

A LUMP OF CARBON.

Tell me, lump of Carbon, burning
Lurid in the glowing grate—
While thy flames rise twisting, turning,
Quench in this curious yearning,
Ages past elucidate.

Tell me of the time when, waving
High above the primal world,
Thou, a giant palm-tree, lifting
Thy proud head above the shifting
Of the storm-cloud's lightning furled,
While the tropic sea, hot laving,
Round thy roots its billows curled;

Tell me, did the Mammoth, straying
Near that mighty trunk of yours,
On the verdure stop and graze,
Which thy ample base displays,
Or, his weary limbs down laying,
Sleep away the tardy hours?

Peregrinate some monstrous Saurian, sliding
Waddled up the neighboring strand,
Or leapt into its native sea
With something of agility,
Though all ungrainy on the land;
While near your roots, in blood-stained fray,
Maybe two Ichthyo beasts, colliding,
Bit and fought their lives away.

Tell me, Ancient Palm-corps, was there
In that world of yours primeval,
Aught of man in perfect shape?
Was there good? and was there evil?
Was it man? or was it ape?

Tell me, lump of Carbon, burning
Lurid in the glowing grate,
Lies there in each human face
Something of the monkey's trace?
Tell me, have we lost a link?
Stir thy coaly brain and think;
While thy red flames rise and sink,
Ages past elucidate.

—Chambers' Journal.

THOSE DREADFUL JAPS.

It was a fearfully hot season, and let me tell you that heat is heat in the States. I was coming from Canada to sail the next day for home. I took the train at Niagara Falls, and had a long, sixteen-hour ride before me. The nasty white dust sifted through the window blinds and shades; the sun glared in fiercely, spite of the shades provided by the company; and the car was crowded, and every moment the atmosphere grew more and more oppressive, until breathing became absolutely painful. As things reached this crisis, a brilliant thought struck me, emanating from sheer desperation. Why not get off at Albany, and take the night boat down the river to New York? I should arrive in plenty of time for the sailing of the *Russia*, and escape the further misery of six hours in the train. Surely, on the beautiful Hudson a comparatively cool breeze could be found.

We were already nearing Albany; so, hastily thrusting my scattered belongings into my portmanteau, I stood ready and waiting as the train entered the large railway depot. Two hours later, behold me, tranquil and triumphant, after a very good dinner, pacing the deck of the finest river steamer in the world.

It was a beautiful night, the moon at its full, the stars all out in their lesser glory. As I roamed up and down, I passed the door of the ladies' saloon, and my attention was caught by a figure sitting silent and alone in the moonbeams. When I passed again, I caught a glimpse of a bended brown head, and two ungloved hands loosely clasped together—a pretty, quiet figure, with feminine grace in its attitude. She did not look up as I stood between her and the moonlight, but moved a little impatiently, as if only half-conscious of the obstruction. When I came by a third time, she had vanished.

Shortly after, as I was still wandering lazily to and fro, I heard the sound of the piano in the saloon. For a moment I felt annoyed; the night was too perfect in itself to be marred by any of the popular war-songs of the time, and what else could be expected from a performer on board a river steamer? My displeasure, however, soon gave way to astonishment and delight as I listened to the strains of the "Moonlight Sonata." My love for music amounted to a mania, and when this delicious melody, rendered with all the passion of its composer's mind, floated away over the moon-washed waters, I stopped in amazement. Instinctively, my thought, framed by desire, was that the player must be the girl who had sat half hidden in the shadows.

I stepped within the gilded apartment from whence the sweet sounds issued. The room was comparatively empty, for most of the passengers were on deck. As I had suspected, at the further end, seated at the grand piano, her back toward me, I saw my incognita. Her head was a little drooped, and the fine curves of her figure well defined against the crimson gorgeousness of walls and furniture. She was absorbed in the music. I approached quietly and stood by her side, looking down upon her. Her face thus seen was very charming, softly tinted and delicately cut; a drooping mouth, half melancholy, half determined, and braids of nut-brown hair rolled high upon a shapely head.

As she finished, I made some appreciative remark, to which she responded gravely, but with a certain dignified pleasantness that marked her as one used to the world.

With two true lovers of music, conversation soon springs into life; so in a few minutes we were in full swing over our favorites, she arguing, differing, and illustrating with sudden touches on the keys in a manner dangerously charming, while her eyes met mine fearlessly. Handsome eyes they were, gray, with black lashes, and finely pencilled brows.

In the midst of a lengthy argument over Chopin, in which she was displaying considerable fire and spirit, a shrill, piping voice cried out, "Mamma, mamma," followed by a long and voluble explosion of Hindostanee, or any one of the languages of the ten lost tribes, as far as intelligibility was concerned. My companion replied in the same incomprehensible form of speech; the result being the appearance, from one of the adjacent state-rooms, of two of the most astonishing figures I ever beheld. They were the most ultra-ugly children imaginable, sallow-faced, with dark, almond-shaped eyes, whose heavy lids unclosed with difficulty, black brows and lashes, and hair growing loose upon their foreheads, brushed back and braided into long tails upon their shoulders.

On one these heavy locks were ebon black, on the other of a common light brown, that added greater plainness to the yellow skin and thin, sharp features.

These two strange little folk ran toward my pretty incognita and laid hold of her with their skinny little paws, gabbling all the time in their unreasonable jargon. She answered them in soothing tones, and taking the little girl upon her lap, drew the boy to her side as she continued her consolatory remarks. Feeling decidedly an outsider in this domestic scene, I made a movement to leave them. She raised her eyes, over which a shadow had come and dimmed their charms, and said:

"You must forgive my little ones; they are Japanese, and understand but a few words of English."

I took this as my dismissal, and left her; but, as I looked back from the doorway, I saw her still bending over those fearful ills, caressing their horrid little faces with her soft white hand. I resumed my promenade.

"Good heavens!" I thought. "Her little ones! She an Englishwoman, and they—Japanese! Then—horrible, unbearable thought!—her husband—the father of the children—what was he but a Japanese also!"

Indeed, was there not a curious blending of the two nationalities in the little faces, the brown hair of the girl, the gray eyes of the boy—like her, yet rendered unlike by the unmistakable stamp of their race! But how could such an alliance have come about? Were such things ever done? Was there no law to prevent such marriages?

An hour later, as I approached the door of the saloon, I came face to face with the mysterious subject of my thoughts. She was coming out for a breath of the evening air, she said, before consigning herself to her comfortable quarters for the night. I fancied she met my glance less calmly as she broke into a rapid flow of words, fearing, perhaps, I should ask some leading question.

Leaning over the railing, glancing now at the gliding water, now at my companion's face, about whose finely cut features the moon's rays lingered tenderly, we grew more friendly. But all my efforts, put with my greatest finesse and delicacy, failed to draw from her any confidence regarding her name, her station, her past, present, or future.

She was dressed in mourning, I noticed, and she wore on the third-finger of her left hand a heavy gypsy ring with a single stone—a diamond of great beauty; otherwise her attire was plain in the extreme. As it grew later, she turned from gazing at the quiet river below us, and, fixing her fearless eyes on mine, held out her hand and said: "Good-bye, and thank you for a pleasant evening."

"Good-bye!" I echoed. "But I shall see you in the morning; I have promised myself the pleasure of waiting upon you in New York. Seeing you to a hotel, or—your home."

"You are most kind," she returned, quickly; "but I am quite provided for, and I shall require no assistance."

Then, bowing, she withdrew, and I was left lamenting.

I did not see her again, though I lingered about the next morning, walked through the saloon many times, touched the notes of the piano invitingly. All to no purpose; she would not appear. To be sure, the elder of the Japanese horrors, the girl, came out and played upon the floor with a Japanese doll so fearfully like its owner that I fairly shuddered. Overcoming my repugnance, I approached this small specimen and asked insinuatingly for "Mamma."

The child squinted her sharp black eyes at me, and began in her high, shrill voice a voluble harangue in her native tongue, gesticulating with her elfin hands as she concluded; but, though she grinned and chattered, and winked her eyes, so like those of the doll she held, I could make nothing of what she said. Finally, I left the brat with no more accurate knowledge of my mystery than I possessed when I first saw her sitting amid the moon's shadows.

My voyage home was a dull one. The ship had few on board, and among the few no sensible man to make a pleasant hand at cards, no pretty girl to keep one up in scientific flirting. Consequently my thoughts often dwelt tenderly upon La Mystère, as I called her in my heart, and her strange, weird, ugly children.

A season spent in London, however, threw her somewhat into the shades of memory, and when I did recall her, it was with but a momentary interest, coupled with a slight feeling of disgust for the small Japs. The deeper sentiment she had excited in me I fancied dead, and though I often caught myself comparing other gray eyes with hers, I was in no way hard hit, and did not waste a thought on the possibility of our meeting again. Life, however, is stranger than fiction; and so I found it.

I was again in the States, and again on my homeward journey; the *Russia* this time was full to overflowing, but as I had a jolly companion with me in the person of my old college chum, Arthur Harford, I felt above any chance acquaintance. We sailed late in the day, and after dinner Harford and I sat smoking, comfortably at our ease in our deck chairs. As the sun went down into the sea on one side and the moon rose from it on the other, I was reminded of that evening in the past, when, under just such a sky with just such a moon above, I had listened to Beethoven as never before had it been my good fortune to hear him rendered. I felt communicative, so I told the story to Harford, adding, as I finished:

"I would give a goodish bit to see La Mystère again. She was pretty and she could play—ah! how she could play Beethoven."

"Bah!" said Harford, sentimentally. "You have dined to your liking. You are always sentimentally inclined, Phil, after a good dinner; I have remarked it often. Go and talk to that slim girl over by the wheel-house; she may like you rhapsodies better than I do."

"You are a heathen, Arthur," I politely remarked.

Nevertheless, I did get up, and stole in the direction of the lone figure bending over the railing. She was enveloped in a loose wrap of some kind, pulled well up about her throat and ears, and, as she bent upon her crossed arms, a view of her countenance was rather difficult to obtain. With invention born of necessity, I threw myself forward and tossed my lighted cigar into the gliding waves. It gleamed for an instant in the shadows of the keel ere it went out, but my object was accomplished; the sudden flash as it passed before her eyes caused her to start from her meditative posture, and throw back her head. The dark drapery dropped from about her, and, as she turned full upon me, I beheld once more, under the moonlight, the finely cut face and honest, earnest eyes of La Mystère!

A sudden thrill at my heart told me the meet-

ing was anything but unpleasant to me. Was she equally pleased? A slight flush spread over her brow and lost itself in the waves of her brown hair; then she held out her hand in the same old fearless manner, lifting her handsome eyes to mine.

"History and life are forever repeating themselves," she said.

I took her outstretched hand, I looked into her happy eyes, and in that moment fell hopelessly, helplessly, unwillingly but eternally in love with the mother of the two Japanese infants.

Of the ten days that followed, I will give no minute description. Any one will easily understand how dangerous ten days at sea passed in the presence of a pretty, fascinating, cultivated, incomprehensible woman may prove. The evenings worked the most mischief; never were such moonlights, never such Summer weather! We three—for Arthur succumbed to the glamour—sat hour after hour in the full beauty of an almost tropical moon, while she would sing to us; for La Mystère possessed a voice of such power and sweetness that even her incomparable playing faded into insignificance before it. So she would charm us both, until even prosy, steady old Arthur lost his head, and declared that, but for me, he would have placed his heart and fortune at the incognita's feet.

You will scarcely believe me, yet, during all this time, neither Harford nor I had learned if she were maid, wife or widow. There was the black dress, and the horrible little Japs, whom in my presence she had caressed and fondly addressed as her "little ones," for proofs of her widowhood, while, on the other hand, her innocent fearlessness, her absolute belief in the good of this evil world, her almost childish trust, implied a maiden's heart and nature not yet tried or molded. Her name was Sandwell; we always addressed her as one entitled to the prefix of Madame, and as she never corrected us, we had, consequently, to believe her a widow—anything less dignified was impossible.

As we neared our journey's end, I began to understand that I was deeply interested in her—so deeply and so truly that my future seemed a wilderness of unrest without her figure in the foreground. But how present her to my stately lady mother, with all the proud blood of the Grants distilled into a double essence in her veins? How say, "This is my chosen wife! I know nothing about her family or her past. I met her on a river steamer in America. She has two Japanese children—but—I love her!" A pretty state of facts, and one synonymous with a cut-down of my present allowance, and the loss of Thorney Grange, in my mother's gift, in prospect.

So the days glided by: I loved her more and more desperately, and, as I told myself, more and more hopelessly.

Once only I spoke of the future. I had made some senseless remark as to the blankness of life after our parting, and the probable do-nothing state I should sink into. She lifted her arched brows a trifle scornfully, and her lip curled a little, though she did not make me any answer.

"And you," I asked, "what will you do?"

She flashed her handsome eyes upon me as she replied:

"Simply my duty. You forget—I am going home to my little ones!"

Oh, those horrid Japs! They had not been mentioned between us, and I had plausibly hoped that a merciful Providence had removed them from this sphere, and that never more should I encounter their ugly faces.

The day we landed was a forlorn ending to our Summer sailing; it rained copiously; rained as it only can in Liverpool. Through some mistake there was no one to meet her, so she allowed me to take her to the train, see her comfortably placed in a first-class carriage, booked for London, and did not refuse the miscellaneous collection of literature I thrust upon her. I was very miserable at seeing her go from me, yet I had not the courage to try and win her, Japs and all. I could love her distractedly, but not her accessories.

The guard rang the bell; I put out my hand. "Good-bye!" I said, and some of the mournfulness of my heart echoed in my voice. "Good-bye; I shall not easily forget you!"

She gave me her hand, the brave eyes meeting mine unflinchingly.

"Good-bye!" she returned, quite calmly. "Thank you very, very much for all your kindness."

She loosed her hand from mine, the last bell rang, the train moved, she smiled, and I turned away. Looking back for a farewell glance, I saw the bright, brown head sink on her clasped hands, and I felt the gray eyes were filling fast with willful tears. She, too, then, felt this parting! It was some slight compensation for my own wretchedness, and I gloated over it as I walked toward the hotel, until the miserable idea dawned upon me that I had let her go without obtaining any information concerning her ultimate destination. Questions innumerable had often suggested themselves during our ocean life, but a certain dignified reserve on her part completely repelled any advances on personal subjects. So to the last she had preserved her incognita.

Over our late dinner I told Arthur of our good-bye. He growled at the tears in her eyes and added savagely:

"No sign that she cares a button for you—no doubt she was laughing at you next moment. Tears indeed—thought you couldn't see her—very pretty little trick that—Bah! I tell you it's nonsense; all women do that sort of thing."

After this rather depressing statement, I kept my own confidence, and ere long La Mystère died out of our conversations, though not out of my heart. Indeed, I found my thoughts constantly roving off to those brave eyes and the proud mouth, as I had last seen her look from the window of the railway carriage. Ah! the confusion, hurry and bustle of a gay season could not clear from my memory that one face, grown so inexpressibly dear during the Summer days when we sailed together over the blue Atlantic.

I never attended a dinner, ball or drum that the thought was not present with me, will she be there? As the weeks flew by and I never once met her, I waxed furious at my own stupidity in letting her go without a clue by which to discover her. Various schemes formed, in my busy brain; I would insert a discreet advertisement in all the dailies; I would look up all the Sandwells, in all the different counties, make raids upon their homes and unearth in some way my beautiful, tantalizing mystery; but all to no purpose. What I strove for so eagerly, Fate alone could obtain for me.

I was at the opera one night when Patti, as Margarita, was charming every one, though to me even her delicious voice brought no solace; the entrancing music fell flat upon my ears and

heart for the lack of one woman's face. Yet, even as I argued with myself against this useless passion, I felt her presence near me. I raised my eyes; the occupants of one of the large boxes on the grand tier were moving about in a subdued but excited manner; I heard a low cry; and then, as the group parted, my glance met the beautiful gray eyes of La Mystère!

At that moment the curtain went down at the end of the fourth act, and a crowd of men singing out from the stalls prevented my reaching the box before the occupants had left it. I caught a glimpse of a white gown in one of the passages, and rushed blindly after it, though it seemed that all the men I had ever known in all my life conspired at that particular moment to keep me from flying to the assistance of my unknown. When I did reach the corridor, she was standing half supporting a lady, so beautiful, and yet so ethereal looking, it seemed as if even the breath of the Summer night would blow her away.

The moment La Mystère's eyes caught sight of me, they lost their anxious look, and the little troubled frown disappeared from her brow. She put out an eager hand, from which she had withdrawn the glove, saying impetuously, as though we had parted but yesterday:

"O Mr. Earnsford, we are in such trouble; the carriage has not come, and see, she must be taken home immediately."

To offer my brougham, which was luckily in waiting, to put myself, horses, servants, everything, at her little feet, was the work of a moment. She accepted the first calmly enough; but just as I was depicting to myself the bliss of escorting her home, a tall, distinguished and rather cross-looking man joined them, apparently very much heated and disgusted.

"Not a cab to be found anywhere," said he, irritably; but she interrupted him.

"Never mind, George; Mr. Earnsford has offered us his brougham, so we can get Cora home comfortably without delay."

George looked at me with the air of "And who the deuce is Mr. Earnsford?" but before he could put his look into more polite words, La Mystère seized him by the arm, whispered something in his ear, and pointed to the other lady, who was growing rapidly more and more pale. George turned to me.

"You are very kind," he said; "I accept your offer without hesitation; here is my card."

He held out the bit of pasteboard, which I thrust into my waistcoat pocket; then, almost lifting the elder lady in his arms, he passed down to the carriage, followed by La Mystère, whose only sign of thanks was a quick look toward me from her handsome eyes, and a slight flush on her fair face. Another moment, and they were gone. With a feeling of triumph I went back to my stall and listened in calm serenity to the final act of the opera.

Had I not secured the right and the means of seeing her again? The man's card was in my pocket, he was evidently some relative, and from him I could find her address, go to her and tell her—that I loved her, but not the little Japs; that she must love me and forget the little Japs; in fact, that with me she could not need the little Japs.

I sauntered home to my chambers, happy in the thought of what the day would bring me, put my hand in my pocket for my talisman, but—the card was gone.

I searched every available portion of my clothing, pulled my pockets inside out, but with no good result; it was not to be found. Then I sat down and sulked over it; what a fool I was not to have read the name and address before putting it away! Now there was no possible chance of seeing her. In short, I was in despair until it suddenly occurred to me that at least I could ask the coachman where he landed the party. If he had not caught their name, he would remember their address.

The next morning I summoned Peters earlier than usual. Did he remember the two ladies and the gentleman he took from the opera last evening? Oh, yes, he remembered perfectly. Where did he put them down? Could he tell me that? Undoubtedly; the gentleman had given him half a sovereign; of course he remembered. It was No. — Eaton square.

Peters retired, and I, once more triumphant, prepared my mind for the happiness in store for me. My inclinations advised me to seek the lady of my heart immediately, but my obstinacy, though I dubbed it propriety, urged me to wait until the approved hour for visits; over a cup of tea one grows so much more intimate and confidential.

At a little after four, I strolled into Eaton square and rang the bell of No. —. The door flew open.

"Not at home," said the irreproachable butler. "I called to inquire—" I began, when he resumed in a most respectful tone, "Was I Mr. Earnsford?" "Yes." "Then my lady had left directions that, should Mr. Earnsford call, he was to be told they had all gone to the country; that my lady was better, and very much obliged for Mr. Earnsford's kindness."

"To what part of the country?" I asked, insinuatingly.

"To her ladyship's father's," replied the manservant, implying by his manner, "Of course you know where that is, or, if you do not, you know nothing, and are not worthy of enlightenment."

As I stood hesitating what more to say, a door at the end of the hall was pushed back, and within the room thus revealed I beheld the elder of the two Japs—the girl with the wild yellow hair and black eyes. She caught my unwilling gaze, and pointing her finger at me, commenced jabbering something in her mother tongue. I lingered no longer; another instant the door closed, and I stood outside the wide portico, in silent rage.

So near and yet so far.

A week went by. At the end of that time, I found one Saturday morning, with my other correspondence, a letter to this effect:

ST. MARY CRAY, Kent, June, 188—
MY DEAR SIR:—The ladies of my family have reported to me your kindness and politeness to them the other night at the opera. Their hurried manner of leaving town prevented their thanking you in person when you called. Will you do me the honor to pass a few days at my house in this old-fashioned village? It will give me great pleasure to receive you, and to show my appreciation of the kind services you rendered one of my daughters some months ago, to which you have now added another to the list. I enclose the trains; take which best suits you. Yours sincerely,
HENRY KENDALL.

Needless to say, I accepted the invitation by return of post. Two days later, the four o'clock express saw me speeding on my way, this time with every assurance of meeting La Mystère face to face and learning at last somewhat of her history, past and present, and maybe form for both of us some possible future.

At St. Mary Cray I alighted. A groom came forward; a moment more, and we were bowling along over a fine country road, past the old gray church, with its grave-yard, nestled in the very