he preferred remaining in the house till luncheon-time.

With the explanations and discussions which this farming pilgrimage entailed, Lady Best's spirits rose, and she became thoroughly absorbed in her subject, rejoicing that she had found so congenial a companion and able co-worker as Hannah. On a sudden, however, her spirits fell to zero—Agatha had disappeared. "Of course, she had gone to join Arthur; it was a preconcerted plan between them," and the mother as she thought of it became perfectly miserable.

No more talk about gallons of milk, London market, home consumption, etc. She was tired, she said, and if Hannah did not mind, they would return to the house. They reached the bottom of

the garden, which lay in front of the drawing-room windows, just as Agatha, accompanied by Arthur, strolled up the terrace toward the wood.

The night was past bearing; this then was to be the end of her loving care for Arthur; he was to marry Hannah's penniless companion. Nor did Hannah's remark, as she, too, perceived them, tend to calm the excited mother's fears. "Oh! they are going to have a little chat. I told Aggy the sooner it was over the better."

"A chat with my son? Has this—this Miss Burghley met Arthur before?"

Hannah laughed. "Did you not know? Oh, then I must not tell the secrets of the prison-house. But pray don't look so rueful, aunty mine. The secret is not of a very dreadful nature."

Lady Best was, however, by no means comforted by this intelligence. Arthur had been carrying on with this girl unknown to her, and hence the reason of his dejection and listlessness; of course the neighbors were right, love was the root of all evil. And to think of the little mixt forcing herself in here under Hannah's auspices! Oh! it was too bad—very much too bad; she had been treated shamefully!"

And, her heart too full to speak, without committing herself, which pride prevented when she remembered that this need had been conniving to deceive her, she went indoors, up into her own room, of which she locked the door, and then indulged in the luxury of a tempestuous burst of tears.

For more than an hour she remained there, sobbing and composing herself by turns, till at last she heard voices under the window. Carefully concealing herself, she peeped from behind the curtain.

There they were, all three talking and laughing, a "wake-up" look on Arthur's face which she had not seen there for months.

It was strange, very strange; and, as she stood and watched them, she could not make up her mind whether she had not made a mistake in asking these people to come. After all, if his love for Agatha saved Arthur from despondency and made a man of him, she ought to consider her object gained.

Any way, she made up her mind to be silent for the present and take notes; and, so deciding, she washed her face, smoothed her silvery hair, set her cap daintily on her head, and went down stairs, where the luncheon was decidedly far more cheery than the dinner had been on the previous evening.

And the days passed on—life at the Cottage seemed very bright to all but its mistress, who could not reconcile herself to the fact that she had been deceived—not even though it gladdened her heart to hear Arthur laughing merrily, as he sometimes did at his cousin's sallies, or to see him take an interest he never took before in the farm and its workings.

Agatha's pale, beautiful face would come between the mother and the change her presence seemed to have effected, and Lady Best felt that she could never love Agatha, even though Arthur's whole happiness was centered in her.

But if she had lost a son she had gained a daughter; for, appreciating Hannah's merits as she did to the fullest, she felt that she was each day learning to love her more and more. Many times was it on her lips to tell her how grieved she was at the direction Arthur's fancy seemed to have taken, but pride held her back.

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"Of course not, since she expects to stay here always; not with me, though. She will not live here with me," raged Lady Best to herself.

And in this mood Arthur found her one morning when he sought her in the little morning-room she called her den. He broke the ice without any preliminary skating over it.

"Mother, will it not be a pleasure to you if I bring you a daughter to welcome?"

"Oh, Arthur, if you only knew how I have dreaded this question!"

"Dreaded it, mother? I thought you would be delighted."

"How could you? A penniless, lackadaisical, intriguing—the rest of her sentence was a sob, interrupted, however, by an exclamation from Arthur.

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EXECUTIONS AT CANTON.

Criminals Beheaded or Dying Upon the Cross at the Rate of One a Day.

Crime does not go unpunished in one part of China. The professional guide of the city, indeed, shows the execution ground of Canton with an honest pride. It is not a pleasant place to look at on a wet morning, and to a criminal must have a very depressing appearance. Yet, with the exception of three or four wooden crosses leaning up against the wall, there was nothing to indicate that the scene had ever been one of wholesale butchery. Still here it was that, in 1855, nearly 50,000 so-called rebels were beheaded. A short lane, seventy-five feet long by about twenty-five feet wide, narrower at one end than at the other, was nearly filled with earthenware pots put out to dry. Very muddy and sloopy, there was no place marked off for executions, and I stepped down to a little hut at the end of a lane to make the acquaintance of the executioner, who, I learned, lived there, before I found out that the beheading was performed wherever there was a vacant space.

The functionary was not at home, and his wife was showing me the heavy two-handled, broad-bladed knife with which he operated, offering, in fact, to sell it for \$2, when a little crowd appeared in the lane, and a man bound at the arms was led to an open space among the pots. My idea that an execution was about to take place was now confirmed by the owner of the hut coming for his knife. The culprit was evidently also informed of the nature of the ceremony about to take place, for he looked very melancholy, though I afterward learned that some opium had been given him. As the executioner came up a couple of policemen pushed the victim down upon his knees in the mud, and bound his legs to his arms as he knelt, then pulling back the collar of his shirt forced his head forward, while the executioner, with much care, selected an earthen pot in which to catch the prisoner's skull.

These preliminaries having been settled, the headsman stood over the prisoner and with two cuts completely severed the neck—one, indeed, had put the criminal beyond all pain. The head, which had fallen into the pot, was covered up, the bleeding trunk was picked up by the relatives of the convict, the crowd separated, and after some financial transactions between the officer who superintended the execution and the executioner, the latter walked off to the hut, for all was over, the whole affair not having occupied ten minutes. I was told that just then executions took place at about the rate of one a day. Generally they took the form of beheadings, but occasionally people were submitted to the slow death upon the crosses against the wall, when, of course, the spectacle was more barbarous. A woman was executed the next day for killing her husband, and received eight wounds from the knife of the executioner before she was finally put out of her agony; but I could not find that hers was a frequent case, nor did I meet any one in China who had seen more cruelty practiced than that.

The "cutting into a thousand pieces" now generally resolves itself into some such mode of dispatch.

The Author of "Mr. Isaacs."

F. Marion Crawford, the celebrated author of "Mr. Isaacs," "Dr. Claudius," "A Roman Singer," "To Leeward," etc., lives in a twenty-four-foot room in Rome. It is furnished almost to meanness, and contains, besides the ordinary furniture, only a few books and two or three busts. He is a tall, dark-haired, blue-eyed young man, with a hearty English voice, powerful shoulders, and muscular limbs. He is only 26 years old, and was born at the Baths of Lucca. He received a cosmopolitan education, studying in turns at Cambridge, Carlisle, Bombay, and Rome. He, however, remained a true American, loving Newport and believing with unflinching faith in Boston. He has none of the affectations so common to writers, and, beyond his few books and the writing-pad and inkstand, his room shows little to indicate the literary character of its occupant. He is an excellent scholar in philosophy and the languages, especially Sanskrit and the other tongues of the East. Indeed, in this his chief delight and aspiration, and the intrusion of fiction into his work is a droll one. He is remarkably well informed upon almost all subjects, and is a musician of no small talent. He is the son of Thomas Crawford, the sculptor of the Washington monument, who died young, after having married Miss Louisa Cutler Ward, the sister of Sam Ward. He learned English at Dr. Coit's famous New Hampshire school. After studying at the places named above, he went to Bombay with his Roman teacher of Sanskrit. There he began to write for the press, and became editor of the "India Herald." Here he learned to speak Hindustani and write Urdu. He then returned to Rome, and afterward to America, visiting Julia Ward Howe. He went to Harvard and took a Sanskrit diploma. He wrote a paper on the silver question, which was read at the Bankers' Convention at Niagara, and also wrote a long list of reviews on scientific, political, or philosophical subjects. While dining with his uncle Sam in New York he told him the true story of Mr. Jacobs, a diamond merchant of India, and it so interested the bon vivant that he insisted that his nephew should write it. The young man locked himself in a room and wrote "Mr. Isaacs" in thirty-five days. His other novels have been completed