

THE SIGN DIVINE.

"Who knocks?" the waiting angel said; "What sign is thine?" "In holy war my blood was shed, From battle's heat my soul has sped; That sign is mine."



"O spirit dear! I cannot see The sign divine." "That lifts the heavy gate for thee, That angel sees my agony For sign divine."

THE EASIEST WAY.

Your letter just came to me Willy, And you find that you don't forget; You've tried for these months (oh, you silly) And are sure that you love me yet? Ah! those days were sweet, I acknowledge In that dear old town by the sea, When the head of his class in college Took a fancy to me.

EVERY ONE LOVED HIM.

How Jack Easton's Sins Were Outweighed by His Virtues.

Any fine sunny day you might have seen old Sir Peter Easton driving in the park with his admirable elder son Joseph by his side. The old gentleman was a good deal shaken since that dreadful business about his son Jack. Society talked of it for quite three days, and my friend John Carleton was nearly worn of his legs running about from club to club repeating the story. Sir Peter's kind old face brightened in return for a friendly greeting, but there was a vast deal more sorrow than joy in his smile.

odious thing, a well-conducted boy. I don't like decorous boys, and I didn't like him. He never tore his clothes nor got into debt; he could not have climbed a tree to save his life; and he would as soon have broken into a church as robbed a hen-roost. No one ever was known to call him Joe, or chaff him, or play any tricks on him. All the deviltry of the family centered in Jack, and left nothing but all the domestic virtues for Joseph. Add to his virtues an extremely courteous manner, and to his manner a soft, winning voice, and to both a well-secured income of ten thousand pounds a year, and tell me if Hannah More ever conceived a more noble perfect hero.

"That very evening I was playing a rubber at old Lady Chelsea's. I always had her home considerably richer in scandal but decidedly poorer in pocket. Between the hands Lady C. would distribute crumbs of the very latest gossip, and any social chit-chat-biddy might pick them up. So says my Lady Chelsea: 'I hear Joseph Easton is secured at last.'"

The dealer paused in his deal as a chorus of inquiries rose. Little Cecil Digby, who was my partner, raised his hand and said: 'I'll lay ten to one I can spot the girl.' 'The creature is detestably slangy,' says Lady C., leaning back in her chair. 'I have a great mind to win your money, Mr. Digby. I think I might give the party a guess all round and yet keep my secret.'

"Why, Lady Chelsea," cries Cecil, "all the world knew the day before yesterday that the beautiful Yankee heiress, Miss Dinah B., Chicago, had landed the prize." Lady C. shakes her head and says: "All the world is wrong, as usual. Guess again." I then hazard the remark that as Mrs. Wilks Wheeler has been angling for him for her third girl for two years (and mark you, Mrs. W. Wheeler was the most successful prize-taker for the last three seasons), it was probable that this accomplished lady had at last brought matters to a crisis. Then came more shakes of my lady's head, and further random guesses on the part of the guests; then an interval of silence as Lady Chelsea's most oracular voice announced the name of "Lady Olivia Plantagenet." The rubber was suspended for several minutes while we expressed our surprise.

And now I must tell you something about Lady Olivia, and how it all came about. For three seasons every well-thinking mother in the gravias with any thing in the shape of a marriageable daughter had spread her nets abroad for Joseph Easton. When his father died he would be Sir Joseph, and in the meanwhile he was practically the senior partner in the famous old bank of Easton, Curtis & Langham. Philanthropic mothers with tenderness toward Exeter Hall had laid desperate and insidious siege to his heart. It is on record that pretty and skittish Miss Routflower, old Sir Christopher's only daughter, actually became a deafness and renounced the gayeties of a whole London season, all in hopes of securing Joseph. She never indulged in a single frivolity that season, except one fancy bazaar to which Joseph was inveigled. He attended the bazaar, brought many of her knickknacks, but alas! did not purchase the fair salwo-man. I could count up a dozen cases in which he was nearly secured, and then, at the last moment, he managed to escape the landing net; always, I must own, in a perfectly decorous manner. And now to think that Lady Olivia Plantagenet had secured him, rather had come scented to secure him; for you must know that the Lady Olivia was, as it were, a sort of ganglion, or pathos, joining together, of the bluest of all blue blood. She was the only daughter of the Duke of Dartford, and, in all respects, his daughter ought to be tolerably blue-blooded, especially when I tell you that her mother was Hon. Emily Buchanan Denzil, (the Worcester Denzils, if you please; not the left-hand-of-Warwickshire branch.) In the face of such facts it is evident that millions of years of natural selection, carried out on Darwinian or any other principle, you like, could never have produced such a doubly-distilled azure as the blood that ran in the Lady Olivia's veins—I don't suppose it ran, it coursed in a stately way. Well, Lady Olivia was very beautiful and beautiful. She had very little money and less brains. I have even heard coarse plebeian folks whisper that she was a fool; but this was manfully untrue, as her conduct throughout this ticklish matter abundantly proves. Still, for all that, I must own I never heard Lady Olivia make any remarks except extremely stupid and decorous ones. Talking to her was like conversing with something between a statue and a sheep. The old Duke of Dartford was dreadfully poor for a Duke. Their place down in Summer-shire was half shut up. He sold his game, (they do say he turned an honest penny by his grapes and pines) and it became absolutely necessary that Lady Olivia should marry money.

"He is an extremely painful subject; need we discuss it?" "I think I must claim your co-operation," he answers, "in preventing his return. He is going from bad to worse."

"That is immaterial," says Lady Olivia, "so long as he does not return home." "His letter to-day," says Joseph, "states that he has abandoned all his capital and that he is absolutely starving, and has taken a berth as a farm laborer. He seems to have associated with the lowest."

"Kindly spare me any details. It is extremely distressing. He is your brother, unfortunately, but he has long since been a social outcast, and, as you are aware, it is a most painful feature in our future relationship. I should prefer dropping the subject."

From which you can see that the Lady Olivia was possessed, among her other high qualities, if not exactly of what Carlyle calls a soft invincibility, still an invincibility of a very definite character.

But although this extremely admirable couple found Jack such a distressing subject and declined to discuss him (as, in fact, society in general did) to me he was a subject of undying interest, and I am never so happy as when I am talking of him, either on the sly with his poor old father, (when Joseph is safely out of the way,) or quite openly and joyfully with his aunt, old Lady Betty Pimlico, of whom more anon. Wasn't Jack my godson? wasn't I responsible for half my dear lady's sins? He was my dear old dad's lad all through. Was there ever such a scapegrace? Surely he was possessed by all the devils of mischief, frolic, riot, and uproar. His school days were one long rebellion; he infected the whole school; he was the ring-leader in all mischief. But how the boys adored him and followed him! He could wheedle round the sternest of masters. At last he got beyond all bounds. In a moment of infernal recklessness he arranged an internal machine composed of a battery of bottles of Bass, which by an ingenious device was timed to open fire (and actually did) upon the head master in the dead of night as he lay peacefully sleeping in bed. After that there was nothing to do but expel him. I went to try to make peace, but old Doctor Turner was inflexible. The lad was demoralizing the whole school, and he must go. But for all that, the doctor's eyes were full of tears, as he rested his hands upon my poor lady's shoulders and spoke his little farewell sermon and advice. So he went home to his father's house—he was then fifteen. He had demoralized the school and he demoralized us. He kissed all the servant girls, and they all doted on him; he had four pet dogs and three horses; he was the boon companion of all the men servants. I know that old Tompkins, the butler, lent him fifty pounds out of his little savings, and the very stable boys would have laid down their lives for Master Jack. Joseph cared but for Oxford just about then, if possible more decorous than he went. It had been arranged for some years past that Joseph should enter the bank and Jack the army; so in a few years Jack became Captain Jack.

It was one of the loveliest sights in all London to meet old Sir Peter ambling along Piccadilly, arm in arm with handsome Jack. How the old man doted on him! And amid all his vices, and there were many, Jack had this one tremendous virtue—he always adored his father. And now old lady Pimlico drifts into this family history, and she plays an important part in it.

She was Sir Peter's only sister, a widow, childless, supposed to be wealthy, and known to be mean. She lived in a little house in Park lane; a narrow, lean little house, wedged in between two big ones. She had the warmest heart and the sharpest tongue of any old lady I ever came across. Ask her maid Jenkins about the tongue and leave Jack to yawn for the heart. I have several photographs of this venerable old lady in my album. Whenever I entertain my friends and conversation flags my albums are produced and I doom my guests to the social penalty of gazing at and saying something appropriate about hosts of people they have never known. Everybody says, directly they see Lady Betty's photograph, "What an extraordinary old lady!" She wore an audacious wig, a capacious brooch, an old brown silk dress, and on state occasions a quantity of extremely dirty old lace. Out of doors she invariably wore an old fur tippet; she was a valiant old soul, free of speech, given much to questionable stories, bating shams, and fearing no man, and loving Jack more than any other creature on earth. She fought his battles, she paid his debts, she outraged all the proprieties for his sake; and when that last awful business cropped up and he had to leave suddenly for Manitoba, the old lady broke down and took to her bed for some weeks. When she got about again she refreshed herself by trotting over to Harley street and having a battle royal with Joseph. How he hated her! She alone had the power to ruffle his decorum and to make his pale face flash and his eyes gleam.

It was November, and all the folks had flocked back from Scotch moors and sea beaches, and the season promised to be a brilliant one. I went round one afternoon to call on Sir Peter. Joseph and his father were sitting together in the dismal dining room in Harley street. Sir Peter was very shaky and silent, and Joseph was more virtuous and respectable than ever. He told me he was going to preside at some philanthropic meeting that evening at Exeter Hall. Conversation flagged; we all three seemed sleepy and stupid. I did not dare to ask about Jack. Joseph kept rambling on in his smooth decorous monotone about the pauper lunatics and discharged prisoners, temperance washerwomen, and all the rest of it, when suddenly the servant announced Lady Pimlico. Joseph's face changed and hardened, and old Sir Peter brightened up. My Lady entered, evidently in high spirits, more untidy than ever. She greeted her brother with affection, me with cordiality and Joseph with pugnacity.

"I've got news," cries the old lady, seating herself with her feet on the fender and her hand on her knees. "I saw Sir Peter's hands move feebly and a gleam of light pass over his face."

"Good news, I hope," says Joseph. "What I call good news," snaps back the old woman, "and what you may call bad news. My boy is coming home."

In an instant I could see the sorrow and grief of all those years pass from the old man's face as he turns to his sister and cries: "What! when? Oh, Elizabeth! is it true?"

And then, before she can answer, Joseph rises, pale and darkling, and cries in a voice no longer decorous: "Lady Pimlico, this is your doing; you have striven for years to complete the ruin of your own house. But learn one thing, your nephew John does not return here."

My Lady flings off her tippet and stands to her guns. "He shall return to my house and to his father's house. Who are you to stand between my lad and forgiveness. Listen, Peter; your son Jack was tempt'd and he fell; he was a rascal and a blockhead, I don't deny it; but he has suffered and he repents. Listen to what he says in a letter I had only to-day. He has fallen so low that he works as a farm laborer; he hasn't a decent coat to his back nor a decent meal to eat; he is broken down, body and soul. But, Peter, don't forget he is your son—your own flesh and blood."

Old Sir Peter turns very white, rises from his chair, and leans trembling toward Joseph. "Oh, Joseph, hear what she says. Let him come back again." "Let him come back!" bursts in this whirlwind of a woman. "Aye, but he shall come back. Are you master here, Peter, or is Joseph?" As my Lady axes hot Joseph studdles down into a deadly coolness.

"I will answer that question for my ather," he says, folding his hands on the table and looking straight at the old lady. "My brother has ruined his own nature, but he shall not ruin mine—he shall not return here. He strove for years to pull down the honor of my ather's name, and I have striven for years to build it up. He suffers want, misery and shame. He has sown the wind, but he is reaping the whirlwind." All the time he speaks my Lady is plucking many tufts of fur from her bosom. Now she springs to her feet, shrill and red-faced. "Don't quote Scripture to me. You respected! you honored! you, with your smooth tongue and your varnished face! As a boy you were a coward, as a man you're a sneak. My boy sinned, but he sinned openly. You air your virtues in the public streets, but you keep your French novels hidden behind your library shelves."

Now, of course, the allusions to improper book were not at all nice or decorous, and I never knew whether they were chance shots of my Lady's or based on reliable information, but I know that I saw Joseph grow pale and wince. He rose white with passion. "Madam," he says, "you are an insolent old woman, and if you were not my father's sister I should—"

"Go on," cries Lady Betty, the light of triumph glowing on her old face—"go on; abuse me as much as you like, but not you or a hundred such shall keep my lad from coming back."

So Joseph drives down to his bank in dudgeon, and no sooner has he gone than poor old Lady Betty breaks down and fairly sobs, and this absurd old couple just run into each other's arms, and cry and laugh, and talk incessantly, and prove themselves to be a couple of fools; but I think the clerks and bank officials, with Joseph in that frame of mind, must have had an extremely unpleasant afternoon of it.

Three months after this I was again calling at Harley street. Poor old Sir Peter used always to receive me in his study, but now, the butler told me, he sat all day in the dining-room, which commanded a lookout down the street, and there I found him, and, best of all, I found him alone. "Joseph is at the bank," said the old man with an unbecoming delight, "so let us have a quiet talk." So I drew to the fire, but I noticed a strange restlessness about Sir Peter. He would break off suddenly in the middle of a sentence and look down the street and listen. "So Jack is coming back?" I said. "And when?" "We don't know," he answered—"we don't know. He may come at any time. I haven't told Joseph. I'm afraid he'll be greatly upset, but Jack will stay for awhile at his aunt's, and things will tide over."

shall never forget what I saw in the hall! Jack and I helped Sir Peter in, feeble now, exhausted, and spent. He sits on the hall seat, but holding his knees and hides his thin wan face on his father's hands, weak as any hysterical woman. "Oh, take me back again, father! I know I've been a bad son; I know I've disgraced you all; but I've fallen so low and I have suffered so much, and I have repented! Oh, give me another chance!" As he speaks several of the servants run into the hall and gather round them. Then I saw in Sir Peter's face the most beautiful look I ever saw on any human features; I think it must have been the reflection of the Divine love of the Great Father of us all. So, rising, he starts before us, the poor lad still kneeling at his feet; then, stooping, he raises him tenderly, holding him in his loving arms—oh, so closely—and says, in a clear, strong voice: "See here, all of you; this is my son Jack, my very own son. He shall once more eat at my table, once more sleep beneath my roof."

By and by Jack and I are sitting alone in the dining-room, and I'm not ashamed to own, and I know Jack wouldn't be, that we both broke down and cried a little. I was a weak old man, and he a weak young one. Looking at him steadily, I could see how want and poverty and hard life had ground him down. The poor, wan face was pinched and white, and the blue eyes that used to be so gay and full of life had a hunted, maddened look. Jack sits in the deepening London twilight and tells me his weary history. Debt, dishonor, gambling and the ever downward career that we all know so well. He was asking after his old Aunt Betty, when suddenly there was a clatter at the front door, a tremendous bustle and scuffle in the hall, and in bursts that redoubtable lady, a whirlwind of tears, gasps, fear, joy and inarticulate hallelujahs. In two seconds her faithful old arms were round Jack's neck and the old lady sobbing on his breast; then she would hold him at arm's length, looking him all over, then with another sob of triumphant delight fling herself into his arms again. I really feared the old lady's mind would give way. After much laughing and crying she delivered herself in this fashion, one arm around Jack and the other dominating me. I might have been Aldgate pump for all she cared.

"Here's my boy come back—praise God for that, he has come back—and not a leg on of Joseph's nor a legion of devils shall drive him away again. Who cares for the past! To-day we begin a fresh chapter. Who cares for your moralities and your deonomies! Hang 'em all, I say. Kiss your old aunt, my lad."

I think sometimes dear Aunt Betty is too outspoken, but no one thinks of that now. Jack kissed her ugly old tear-stained face, kisses her as tenderly and gallantly as if she were his bride, and then by some strange freak the old lady falls upon me and kisses me quite outrageously, till Jack takes her hand in mine and says: "Aunt, I can't forget the past, or your patience and love, but I've come back to redeem it. Be patient and kind to me a little longer, as you would to a sick man whose fever is leaving him."

"Kind to you, Jack!" she cries, mantling all over with beautiful pride and joy. "Leave me alone for that. Why, my darling!—then words fail her, and the eager old arms are once more round him as if they would never unclasp again."

Then Sir Peter joins them, and I go away happy to my own home. This is what happened afterward, excellent old Tomkins being my informant. And I must tell you the very end of it all, which is as happy as a fairy story, and much more true. Our unprofligate son Joseph came back that evening from the bank in a state of serene decorum quite beautiful to behold; everything had prospered exceedingly with him that day. He had arranged the settlements with the Lady Olivia, and had kept matters more in his own hands than he had hoped to do. As he drove up Harley street, even when far off, he was astounded to see unusual signs of festivity at his father's sombre-looking house. Lights gleamed in the window, and the whole place was transformed. Joseph must have guessed the truth. He stood on the door-step in no happy mood. Tomkins opened the door, his honest face gleaming, and behind him stood Sir Peter.

"What's the meaning of all this, father? Have you gone mad?" Then Sir Peter spoke in strong, clear tones: "Joseph, your brother is come back; your brother and my son. Come in and join us. Help us give him a welcome."

Joseph's pale face flushed. "Is this the reward of all my years of duty? As you say, he is my brother, he is your son; but he is more than this; he is a thief, an outcast, a swindler. Ever since he was born he has been a curse and a disgrace to us."

Then Sir Peter flushed up in a beautiful short-lived anger of wrath. "Peace, Joseph; no more of this. He is my son; he was lost, and now he is found. I have flung the past behind my back; he is the very apple of my eye. I forbid you to cast one word in his teeth. If you can not live in peace with him, you must live elsewhere."

"Well, uncle, Stanley is an ugly name, though you mightn't think it, so I'm going to give her a new one and present you with a new niece. Kiss her and tell her you love her for my sake and her own, too." Before they go I ask Jack to keep a little corner of his heart for me to creep into for old love's sake, and Jack says as will.—Temple Bar.

PERSONAL AND LITERARY.

—Miss Annie Lippincott, of Philadelphia, daughter of "Grace Greenwood," has made a successful debut in opera in Trieste. Her stage name is Anita Armour.

—Plutarch says that Demosthenes made a gloomy fizzle of his first speech. This did not discourage him. He finally became the smoothest orator in that country.—N. Y. Post.

—The London Truth says it may interest those who discuss Russian affairs to know that the name of M. de Giers, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, is pronounced "Geerch."

—"Josh Billings" will spend the summer in the West. He will remain on the Pacific Coast next winter, and thereafter he has a two years' foreign tour in contemplation.—Chicago Tribune.

—The oldest book in the Congressional Library is said to be "The Olive Leaf," by one Hauser, of Georgia, a tune book concocted "for the glory of God and the good of mankind."—Washington Post.

—Rev. John Hall, the noted New York divine, is an Irishman by birth, who was sent to this country by the Ulster Presbyterians and furnished with a return passage ticket, which he has never yet used.—N. Y. Mail.

—Leopold von Ranke is the oldest living European historian who retains his mental powers unimpaired. He has passed his ninetieth year, and says he expects to be writing history when his age has covered a rounded century.

—The first article on "London Society," which appeared in Mrs. Adams' Nouvelle Revue, treats of the Queen and the Royal family of Great Britain. The portion relating to the Queen takes the view that her reign is paving the way for a Republic.

—Mr. Martin F. Tupper, the author of "Proverbial Philosophy," appeals to the American public for money. He says he never had any profit from the American edition of his works. He is as well off as his readers.—N. Y. Freeman's Journal.

—Dr. Folsom, member of the Boston Society for Medical Observation, thinks that, in cases of consumption, physicians are too much inclined to give unfavorable prognostications. He advises the keeping of patients quietly in one place rather than shifting them about in search of a more favorable climate.

—General (Chinese) Gordon was an inveterate smoker. He used a long pipe, and every morning at sunrise with pipe and telescope he mounted to the roof of his palace and carefully noted every condition of his surroundings. It is said that he frequently spent the entire night upon the ramparts with his pipe, cheering them up, and seeing in person that every minute of military regulation was performed.

—Captain Howard, whose bravery saved the day to the Dominions in their recent fight with the Riel insurgents, is a native of Connecticut. He served in the war of the rebellion and also five years in the regular army, where he had considerable experience in Indian warfare. He is a brave, cool-headed soldier, thoroughly familiar with army life, and he is also a very skillful machinist, possessing a complete knowledge of the mechanism of a Gatling gun.—Lancetford Post.

HUMOROUS.

—A maid is a young lady who is single and who will be won if she marries.—The Judge.

—"Papa, why do the little pigs get so much milk?" "Be cause we want them to make hogs of themselves."—The Lion.

—The Niagara Falls hackman contends that he belongs to the natural scenery and should not be removed.—Detroit Free Press.

—Ordinary astronomy teaches us the theory of spots on the sun, but Boston astronomy teaches the theory of spots on the daughter.—Merchants' Traveler.

—"You are not afraid of the dog, are you, bub?" "No, ma'am." "Well, then, why don't you come right in? He won't hurt you." "I'm too timid, ma'am—that's what ails me. I'm always bashful when there's dogs about."—Chicago Ledger.

—A Dutchman was relating his marvelous escape from drowning when thirteen of his companions were lost by the upsetting of a boat, and he alone was saved. "And how did you escape?" "I did not go in to peep."—Philadelphia Call.

—"James," said the teacher, "con h h b s t l at A

—"Say, Bob, you're out with Miss Parsons, ain't you?" "Yes, Joe." "What happened?" "She's experimenting too lavishly." "Experimenting? What?" "Trying to cure freckles by eating ice-cream." "Well, why ought you to care?" "O, I don't, provided it's at some other fellow's expense. It was costing me a dollar and a half a freckle."—Philadelphia Call.

—They were talking about the weight of different individuals in a certain family, and the daughter's young man, who was present, spoke up before he thought, and said: "I tell you that Jenny ain't so very light, either, although she looks so." And then he looked suddenly conscious and blushed, and Jenny became absorbed in studying a chromo on the wall.—Exchange.