

DECLINED, WITH THANKS.

BY NATHAN D. URMER.

You write me you will be my "friend"
Henceforth—a "sister," nothing more,
And so on to your letter's end,
With cruel pity, o'er and o'er,
As though you deemed the past a breath
Upon life's mirror deep and bland,
That nothing of the breather saith
When blotted by a jeweled hand.

But pardon me if I decline
Friendship's or sister's sacred tie
With one who thus can dash the wine
Of love that mantled late so high,
And all the burning looks that swam
Above the beaker turn to naught,
As points for future epigram
To while the worldly after-thought.

It, while you fed my flame with sighs,
Soft-whispered yows, shy kisses given,
And under-lidded glances of eyes,
Whence lovers build their hopes of heaven,
You merely meant to idle by
Some tedious hours—to "draw me out"—
Forgive me if your friendship I
Should deem too tight to care about.

Or, if a darker purpose ruled,
To take a heart by stratagem,
And then, as your amusement cooled,
To wring, to torture and to condemn,
Forgive the still if I should not,
In folding fancy's broken wing,
Crave sisterhood in deed or thought
From such a vile, revolting thing.

Thanks for my letters! Here are yours,
With photograph and lock of hair;
And, if their memory yet endures
As something that could once ensnare,
Flaunt them as rallying flags, I pray,
Above the long and reeling ranks
Of those who, at some future day,
Your friendship may decline with thanks.

THE TWO FISHERMEN.

I was strolling along the beach, one fine Summer evening, amusing myself by picking up pebbles and throwing them into the sea, while memory was busily employed in retracing past events, when my reveries were broken in upon by a slight tap on the shoulder. I turned around and beheld an old sailor whom I often visited during the Summer months at his pretty cottage in

"What! all alone?" he said, with his usual benevolent smile. "Can you not find better employment, my pretty miss, than that of throwing stones into the water?"

I attempted to make some excuse for the foolish manner in which I was wasting my time.

"Do not make any apology, Annie. I know you of old. You will contrive to draw some grave reflections from your childish amusement, and tell me that the ocean reminds you of time, and that the pebbles you cast into it resemble the fate of man, making a stir for a moment, agitating the bosom of the waters, then sinking forever and leaving no trace on the surface."

"It is even so," said I, unconsciously dropping the stones I had in my hand one by one on the beach.

The old man sighed deeply, and an expression of sorrow almost amounting to anguish convulsed his features. It was but a passing cloud; his fine countenance was again illuminated by his usual placid smile, as, seating himself on a large stone, he motioned me to do the same.

"Come, Annie, sing me the song that I dearly love, and I, in return, will tell you a long story, which you may turn to what account you please, so that you conceal the names of the parties concerned."

I loved his stories; they were always told with such simplicity and warmth of feeling that he ceased to be the mere narrator, and the hearer might fancy him one of the principal actors in the drama. The song he wished me to sing, and which he always called his favorite, was a very and one.

"I will not sing that song," I said, "it is so very sad."

"The better suited to my perfect feelings," returned the old man.

Now, I wished to hear this tale; curiosity conquered my scruples, and I did my best.

A long pause succeeded. At length, the old man, passing his trembling hand over his eyes, pointed to a small white cottage that stood on the brow of the cliff.

"Do you see that cottage with the roses over the porch?"

"Tis an old-fashioned looking place," said I, "and would make a pretty picture."

"Forty years ago," he continued, "that house was built by two brothers, who gained a comfortable living by engaging in the fisheries, which were then carried on to a great extent in this village and the adjacent town. George and Henry Gordon were early left to struggle with the world. Their father died at sea, and their mother did not long survive her loss. The boys were brought up in the house of an uncle who was the father of two sweet little girls. The children tenderly loved each other; time strengthened their mutual attachment; the uncle, before his death, consented to their union, and the brothers jointly erected that dwelling to receive their promised brides.

"The rising sun smiled upon their labor of love, and the shades of evening could scarcely wile them from it. George was grave in his deportment and plain in his person. Henry was gay, passionate and thoughtless. The difference in their dispositions often produced hot words between them, yet the brothers were fondly attached to each other.

"The marriage was a matter of rejoicing to the whole village. The bells rang forth a merry peal, and old and young came out to meet the bridal party and welcome them to their new abode. The children strewed flowers in their path, and the matron and maid wished that long years of happiness might attend their wedded life.

"For a while, the young people bade fair to realize the fond hopes of their friends. Cemented alike by brotherly and sisterly love and conjugal affection, the harmony that reigned in that little cottage became the topic of conversation to the inhabitants of the village. Dora, the wife of George Gordon, possessed a heart too gay and

joyous to contend with the ills and sorrows of life. I see her now, the feelings of her innocent heart lighting up her smiling and beautiful face, round which her dark curls wandered like the tendrils of a vine. How often have I paused beside yon rose-bound porch of a Summer evening to hear her gay laugh ring in the clear air while she tied up the flowers or playfully wove them into wreaths for her flowing tresses! Dear girl! There was music in her step and gladness in her eye, and both were combined in the witching tones of her voice. I have heard it exerted to its utmost pitch to reach the ear of her husband as she stood upon the cliff watching the return of his boat by the clear beams of the moon. That voice has been mute many a day, and the grass has grown old upon her grave.

"Harry and Florence, after the first months of their marriage were over, did not possess that happiness and unity of mind that were so conspicuously displayed in the domestic felicity enjoyed by their next-door neighbors. Harry was rash and obstinate, and often found fault with every scheme that his mild partner devised in the vain hope of pleasing him. All her endeavors to fulfill his wishes were frustrated by his unfortunate temper. He loved her, it is true, but he loved himself better, and viewed the happiness of George and Dora with a jealous and discontented eye, not considering that it was his own fault that he did not enjoy the same.

"You never seem glad to see me, Florence," he would exclaim, as he threw down in a corner of the room the nets he had been fishing with, or sing such sweet songs to welcome my approach as Dora does."

"I have no voice; I cannot sing," was the meek reply of poor Florence; "but indeed, Harry, I am always happy to see you."

"Ay, that's the old phrase; but deeds show. Dora is gay and cheerful; that renders George so, and makes his home happy; while you greet my return with upbraids, which drive me from mine."

"It's your own fault, Harry," said Florence, bursting into tears, and leaving the room. "Would you curb your temper, we, too, might be happy."

Seldom a day passed without some dispute of this nature, and the kind-hearted Dora saw with grief that the fiend Discord had thrown her apple into their once happy circle.

"One evening they had met at George's house to while away a few hours by his cheerful fireside. It was a wintry night, and the rain fell in torrents, and the wind roared without and shook the cottage to the foundation. Harry had been on the sea with the boat, which was their mutual property. In the earlier part of the day, and George, hearing the tempest rising to a pitch of fury, asked his brother if he had taken the precaution to draw her upon the beach and secure her against the violence of the waters, which burst in tremendous force against the cliff.

"Harry answered harshly in the negative.

"Then I must go and do it myself," said George, the color mounting to his cheek. "If you are careless with regard to your own property, you should have some respect for mine."

"Let me perish if you leave this house on such a night as this on any fool's errand!" said Harry, rising and placing his back against the door. "She will take no harm, and is just as much my property as yours."

"Stand back from the door!" said George, giving way to sudden passion. "If I want to go, no one shall dare to bar my passage in my own house!"

"I tell you that you shall not go!" returned Harry, "and I will make good my words."

"You must do it in another place, then," George said, with a threatening air.

"With all my heart," was the reply.

"The women now interposed, and with tears and entreaties endeavored to win the brothers into a reconciliation. Dora finally succeeded, for when did she ever plead to her husband's heart in vain?—Kissing her pale cheek and quieting her fears, he turned to his brother, and holding out his hand in token of amity, said:

"Harry, we have both acted hastily. I forgive you for your late intemperate speeches, and I expect you will extend to me the same favor. There is my hand upon it; and now let us assist each other in securing the boat."

"Harry, whose passion had not so soon subsided, consented with a sullen air, and they left the house together.

"During their absence, Dora continued to pace the cottage with rapid steps, and often hurried to the door and listened to the howling of the tempest with an expression of alarm and anxiety.

"The night is dark and stormy," she said. "The billows are mountains high. Oh, how I wish my husband would return!"

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear sister," returned Florence, rising and approaching the open door. "They will doubtless return, in a few minutes. But see," she continued, "your clothes are wet through with the rain. Consider your situation, and be more careful for your husband's sake."

"I can see a dark figure advancing along the brow of the cliff," replied Dora, disregarding her sister's caution. "It is he—it is my husband!"

"In spite of Florence's efforts to detain her, she sprang from the cottage and sank almost fainting into the arms of Harry Gordon, who, without deceiving her, carried her gently back into the cottage.

"When Dora perceived her mistake, her fears reached a climax of agony. Turning with a degree of fierceness quite foreign to her nature toward Harry, she demanded of him what he had done with her husband.

"Is the woman mad?" he exclaimed, in an angry tone. "Am I accountable for her husband's actions?"

"You are! You are!" shrieked Dora. "He left the house with you, and should have returned with you. There's blood upon your hand—your clothes are dyed with it! Almighty God! You have murdered my husband!"

"She sank senseless at his feet, and Florence, turning toward him with a face as pale as death, said:

"Speak, Harry! Tell me what is this you have done? What are these fatal stains? Where is your brother?"

"Let me be cursed to all eternity if I know!" said the fisherman, stamping furiously on the floor. "These women, with their suspicions, are enough to drive a man out of his senses!"

"Seeing his wife trembling from head to foot, he added, in a calmer tone:

"I left him with the boat; he will be here in a few minutes to laugh with me at your folly."

"During this speech, Dora had half risen from the floor, and she caught his arm wildly.

"It may be true. Forgive, Harry, a wife's

agony. Come and help me look for him!" she cried.

"This idea appeared to inspire her with fresh hopes, and, springing to her feet, she darted through the doorway and fled with the rapidity of thought toward the cliff. The wind did not impede her course, nor the drenching torrents that beat on her uncovered head; one dreadful supposition alone possessed her mind; the uproar of the elements was congenial with the feelings it produced in her distracted breast, and she never paused till she reached the spot where the boat was generally moored. The moon, which had been obscured, now struggled through the haze and cast a wan, uncertain light on the surrounding objects. She stood alone on the sands; no sound of human voice reached her ear, no living creature met her eye. She called in frantic tones on the name of her husband.

"George! George! Where are you?"

"The hollow cliffs returned her voice, and the wind and waves alone answered.

"Harry now arrived on the spot with a lantern, accompanied by several fishermen from the neighboring houses. They found the unhappy wife of George Gordon in a state of almost unconsciousness. Two of the men carried her back to the cottage, while the rest proceeded to search for her husband. On examining the boat, they discovered the pebbles all around it stained with blood, and the sand deeply indented by the pressure of contending feet. The men looked at one another, and then at Harry.

"What are those stains on your face and garments, messmate?" said an old man, eyeing the young fisherman with a glance of peculiar meaning.

"It is blood," he returned, in a sullen voice; "but it is my own. In drawing the boat higher up on the beach, I had the ill luck to cut my finger with a sharp flint, and the blood is still oozing."

"You will have to give a more satisfactory account of the accident if your brother is not forthcoming," replied the old man. "In the meantime, I shall consider it my duty to retain you in custody until he is found, or you confess what has become of him."

"Of what do you accuse me?" exclaimed the agitated young man.

"Of murder!"

"He uttered a scream of agony, and, raising his hand toward heaven, made the most solemn assertions of his innocence, and called on God to attest their truth.

"The men pitied him, but no one in his sober reason could acquit him of the deed. He then implored them to let him take a last farewell of his wife before they hurried him off to prison, and this mercy was not denied him.

"Unconscious of the horrors of her situation, or the trials that awaited her, Florence was standing by Dora's bed, watching in unspeakable sorrow the last flutterings of expiring life. Sorrow had pressed but once on that young, gay heart, and the cord of life was severed in the contest. Her anxiety of mind hurried the event of motherhood, and she died in giving birth to a male infant, who survived the loss of its unhappy parents.

"She had just performed the last melancholy task, and closed the fair lids that shrouded forever the once joyous glance of her sister's radiant dark eyes, when her husband sprang into the room, and, catching her arm, exclaimed in a wild tone:

"Look on me, Florence! Tell me that you believe me innocent of the horrible crime they have laid to my charge!"

"The low wailing of an infant met his ear, and his bloodshot eyes fell on the pale, inanimate form of the once beautiful Dora.

"Ah, she is dead!—And they will say that I murdered her, too!" he cried, as he threw himself on the floor and wept aloud in the paroxysm of his despair.

"Florence knelt by him, and raised his head tenderly. Hers was a misery too deep for tears; she kissed with trembling lips the swollen brow in which the veins seemed bursting, and said, in a faltering voice:

"Oh, my husband! I know not what to think, but I will not believe you guilty!"

"God bless you for those words, my poor wife! Heaven will prove my innocence; for I swear to you, Florence, by Him who made me, I am as ignorant of my brother's destiny as you are. We parted friends, and never in my wildest fits of passion could I have raised my hands against his life."

"I believe you!" exclaimed Florence, throwing herself into his arms.

"The officer of the law entered and tore them apart.

"We shall meet again, Harry," she cried, as they bore him from the room, "both here and in another world."

"As the village bell smote on her ear, she turned toward the pale, crushed flower, over whom her tears flowed unceasingly.

"Poor Dora!" she said, stooping and kissing the cold brow of her sister. "Thy sorrows are over—thy heart is at rest. That gay, glad voice is hushed forever. I shall never again envy its tones of melancholy, or hear thy bounding step spring forth to meet him who has vanished from among us like a dream. Oh, that I could lie down and sleep like thee, and bury in the dust the anguish of a broken heart!"

"Days, weeks, months, rolled away, but George never returned. Harry was tried for the murder; the presumptive evidence was too strong to admit of a doubt as to the perpetration of the crime, and he suffered the penalty at the age of three-and-twenty.

"Florence remained a lonely inhabitant of the cottage, pitied and respected by all her neighbors. She found a melancholy pleasure in bringing up the orphan her unfortunate sister had in dying bequeathed to her care. She bore her dreary lot with a meek and lowly spirit, patiently submitting herself to the will of heaven. The cottage, however, wore a different aspect. The roses that had been trained up by the hands of love were unbound, and floated on every breeze. The pretty garden, once the scene of Dora's rural labor, was overgrown with weeds, and there a solitary lily rearing its sunny crest to bring back to Florence the memory of departed hours. When the moon shone down in beauty on the spot, she would lean her head pensively on her hand and fancy she heard the sweet voice of Dora singing in the porch as she playfully shook the dew out of the roses on the dark locks and sunburnt cheek of her husband.

"Ah! they were happy days," would the solitary mourner say, "but they are gone forever!"

"Six years had rolled on, and the little orphan had grown into a fine, ruddy boy, with his mother's lovely smile and sparkling beauty. Florence marked his growth with melancholy pleasure, and

he became more dear to her from the resemblance he bore to her sister.

"One bright Summer evening, as the rosy child was swinging on the front gate and watching the restless billows as they slowly rolled against the cliff, a woe-worn and weather-beaten man approached the gate. The child, frightened at his haggard looks, would have fled, but the stranger caught him in his arms.

"Tell me," he cried, in a hurried voice, "whose little boy are you?"

"Mother Florence's," said the child, struggling in his grasp. "I don't know you; please let me go."

"Do your father and mother live here?"

"My mother does, but I have no father," said the boy. "He died before I was born."

"Poor Harry! he is gone, then?" said the stranger, greatly agitated. "Tell me, dear child, if your aunt, Dora Gordon, is living."

"Aunt?" said the child, looking earnestly in his face. "I had once, they tell me, another mother; but she lies in the churchyard. I never saw her, but mother Florence always makes me pray for her and my father, too."

"O my child! my child!" exclaimed the stranger, pressing the child wildly to his heart, while his tears fell fast on the glittering ringlets of the cherub boy.

"At this moment Florence advanced from the cottage. At the sight of the stranger she uttered a terrible scream, and, catching his arm, cried out in a trembling voice:

"Speak to me, in God's name, George! Tell me you are still of this world!"

"Alas—to my misery!" groaned forth the unfortunate man.

"Florence clasped her hands mournfully, and raised her streaming eyes toward heaven.

"My wife—my brother!" he exclaimed, dashing his hand against his head. "This is a horrible dream—it cannot be true that they both died for me!"

"After the first burst of feeling had subsided, Florence entreated him to reveal the cause of his long absence.

"Harry's tale was true," he said. "We dragged the boat, which was nearly afloat in the surf, high up on the beach. In doing so Harry cut his finger severely with a large flint, and I begged him to leave me to fasten the boat, while he ran home and got the wound—which I considered dangerous—bound up. Thank God, we parted friends! He had not left me many minutes before a band of smugglers emerged from a cave in the cliff, and, observing me imprudently turn my head and look earnestly at the place of their retreat, they surrounded and threatened me with instant death if I dared to reveal their hiding-place. I promised, nay, even bound myself to secrecy by the most powerful oaths that language could suggest. 'Do not trust him,' said one of the crew. 'Kill him and throw his body into the sea. We shall then be sure of his silence.' My wife rushed across my mind. I implored their mercy. 'If any of you are husbands and fathers,' I said, 'have compassion on me. I have left in that cottage a wife on the eve of confinement with her first child—a wife whom I adore. Do not commit a double crime by destroying both.' The leader of the band relented. 'I have thought of a better scheme,' he said, nodding to his companions. 'We will not take his life.' Just at this moment I heard approaching footsteps. I struggled desperately to regain my liberty, and was thrown with such violence to the ground that the blood gushed copiously from my nostrils; a handkerchief was tied over my mouth, and I was forcibly dragged to the cavern. O Florence, imagine my feelings when I heard the voice of Dora calling on me in tones of despair, while I, bound hand and foot, was denied even the power of utterance! Were I to live for eternity, I should never forget the horrible presentiment of approaching ills which crowded on my mind during that dreadful night."

"Toward morning the smugglers got their vessel under way, and they put me on board, and in the course of three days we were landed in Holland. Without a half-penny in my pocket, or the least knowledge of the language, I was reduced to the necessity of soliciting the charity of the passers-by. But the anxiety of mind brought on a violent fever. I was picked up in the streets and conveyed to the hospital, where I languished for upward of twelve months, and when restored to health and liberty, new miseries awaited me. Luckily, I fell in with the captain of a trading vessel, who, pitying my forlorn condition, agreed to take me with him to England. Just as my hopes were nearly realized, I was again plunged into despair. Our vessel became the prize of a privateer, and I was carried a prisoner to France, where I remained until the exchange, which took place a few weeks ago. We had a quick passage and arrived safe in old England. My joy was so great on once more beholding my native country that it was some time before I could moderate my feelings. I begged my way hither, anticipating the kind welcome I should receive from my wife and family after so long and painful an absence. And what have I found? My wife in her grave, and my brother executed for my supposed murder!"

Here the old seaman paused, and seemed so deeply affected that it was some time before I could summon up resolution to address him.

"And what became of poor Florence?"

"As though she had lived only to deliver up that boy into his father's care, she soon after sickened and died, and we buried these two sisters of misfortune in the same grave. The boy, Annie, you have often seen. He is the gay, high-spirited young officer who is frequently the companion of your evening rambles."

"How?" I cried, starting from my seat. "Herbert Clinton? He is, then, your son?"

"Yes, Annie; I was once the happy husband of the beautiful Dora Gordon."

He pressed my hand to his lips, and walked slowly toward the deserted cottage. I looked after him; my heart was full; tears blinded my eyes; I could not follow him.

A priest was addressing his flock in Ireland on the dangers of intemperance, and concluded his harangue with these words: "Drink, my children, makes you beat your wives, starve your families, and shoot your landlords—aye, and miss them, too."

When you see a man occupying four seats in a railroad car, console yourself with the thought that the average age of the hog is only fifteen years.

General Garfield's mother is 73 years old, and she will reside with his family in the White House.

Pigs and bears as jewelry emblems are declining.—Er. So, too, are pigs and bears in street cars.