

Current Literature.

THE LAND OF THE AFTERNOON.

An old man sits in his garden chair, Watching the sunlit western sky; What sees he in the blue depth there, Where only the Isles of Memory lie? There are princely towers and castles high, There are gardens fairer than human ken, There are happy children thronging by, Radiant women and stately men, Singing with voices of sweet attire The songs of the Land of the Afternoon. The old man watches a form of cloud That floats where the azure islands are, And he sees a homestead gray and loved And sees a hand that beckons him afar. O, cheek of roses and hair of gold! O, eyes of heaven's divinest blue! Long have ye lain in the graveyard mold— But love is infinite, love is true: He will find her—yes—it must be soon, They will meet in the Land of the Afternoon. The sky has changed, and a wreck of cloud Is drifting athwart its troubled face, The golden mist is a trailing shroud; It is cold and bleak in the garden place. The old man smiles and droops his head, The thin hair blows from his wrinkled brow, The sunset radiance has appeared O'er every wasted feature now; One sigh exhales like a breath in June— He has found the Land of the Afternoon.

"Old Mr. Binney."

All their friends had said, when Mrs. Binney died, "now what a good thing it would be if old Mr. Binney would but marry Miss Bright." Mr. Binney was an elderly gentleman, retired from the profession of the law on a comfortable income derived from his own exertions. In early days he had known the pinch of poverty, and determined that no one should share these struggles, he had put off marrying until he could keep a house in comfort. But, as often happens when the choice is delayed, the lady whom he selected, although in many respects a truly worthy woman, was at heart and in habit a nip-cheese. Forced by necessity while single to make a good appearance on very small means, Mrs. Binney when married could not forget her habits of economy, and she practiced them so persistently, that, instead of the social circle of friends and neighbors whose centre Mr. Binney had promised himself his house should be, the old people were thrown very much on their own resources, and, as time went on and ailments increased, the home was the reverse of cheerful. "What can they be saving for?" every one said, and no one protested half as indignantly against the little acts of meanness reported, as the two most certain to benefit from them, namely, Mr. Binney's nephew Joe and his pretty young wife Sally. "Whenever I can get the old gentleman here," said Sally, "I stuff him with everything I can think of, because there is no knowing when he may get anything good again; and the poor old dear does enjoy it so!" And Joe used to tell a story of coming back from his office unexpectedly, to find Sally proudly asserting that it was "almost all juice and peel, with hardly any spirit in it." However that might be, it put some spirit into Uncle Binney, for about nine o'clock that same night the maid arrived to ask if master was there, as he had not been back to dinner, and mistress was in "a terrible way about him." Full of alarm, Joe set off to inquire how he could assist in the search, but the house reached, it was found that the culprit had returned. "I—I took it into my head that I'd dine at my club," he said. "That's all, my dear—why, what a fuss have made about nothing." "That was your orange brandy," said Joe, when he got back to Sally. "You'd better be careful, Sally, or I shall have you hauled up for demoralizing your respected uncle." "I don't care," said Sally, recklessly, "I shall give him more when he comes again; no, is a different man after he has been here half an hour. Do you know, Joe, when he likes he can be most agreeable. He told us stories to-day and made jokes, and was as nice as possible; now wasn't he Miss Bright?" Miss Bright, the lady appealed to, was one of those cheerful, kindly beings who because they are the favorites of every one they meet, are looked rather askant on by Dame Fortune. Miss Bright had not been without her troubles, and very hard ones they had been, too, but she bore them with a brave heart and carried a smiling face, and had a thankful spirit within her, striving always to remember her blessings and how much they outnumbered any evils she was called upon to bear. Indeed, to listen to Miss Bright's showing you would have counted her as one of the luckiest persons ever born. She had the kindest of friends, the most comfortable of situations, and the girls she had taught were endowed with an amiability of disposition which made it a positive pleasure to be with them. The only accusation she could bring against them was, that they were all in such a terrible hurry to grow up and get married, and then Miss Bright's occupation was gone, and she had to step out

into the world and find a fresh field for her labors. As years rolled on, each one adding to the scorn of Miss Bright's age, these hunting grounds of instruction became more and more narrowed. Children of eight began now where girls of eighteen used to leave off, and history and geography, to say nothing of parts of speech and grammar, were all so altered that poor little Miss Bright had to acknowledge that at times she really did feel quite confused. "Very soon I shan't be left with anything to teach," she would say pathetically, and then Joe or some other good fellow who heard her would declare she should set up a school for wives, for there never were such wives as the girls whom Miss Bright had brought up. She had taught Sally and her sister, and though since then she had other situations, on holiday time or whenever she was seeking employment she always returned to the house of Dr. Brendon, their father, who regretted that he and his wife could not afford to keep her altogether. When Mr. Binney dropped in, as he frequently did, to inquire after his old friends the Brendons he from time to time found Miss Bright there, and happening on the occasion of one of her visits to bring the news that Mrs. Binney was ill, with no one whose business it seemed to be to look after her, nothing was more natural than that Miss Bright should volunteer, and a great comfort they found her. So sprightly yet unobtrusive was the cheery little woman that Mrs. Binney herself was influenced in her favor, until, with an eye to their mutual comfort, Mr. Binney proposed Miss Bright staying with them altogether. "Why not?" he said. "We could well afford to pay her a salary." But this word salary, acting like magic on Mrs. Binney, seemed to bring her to her senses immediately. She would be very glad to have Miss Bright as a visitor as long as she liked to stay, but as to living with them altogether, "No!" she would not give her consent to that; she had always objected to having in her house a third party. So, with the quick perceptions of a delicate nature, Miss Bright, seeing how matters stood, soon took her departure, this time to try daily teaching, and her report was that the experiment was successful. For a few years all ran smoothly, and then—though this time she had begun with quite young children—the tiresome little monkeys would grow so, that the boys were ready for public schools and the girls for more advanced education, and alas! there did not seem anybody else to replace them. It was then that Miss Bright's friends pulled very long face indeed—what would she do? they asked her. "Oh, something is sure to turn up," she would say hopefully. "Whenever I have come to my last ebb an opening has been made for me, so I am not going to despair now." And she said this all the more emphatically, because in spite of her confidence she could not help feeling that her heart had never seemed to sink quite so low before, and a voice which she could not keep still kept repeating: "What will you do when you grow older?"—teaching will get harder than ever! That was true enough, but what else was there for her to do? When Mrs. Binney died, which happened quite suddenly about a year before, there had been some talk as to Miss Bright going to Mr. Binney as housekeeper, but this proposition had been made without the knowledge or consent of the principal person concerned, who, as the hint was given, negated it by seemingly taking no notice; except that he set about making his arrangements without consulting anybody. Mr. Binney thoroughly appreciated Miss Bright, but he had lost his taste for matrimony; he remembered that he had spent forty excellent years without a wife, and notwithstanding that he was now a widower he could not conscientiously say that he felt his state to be so very unhappy. Susan the cook, respectable and staid, would, he felt sure, manage his household properly, and if it proved that she should give way to extravagance, as people seemed to say, Mr. Binney fancied he could better put up with that evil than with too much of the economy from which he had suffered already. So all the hopes that on the death of Mrs. Binney Joe and Sally and the Brendons had cherished for Miss Bright were ruthlessly dashed to the ground. Evidently Aunt B. was not to have a successor. "If we could but have got her there as housekeeper," said two of these arch-conspirators, "the rest would have been easy." But though they returned to the attack several times, no good came of it. Mr. Binney shared in their regret at the loss of Miss Bright's pupils, wondered, as they did, what would become of her, and, his visitors gone, to make his sympathy apparent he sat down and wrote a kind little note, with a check for £10 folded within it. "He's an old stupid," said Sally, who sat with a letter from Miss Bright in her hand, in which she communicated to her friends Mr. Binney's generosity, "and now she is going away altogether, ever so far!"—for Miss Bright had another piece of news to tell. An old pupil of early days had been recently left a widow; her health was as delicate as her heart was kind, and when she made the proposition that Miss Bright should come and spend the remainder of her days with her, it was not entirely of her own comfort she had been thinking. Miss Bright had readily accepted her offer, and she had written to tell Sally that the next week she should come up and see them. She could only stay a few hours with them when she came. The farewell visit was to be paid later. "But I think,"

she said as she was going, "I will call on my home and say goodbye to Mr. Binney, in case I might not have another opportunity." "Do," said Sally, and away she went. Mr. Binney was at home. He had not been quite well lately; nothing more than a cold, but it had kept him a prisoner. To-day he might have gone out, but he had not felt inclined to, and he gallantly said he was glad to be in, as he should have been sorry indeed to have missed seeing Miss Bright. "And so you are really going to leave us," he said, and almost regretfully too. "Well, you will be very much missed. I don't know what the Brendons will do." "They will not miss me more than I shall them," and the brave little woman made an effort that her voice should not sound shaky; "but you know, Mr. Binney, I am not growing younger, am I?" "No," he said, "that is true. I was saying the same to myself of myself only to-day." "Yes, only with men it does not seem to matter, but with women the thought always comes with a little shudder that when we get old, and want quiet and rest and a comfortable armchair by the fire, there is a doubt whether we shall be able to get them." Mr. Binney did not answer, and fearing she was saying too much about her own feelings—always with her a very secondary consideration—she altered the tone of her voices, which had been a little sad, and went on in her usual cheerful way:—"But then I ought to feel so thankful that this opening has been made for me. I told them that I knew something would come; it has always done so; I have always been so lucky." "It's your happy disposition makes you say so, my dear Miss Bright; a cheerful spirit shortens the longest day. I wish I could follow your example. I often feel condemned at my want of contentment—of gratitude, I ought to say." But that Miss Bright would not allow. She reminded Mr. Binney of the many kind actions he had done, and in her own quiet way thanked him for the thoughtful present he had sent to her. "No, no, no, now you must not speak of that," Mr. Binney hastily interrupted her; and to give a turn to the conversation he said she "must have some tea," and, ringing to order it, he hoped she could stay. Well, yes, she thought she could spare time for that—indeed, to be plain, she was not in such a very great hurry. The fact had been that Joe had an unexpected holiday, and she saw that, only for her being there, he had come home to go out somewhere with Sally. "So I hope the little fib I told will be forgiven me, for when I said that I was wanted at home, although it was quite true perhaps, I need not but for that have left quite so early. But it was so nice of Joe to come home. I do love to see husbands and wives companions to each other!" "Ah, indeed, yes; that is the object of matrimony, too often, I fear, lost sight of in our day by the young and the old, too." But Miss Bright did not agree. "No," she knew so many united couples. There were the Brendons now—"but at this moment the tea was brought in and Miss Bright asked should she pour it out. Her offer was accepted. "Only," said Mr. Binney, "you must take off your cloak or you won't feel the good of it when you go, and your bonnet too; wouldn't you be more comfortable without that?" Miss Bright said "No," she would not take her bonnet off. "Haven't a cap with you, I suppose?" said the old gentleman slyly. "Yes, indeed I have—a present from Sally—and a very becoming one, too." "Put it on, then, and let me pass my opinion." Miss Bright hastened to obey, and when she came for his inspection the smile on her face and the soft pink in her cheek made her look ten years younger. "Well," she said, "now what do you think of it?" "I think if you take my advice you will never wear any other." "Really," and she laughed softly; "but it is for high days and holidays, you know." And she stooped to look in the chimney glass, saying that it certainly was a very pretty cap, and then she sat down to pour out the tea. "The best tea things!" she said admiringly; "I am so fond of pretty china." And then, searching in the sugar basin, she added, "I have not forgotten that you like two lumps of sugar, you see." Mr. Binney smiled complacently, a feeling of well being and comfort took possession of him, the daylight was gradually fading away, but the fire burned brightly, and every now and then a flame would leap up and show to him the cosy room and the pleasant face of his companion. Of a certainly it was very pleasant to have a congenial somebody to bear one company, one who could talk well, listen well and hold her tongue well, if necessary. Experience had assured him of that. Miss Bright possessed each of these good qualities. When she had stayed there when Mrs. Binney was first ill their evenings had passed very pleasantly, and, recalling the things they had done, he asked— "Do you often play chess now?" "No, never." "Cribbage, backgammon?" "I've no one to play with. That is one thing in my going away," and she swallowed down a sigh—"my evenings will be less lonely." "Ah, yes, I find the time very long after dinner. I don't like to go to bed before half-past ten, although I often feel inclined to."

there is no afternoon—it is all evening—which reminds me that it is getting time for me to go, for it takes me quite an hour to get to the station." "Not in a cab?" "No, but I am going to walk; it is quite fine and I shall wait at the corner for the omnibus passing." Miss Bright began to put on her bonnet. Mr. Binney walked to the window; for a minute he looked out, then he rang the bell. "I shall go as far as the Conway road with you." "Oh, Mr. Binney. No, pray don't think of such a thing; it might give you cold, and there isn't the slightest occasion—I am so accustomed to go about alone." But Mr. Binney remained firm; his hat and coat were brought to him, and away the two set off together. They chatted pleasantly as they walked along, mingling with their talk some measure of regret at the approaching parting. "I shall hope to come and see them all sometimes," Miss Bright said. "I know as long as the Brendons have a home they will take me in." "And remember that so long as I have a house there will be room for you in it." "That is very kind of you, Mr. Binney," she said softly. "Thank you, if I should never accept it. I am sure I do not know why people are all so good to me." Mr. Binney, apparently, was no better able to inform her, and they walked on silently until the Conway road was reached. "Now then," said Miss Bright, "here we say farewell," and she held out her hand, but Mr. Binney did not take it; he was engaged in hailing a cab he saw, then he drew out his purse and Miss Bright knew that he intended settling with the man for the fare. She shook her head at him reprovingly. "The omnibus," she said, "would have done very well for me." Mr. Binney then gave the directions to the driver and then he held out his hand, hesitated, opened the door and said, "I don't see why I should not go with you as far as the station," and before Miss Bright was sufficiently recovered to reply they were driving on, seated side by side together. At the railway station they had but a very short time of waiting; the train drew up, the passengers were getting in. Miss Bright stood near the carriage which she had chosen; nothing remained but to say goodbye and enter. "And you will let us hear how you get on?" she had not said she was coming up again. "Oh, I shall often write to the Brendons and Sally. You will hear of me through them." "And I hope so very much that you will be comfortable and happy." Miss Bright tried to smile, but her eyes filled rapidly, and to hide the tears she half turned away. "I wish that you were not obliged to go away; couldn't anything be managed for you?" She shook her head sadly. "No," she said; "I tried everything I could, and here a sob would come, 'but nobody seemed to want me.'" "I—I want you." Mr. Binney was stammering out his words excitedly. "Miss Bright, can you—will you stay for me? It sounds little that I have to offer, but if a comfortable home and a kind friend could tempt you, you shall have both if you think you could consent to become Mrs. Binney." "Mrs. Binney!—I!"—everything seemed to swim around her—"but, Mr. Binney, such an idea never once occurred to me." "I am very sure of that, my dear," he said earnestly, "and it has taken some time to come to me, or I should have made the offer long ago; however, better late than never—that is if you will accept me." "Oh, but I think it is so good of you—and feel sure that I can make you happy. What will the Brendons and Sally say?" "Say that I am more lucky than I deserve to be for not asking you before. Now I understand why I wouldn't consent to you being my housekeeper; I was wanting you for my wife you know." Miss Bright held up her hands in dismay. "Oh my!" she cried. "There's the train off—gone, I declare!" "What of that if it is?—another will soon follow, and while we are waiting for it, we can arrange our plans and fix the day." And if any one wishes to know how it all ended, I can satisfy their curiosity by telling them the wedding has taken place, the bride and bridegroom are settled in their own house, and it is unanimously voted that a more happy, cheery couple never were seen than the present Mr. and Mrs. Binney.—Temple Bar.

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