

would-be pedagogue's. As they were mostly the sons of petty tradesmen round about, he raised no objection to taking out their schooling in kind, and by this means earned at least a subsistence till more prosperous times arrived, and publishers discovered his latent merits. But for this device, he might not improbably have shared the fate of Chatterton and others, less unscrupulous as to a resource for the "mean time"—that rock on which so many an embryo genius founders.

The misfortune of our next case was, not that he abandoned the law, but that the law abandoned him. He was a solicitor in a country town, where the people were either so little inclined to litigation, or so happy in not finding cause for it, that he failed from sheer want of clients, and, as a natural consequence, betook himself to the metropolis—that Mecca *cum* Medina of all desperate pilgrims in search of fickle Fortune. There his only available friend was a pastry-cook in a large way of business. It so happened that the man of tarts and jellies was precisely at that epoch in want of a foreman and book-keeper, his last prime-minister having emigrated to America with a view to a more independent career. Our ex-lawyer, feeling the consumption of tarts to be more immediately certain than the demand for writs, proposed, to his friend's amazement, for the vacant post; and so well did he fill it, that in a few years he had saved enough of money to start again in his old profession. The pastry-cook and his friends became clients, and he is at present a thriving attorney in Lincoln's Inn, none the worse a lawyer for a practical knowledge of the *pâtés* filled by those oysters whose shells are the proverbial heritage of his patrons.

A still more singular resource was that of a young gentleman, of no particular profession, who, having disposed somehow or other in unprofitable speculations, of a very moderate inheritance, found himself what is technically termed "on his beam-ends;" so much so, indeed, that his condition gradually came to verge on positive destitution; and he sat disconsolately in a little garret one morning, quite at his wits' end for the means of contriving what Goethe facetiously called "the delightful habit of existing." Turning over his scanty remains of clothes and other possessions, in the vain hope of lighting upon something of a marketable character, he suddenly took up a sheet of card-board which in happier days he had destined for the sketches at which he was an indifferent adept. He had evidently formed a plan, however absurd: that was plain from the odd smile which irradiated his features. He descended the stairs to borrow of his landlady—what? A shilling!—By no means. A needle and thread, and a pair of scissors. Then he took out his box of water-colors and set to work. To design a picture!—Not a bit of it; to make dancing-dolls!—Yes, the man without a profession had found a trade. By the time it was dusk he had made several figures with movable legs and arms: one bore a rude resemblance to Napoleon; another, with scarcely excusable license, represented the Pope; a

third held the very devil up to ridicule; and a fourth bore a hideous resemblance to the grim King of Terrors himself! They were but rude productions as works of art; but there was a spirit and expression about them that toyshops rarely exhibit. The ingenious manufacturer then sallied forth with his merchandise. Within an hour afterward he might have been seen driving a bargain with a vagrant dealer in "odd notions," as the Yankees would call them. It is unnecessary to pursue our artist through all his industrial progress. Enough that he is now one of the most successful theatrical machinists, and in the possession of a wife, a house, and a comfortable income. He, too, had prospects, and he still has them—as far off as ever. Fortunately for him, he "prospected" on his own account, and found a "diggin'."

"There is always something to be done, if people will only set about finding it out, and the chances are ever in favor of activity. Whatever brings a man in contact with his fellows may lead to fortune. Every day brings new opportunities to the social worker; and no man, if he has once seriously considered the subject, need ever be at a loss as to what to do in the mean time. Volition is primitive motion, and where there is a will there is a way.

THE LOST AGES.

MY friends, have you read Elia? If so, follow me, walking in the shadow of his mild presence, while I recount to you my vision of the Lost Ages. I am neither single nor unblest with offspring, yet, like Charles Lamb, I have had my "dream children." Years have flown over me since I stood a bride at the altar. My eyes are dim and failing, and my hairs are silver-white. My real children of flesh and blood have become substantial men and women, carving their own fortunes, and catering for their own tastes in the matter of wives and husbands, leaving their old mother, as nature ordereth, to the stillness and repose fitted for her years. Understand, this is not meant to imply that the fosterer of their babyhood, the instructor of their childhood, the guide of their youth is forsaken or neglected by those who have sprung up to maturity beneath her eye. No; I am blessed in my children. Living apart, I yet see them often; their joys, their cares are mine. Not a Sabbath dawns but it finds me in the midst of them; not a holiday or a festival of any kind is noted in the calendar of their lives, but grand-mamma is the first to be sent for. Still, of necessity, I pass much of my time alone; and old age is given to reverie quite as much as youth. I can remember a time—long, long ago—when in the twilight of a summer evening it was a luxury to sit apart, with closed eyes; and, heedless of the talk that went on in the social circle from which I was withdrawn, indulge in all sorts of fanciful visions. Then my dream-people were all full-grown men and women. I do not recollect that I ever thought about children until I possessed some of my own. Those waking visions

were very sweet—sweeter than the realities of life that followed; but they were neither half so curious nor half so wonderful as the dreams that sometimes haunt me now. The imagination of the old is not less lively than that of the young: it is only less original. A youthful fancy will create more new images; the mind of age requires materials to build with: these supplied, the combinations it is capable of forming are endless. And so were born my dream-children.

Has it never occurred to you, mothers and fathers, to wonder what has become of your children's lost ages? Look at your little boy of five years old. Is he at all, in any respect, the same breathing creature that you beheld three years back? I think not. Whither, then, has the sprite vanished? In some hidden fairy nook, in some mysterious cloud-land he must exist still. Again, in your slim-formed girl of eight years, you look in vain for the sturdy elf of five. Gone? No; that can not be—"a thing of beauty is a joy forever." Close your eyes: you have her there! A breeze-like, sportive buoyant thing; a thing of breathing, laughing, unmistakable life; she is mirrored on your retina as plainly as ever was dancing sunbeam on a brook. The very trick of her lip—of her eye; the mischief-smile, the sidelong saucy glance,

"That seems to say,

"I know you love me, Mr. Grey."

is it not traced there—all, every line, as clear as when it brightened the atmosphere about you in the days that are no more? To be sure it is; and being so, the thing must exist—somewhere.

I never was more fully possessed with this conviction than once during the winter of last year. It was Christmas-eve. I was sitting alone, in my old arm-chair, and had been looking forward to the fast-coming festival day with many mingled thoughts—some tender, but regretful; others hopeful yet sad; some serious, and even solemn. As I laid my head back and sat thus with closed eyes, listening to the church-clock as it struck the hour, I could not but feel that I was passing—very slowly and gently it is true—toward a time when the closing of the grave would shut out even that sound so familiar to my ear; and when other and more precious sounds of life—human voices, dearer than all else, would cease to have any meanings for me—and even their very echoes be hushed in the silence of the one long sleep. Following the train of association, it was natural that I should recur to the hour when that same church's bells had chimed my wedding-peal. I seemed to hear their music once again; and other music sweeter still—the music of young vows that "that kept the word of promise to the ear, and broke it" not "to the hope." Next in succession came the recollection of my children. I seemed to lose sight of their present identity, and to be carried away in thought to times and scenes far back in my long-departed youth, when they were growing up around my knees—beautiful forms of all ages, from the tender nursing of a single year springing with outstretched arms into my bosom, to

the somewhat rough but ingenious boy of ten. As my inner eye traced their different outlines, and followed them in their graceful growth from year to year, my heart was seized with a sudden and irresistible longing to hold fast those beloved but passing images of the brain. What joy, I thought, would it be, to transfix the matchless beauty which had wrought itself thus into the visions of my old age! to preserve, forever, unchanging, every varied phase of that material but marvelous structure, which the glorious human soul had animated and informed through all its progressive stages from the child to the man.

Scarcely was the thought framed when a dull, heavy weight seemed to press upon my closed eyelids. I now saw more clearly even than before my children's images in the different stages of their being. But I saw these, and these alone, as they stood rooted to the ground, with a stony fixedness in their eyes: every other object grew dim before me. The living faces and full-grown forms which until now had mingled with and played their part among my younger phantoms, altogether disappeared. I had no longer any eyes, any soul, but for this my new spectre-world. Life, and the things of life, had lost their interest; and I knew of nothing, conceived of nothing, but those still, inanimate forms from which the informing soul had long since passed away.

And now that the longing of my heart was answered, was I satisfied? For a time I gazed, and drew a deep delight from the gratification of my vain and impious craving. But at length the still, cold presence of forms no longer of this earth began to oppress me. I grew cold and numb beneath their moveless aspect; and constant gazing upon eyes lighted up by no varying expression, pressed upon my tired senses with a more than nightmare weight. I felt a sort of dull stagnation through every limb, which held me bound where I sat, pulseless and moveless as the phantoms on which I gazed.

As I wrestled with the feeling that oppressed me, striving in vain to break the bonds of that strange fascination, under the pressure of which I surely felt that I must perish—a soft voice, proceeding from whence I knew not, broke upon my ear. "You have your desire," it said gently; "why, then, struggle thus? Why writhe under the magic of that joy you have yourself called up? Are they not here before you, the Lost Ages whose beauty and whose grace you would perpetuate? What would you more? O mortal!"

"But these forms have no life," I gasped; "no pulsating, breathing soul!"

"No," replied the same still, soft voice; "these forms belong to the things of the past. In God's good time they breathed the breath of life; they had *then* a being and a purpose on this earth. Their day has departed—their work is done."

So saying, the voice grew still: the leaden weight which had pressed upon my eyelids was lifted off: I awoke.

Filled with reveries of the past—my eyes closed to every thing without—sleep had indeed overtaken me as I sat listening to the old church-clock. But my vision was not all a vision: my dream-children came not without their teaching. If they had been called up in folly, yet in their going did they leave behind a lesson of wisdom.

The morning dawned—the blessed Christmas-morning! With it came my good and dutiful, my real life-children. When they were all assembled round me, and when, subdued and thoughtful beneath the tender and gracious associations of the day, each in turn ministered, reverently and lovingly, to the old mother's need of body and of soul, my heart was melted within me. Blessed, indeed, was I in a lot full of overflowing of all the good gifts which a wise and merciful Maker could lavish upon his erring and craving creature. I stood reproved. I felt humbled to think that I should ever for a moment have indulged one idle or restless longing for the restoration of that past which had done its appointed work, and out of which so gracious a present had arisen. One idea impressed me strongly: I could not but feel that had the craving of my soul been answered in reality, as my dream had foreshadowed; and had the wise and beneficent order of nature been disturbed and distorted from its just relations, how fearful would have been the result! Here, in my green old age, I stood among a new generation, honored for what I was, beloved for what I had been. What if, at some mortal wish in some freak of nature, the form which I now bore were forever to remain before the eyes of my children! Were such a thing to befall, how would their souls ever be lifted upward to the contemplation of that higher state of being into which it is my hope soon to pass when the hand which guided me hither shall beckon me hence! At the thought my heart was chastened. Never since that night have I indulged in any one wish framed in opposition to nature's laws. *Now* I find my dream-children in the present; and to the past I yield willingly all things which are its own—among the rest, the Lost Ages.

BLIGHTED FLOWERS.

THE facts of the following brief narrative, which are very few, and of but melancholy interest, became known to me in the precise order in which they are laid before the reader. They were forced upon my observation rather than sought out by me; and they present, to my mind at least, a touching picture of the bitter conflict industrious poverty is sometimes called upon to wage with "the thousand natural shocks which flesh is heir to."

It must be now eight or nine years since, in traversing a certain street, which runs for nearly half a mile in direct line southward, I first encountered Ellen—. She was then a fair young girl of seventeen, rather above the middle size, and with a queen-like air and gait, which made her appear taller than she really was. Her countenance, pale but healthy and of a perfectly

regular and classic mould, was charming to look upon from its undefinable expression of loveliness and sweet temper. Her tiny feet tripped noiselessly along the pavement, and a glance from her black eye sometimes met mine like a ray of light, as, punctually at twenty minutes to nine, we passed each other near—House, each of us on our way to the theatre of our daily operations. She was an embroideress, as I soon discovered from a small stretching-frame, containing some unfinished work, which she occasionally carried in her hand. She set me a worthy example of punctuality, and I could any day have told the time to a minute without looking at my watch, by marking the spot where we passed each other. I learned to look for her regularly, and before I knew her name, had given her that of "Minerva," in acknowledgment of her efficiency as a mentor.

A year after the commencement of our acquaintance, which never ripened into speech, happening to set out from home one morning a quarter of an hour before my usual time, I made the pleasing discovery that my juvenile Minerva had a younger sister, if possible still more beautiful than herself. The pair were taking an affectionate leave of each other at the crossing of the New Road, and the silver accents of the younger as kissing her sister, she laughed out, "Good-by, Ellen," gave me the first information of the real name of my pretty mentor. The little Mary—so was the younger called, who could not be more than eleven years of age—was a slender, frolicsome sylph, with a skin of the purest carnation, and a face like that of Sir Joshua's seraph in the National Gallery, but with larger orbs and longer lashes shading them. As she danced and leaped before me on her way home again, I could not but admire the natural ease and grace of every motion, nor fail to comprehend and sympathize with the anxious looks of the sisters' only parent, their widowed mother, who stood watching the return of the younger darling at the door of a very humble two-storied dwelling, in the vicinity of the New River Head.

Nearly two years passed away, during which, with the exception of Sundays and holidays, every recurring morning brought me the grateful though momentary vision of one or both of the charming sisters. Then came an additional pleasure—I met them both together every day. The younger had commenced practicing the same delicate and ingenious craft of embroidery, and the two pursued their industry in company under the same employer. It was amusing to mark the demure assumption of womanhood darkening the brows of the aerial little sprite, as, with all the new-born consequence of responsibility, she walked soberly by her sister's side, frame in hand, and occasionally revealed to passers-by a brief glimpse of her many-colored handiwork. They were the very picture of beauty and happiness, and happy beyond question must their innocent lives have been for many pleasant months. But soon the shadows of care began to steal over their hitherto joyous faces, and