

## THE MAIL

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

## "THOU FOOL, THIS NIGHT!"

The farmer smiled to see his bursting barns, His fields yet ripening in the summer's heat, And cried with pride upswelling from his heart.

"Lo, what the toll of my two hands hath done!" A sweet voice whispered from the rustling wheat—

"To God, who giveth increase, praise is meet."

"There is not room within those little sheds To store from loss and theft my yellow grain."

So I will tell me greater that I may Rejoice and cheer my soul with this my gain."

Still pleads that angel whisper, low and sweet—

"Give to the poor who have no food to eat."

"Cease troubling me! Why should I be glad?"

For hard hath been my toil, and long the strife—

Now we sing high and fill my heart with joy,

And live right merrily the rest of life."

"Repent, for thou, this very night, shalt die."

## The Dead Secret.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

Under the roof of a widowed mother Miss Mowlem lived humbly at St. Swithin's-on-Sea. In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and forty-four the heart of Miss Mowlem's widowed mother was gladdened in the closing years of life by a small legacy. Turning over in her mind the various uses to which the money might be put, the discreet old lady finally decided on investing it in furniture, on fitting up the first floor and the second floor of her house in the best taste, and on hanging a card in the parlor window to inform the public that she had furnished apartments to let. By the summer the apartments were ready and the card was put up. It had hardly been exhibited a week before a dignified personage in black applied to look at the rooms, expressed himself as satisfied with their appearance, and engaged them for a month certain for a newly married lady and gentleman, who might be expected to take possession in a few days. The dignified personage in black was Captain Treverton's servant, and the lady and gentleman, who arrived in due time to take possession, were Mr. and Mrs. Frankland.

The maternal interest which Mrs. Mowlem felt in her youthful first lodgers was necessarily vivid in its nature; but it was apathy itself compared to the sentimental interest which her daughter took in observing the manners and customs of the lady and gentleman in their capacity of bride and bridegroom. From the moment when Mr. and Mrs. Frankland entered the house Miss Mowlem began to study them with all the ardor of an industrious scholar who attacks a new branch of knowledge. At every spare moment of the day this industrious and inquisitive young lady occupied herself in stealing up stairs to collect observations, and in running down stairs to communicate them to her mother. By the time the married couple had been in the house a week, Miss Mowlem had made such good use of her eyes, ears, and opportunities that she could have written a seven day's diary of the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Frankland with the truth and minuteness of Mr. Samuel Pepys himself.

But, learn as much as we may, the longer we live the more information there is to acquire. Seven days' patient accumulation of facts in connection with the honeymoon had not placed Miss Mowlem beyond the reach of farther discoveries. On the morning of the eighth day, after bringing down the breakfast tray, this observant spinster stole up stairs again, according to custom, to drink at the spring of knowledge through the key hole channel of the drawing room door. After an absence of five minutes she descended to the kitchen, breathless with excitement, to announce a fresh discovery in connection with Mr. and Mrs. Frankland to her venerable mother.

"Whatever do you think she's doing now?" cried Miss Mowlem, with widely opened eyes, and highly elevated hands.

"Nothing that's useful," answered Mrs. Mowlem, with sarcastic readiness.

"She's actually sitting on his knee!"

"Mother, did you ever sit on father's knee when you were married?"

"Certainly not, my dear. When me and your poor father married we were neither of us flighty young people, and we knew better."

"She's got her head on his shoulder," proceeded Miss Mowlem, more and more agitatedly, "and her arms round his neck—both her arms, mother, as tight as can be!"

"I won't believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. Mowlem, indignantly. "A lady like her with riches and accomplishments, and all that, deserves herself like a housemaid with a sweetheart! Don't tell me she won't believe it!"

It was true, though, for all that. There were plenty of chairs in Mrs. Mowlem's drawing room; there were three beautifully bound books on Mrs. Mowlem's Pembroke table (the *Antiquities of St. Swithin's*, *Smallridge's Sermons*, and *Klopstock's Messiah*, in English prose)—Mrs. Frankland might have sat on purple morocco leather stuffed with the best horse hair, might have informed and soothed her mind with archeological diversions, with orthodox native theology, and with devotional poetry of foreign origin—and yet, so frivolous is the nature of women, she was perverse enough to prefer doing nothing, and perching herself uncomfortably on her husband's knee.

She sat for some time in the undignified position which Miss Mowlem had described with such graphic correctness to her mother, then drew back a little, raised her head, and looked earnestly into the quiet, meditative face of the blind man.

"Lenny, you are very silent this morning," she said. "What are you thinking about? If you will tell me all your thoughts, I will tell you all mine."

"Would you really care to hear all my thoughts?" asked Leonard.

"Yes; all. I shall be jealous of any thoughts that you keep to yourself. Tell me what you were thinking of just now?"

"Not exactly the horrid English word! Spare my feelings by putting it in French, *se retrousser*, and skip over my nose as fast as possible."

"I must stop at the mouth, then, and make that it is as near perfection as possible. The lips are lovely in shape, fresh in color, and irresistible in expression. They smile in my portrait, and I am sure they are smiling at me now."

"How could they do otherwise when they are getting so much praise? My vanity whispers to me that I had better stop the catechism here. If I talk about

had told you what I was thinking about!"

"I can't help kissing you, Lenny, when you talk of the loss of your sight. Tell me, my poor love, do I help to make up for that loss? Are you happier than you used to be? and have I some share in making that happiness, though it is ever so little?"

She turned her head away as she spoke, but Leonard was too quick for her. His inquiring fingers touched her check. "Rosamond, you are crying," he said.

"I crying," she answered, with a sudden assumption of gayety. "No," she continued, after a moment's pause; "I will never deceive you, love, even in the veriest trifle. My eyes serve for both of us now, don't they? you depend on me for all that your touch fails to tell you, and I must never be unworthy of my trust—must I? I did cry, Lenny—but only a very little. I don't know how it was, but I never, in all my life, seemed to pity you and feel for you as I did just at that moment. Never mind, I've done now. Go on—do go on with what you were going to say."

"I was going to say, Rosamond, that I have observed one curious thing about myself since I lost my sight. I dream a great deal, but I never dream of myself as a blind man. I often visit in my dreams places that I saw, and people whom I knew when I had my sight, and though I feel as much myself, at those visionary times, as I am now when I am wide awake, I never by any chance feel blind. I wander about all sorts of old walks in my sleep, and never grope my way. I talk to all sorts of friends in my sleep, and see the expression in their faces which, wakening, I shall never see again. I have lost my sight more than a year now, and yet it was like the shock of a new discovery to me to wake up last night from my dream, and remember suddenly that I was blind."

"What dream was it, Lenny?"

"Only a dream of the place where I first met you when we were both children. I saw the glen, as it was years ago, with the great twisted roots of the trees, and the blackberry bushes twining about them in a still, shadowed light that came through thick leaves from the rainy sky. I saw the mud on the walk in the middle of the glen, with the marks of the cows' hoofs in some places and the sharp circles in others where some countrywoman had been lately trudging by on pattens. I saw the muddy water running down on either side of the path after the shower; and I saw you, Rosamond, a naughty girl, all covered with clay and wet—just as you were in the reality—soiling your bright blue pelisse and your pretty little chubby hands by making a dam to stop the running water, and laughing at the indignation of your nursemaid when she tried to pull you away and take you home. I saw all that, exactly as it really was in the by-gone time, but strangely enough I did not see myself as the boy I then was. You were a little girl, and the glen was in its old neglected state, and yet, though I was all in the past so far, I was in the present as regarded myself. Throughout the whole dream I was uneasily conscious of being a grown man—or being, in short, exactly what I am now, excepting always that I was not blind."

"What a memory you must have love, to be able to recall all those little circumstances, after the years that have passed since that wet day in the glen! How well you recollect what I was as a child! Do you remember in the same vivid way what I looked like a year ago, when you saw me—oh, Lenny, it almost breaks my heart to think of it!—when you saw me for the last time?"

"Do I remember, Rosamond! My look at your face has painted your portrait on my memory in colors that can never change. I have many pictures in my mind, but your picture is the clearest and the brightest of all."

"And it is the picture of me at my best—painted in my youth, dear, when my face always confessing how I loved you, though my lips said nothing. There is some consolation in that thought. When years have passed over us both, Lenny, and when time begins to set his mark on me, you will not say to yourself, 'My Rosamond is beginning to fade; she grows less and less like what she was when I married her.' I shall never grow old, love, for you! The bright young picture in your mind will still be my picture when my cheeks are wrinkled and my hair is gray."

"Still my picture—always the same, grow as old as I may."

"But are you sure it is clear in every part? Are there no doubtful lines, no unfinished corners any where? I have not altered yet, since you saw me—I am just what I was a year ago. Suppose I asked you what I am like now, could you tell me without making a mistake?"

"Try me."

"May I? You shall be put through a complete catechism! I don't tire you sitting on your knee, do I? Well in the first place, how tall am I when we both stand up side by side?"

"You are just up to my ear."

"Quite right to begin with. Now for the next question. What does my hair look like in your portrait?"

"It is dark brown—there is a great deal of it—and it grows rather too low on your fore-head for the taste of some people!"

"Never mind about 'some people,' does it grow to low for your taste?"

"Certainly not. I like it to grow low; I like all those little natural waves that it makes against your forehead; I like it taken back, as you wear it, in plain bands which leave your ears and your cheeks visible; and, above all things, I like that big glossy knot that it makes where it is all gathered up together at the back of your head."

"Oh, Lenny, how well you remember me so far! No go a little lower."

"A little lower is down to your eyebrows. They are very nicely-shaped eyebrows in my picture!"

"Yes, but they have a fault. Come! tell me what the fault is?"

"They are not quite so strongly marked as they might be."

"Right again! And my eyes?"

"Brown eyes, large eyes, wakelit eyes, that are always looking about them. Eyes that can be very soft at one time, and very bright at another. Eyes tender and clear, just as the present moment, but capable, on very slight provocation, of opening rather too widely and looking rather too brilliantly replete."

"Mind you don't make them look so now! What is there below the eyes?"

"A nose that is not quite big enough to be proper proportion with them. A nose that has a slight tendency to be upturned."

"Don't say the horrid English word! Spare my feelings by putting it in French, *se retrousser*, and skip over my nose as fast as possible."

"I must stop at the mouth, then, and make that it is as near perfection as possible. The lips are lovely in shape, fresh in color, and irresistible in expression. They smile in my portrait, and I am sure they are smiling at me now."

"How could they do otherwise when they are getting so much praise? My vanity whispers to me that I had better stop the catechism here. If I talk about

my complexion, I shall only hear that it is of the dusky sort; and that there is never red enough in it, except when I am walking, or riding, or confused, or angry. If I risk a question about my figure, I shall receive the dreadful answer, 'You are dangerously inclined to be fat!' If I say, 'How do I dress?' I shall be told, not soberly enough; you are as fond as a child of gay colors—No! I will venture no more questions, But, vanity apart, Lenny, I am so glad, so proud, so happy to find that you can keep the image of me so clearly in your mind. I shall do my best to look and dress like your last remembrance of me. My love of loves! I will do you credit—I will try if I can't make you envied for your wife. You deserve a hundred thousand kisses for saying your catechism so well—and there they are!"

While Mrs. Frankland was conferring the reward of merit on her husband, the sound of a faint, small, courteously-significant cough, made itself timidly audible in a corner of the room. Turning around instantly with the quickness that characterized all her actions, Mrs. Frankland, to her horror and indignation, confronted Miss Mowlem standing just inside the door with a letter in her hand, and a blush of sent mental agitation on her simpering face.

"You wretched! how dare you come in without knocking at the door?" cried Rosamond, starting to her feet with a stamp, and passing in an instant from the height of fondness to the height of suspicion.

Miss Mowlem shook guiltily before the bright angry eyes that looked through and through her, turned very pale, held out the letter apologetically, and said, in her meekest tones, that she was very sorry.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Rosamond, getting even more irritated by the apology than she had been by the intrusion, and showing it by another stamp; "who cares whether you are sorry or not? I don't want your sorrow—I won't have it. I never was so insulted in my life—never, you mean, prying, inquisitive creature?"

"Rosamond! Rosamond! pray don't forget yourself! interposed the quiet voice of Mr. Frankland.

"Le say, dear, I can't help it! That creature would drive a saint mad. She has been prying after us ever since we have been here—you have, you ill-bred, indecent women!" I suspected it before—I am certain of it now! Must we lock our doors to keep you out? we won't lock our doors! Fetch the bill! We give you warning. Mr. Frankland gives you warning—don't you, Lenny? I'll pack up your things, dear; she shan't touch one of them. Go down stairs and make out your bill, and give your mother warning. Mr. Frankland says he won't have his rooms burst into and his doors listened at by inquisitive women—and I say so too. Put that letter down on the table—unless you want to open it and read it—put it down, you audacious women, and fetch the bill, and tell your mother we are going directly!"

At this dreadful threat, Miss Mowlem, who was soft and timid, as well as curious, by nature, wrung her hands in despair, and overflowed monthly in a shower of tears.

"Oh! good gracious Heavens above!" cried Miss Mowlem, addressing herself distractingly to the ceiling, "what will mother say! whatever will become of me now! Oh, mam, I thought I knocked—I did, indeed! Oh, mam! I humbly beg pardon, and I'll never intrude again. Oh, mam! mother's a widow, and this is the first time we have let the lodgings, and the furniture swallowed up all our money, and, oh, mam! mam! how I shall catch it if you go!" Here words failed Miss Mowlem, and hysterical sobs pathetically supplied their place.

"Rosamond!" said Mr. Frankland. There was an accent of sorrow in his voice this time, as well as an accent of remonstrance. Rosamond's quick ear caught the alteration in his tone. As she looked round at him, her color changed, her head drooped a little, and her whole expression altered on the instant. She spoke gently to her husband's side with softened, saddened eyes, and put her lips caressingly close to his ear.

"Lenny," she whispered, "have I made you angry with me?"

"I can't be angry with you, Rosamond," was the quiet answer. "I only wish, love, that you could have controlled yourself a little sooner."

"I am so sorry—so very, very sorry!" cried Miss Mowlem, addressing herself distractingly to the ceiling, "what will become of me now! I feel it all through me, Lenny—only don't look so serious. I'll be a Tary, dear, if you will give me a kiss, and let me sit on your knee a little longer!"

Mr. Frankland's gravity was not proof against his wife's change of political principles, and the conditions which she annexed to it. His face cleared up, and he laughed almost as gayly as Rosamond herself.

"By-the-by," said he, after an interval of silence had given him time to collect his thoughts, "did I not hear you tell Miss Mowlem to put a letter down on the table? Is it a letter for you, or for me?"

"Ah! I forgot all about the letter," said Rosamond, running to the table, "It is for you, Lenny—and, goodness me! here's the Porthgenna postmark on it."

"It must be from the builder whom I sent down to the old house about the repairs. Lend me your eyes, love, and let us hear what he says."

Rosamond opened the letter, drew a stool to her husband's feet, and, sitting down with her arms on his knees, read as follows:

TO LEONARD FRANKLAND, ESQ.—Agreeable to the instructions with which you favored me, I have proceeded to survey the Porthgenna Tower with a view to assessing what repairs the house in general, and the north side of it in particular, may stand in need of.

As regards the outside, a little cleaning and new-pointing is all that the building wants. The stonework, which seems meant to last forever, such strong, solid work I never saw before.

Inside the house, I can not report so favorably. The rooms in the west front, having been inhabited during the time of Captain Treverton's residence, and having been let to others since, by the person left in charge of the house, are in tolerable repair. I should say two hundred pounds would cover the expense of all repairs in my line, which this sum will do. The rooms in the east front, which has given a little trouble, are in a tolerable condition, though not so good as the west. The rooms in the north side of the house are in tolerable repair. I should say two hundred pounds would suffice to set this all right.

The rooms on the north front, the state of dilapidation, from top to bottom, is bad as can be. From all that I could ascertain, nobody ever went near these rooms in Captain Treverton's time, or has ever entered them since. The people who have been in charge of the house, are in tolerable repair. I should say two hundred pounds would suffice to set this all right.

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