

LEAVES BY THE WAYSIDE.—No. I.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

How much, how very much of human life, its many disquietudes, its heartfelt sufferings and wearying cares may be learned from the faces and casual remarks of the wayfarers in a great city. Often a sigh is breathed into our very ear by some burdened heart, unconscious that it hath thus betrayed its sorrows; and we are startled at hearing some low word of regret or tone of entreaty from the lips of those whose garments might otherwise have brushed by us with no word of comment: but no sooner is the slightest key presented revealing another heart, than our sympathies start at the touch; we look back, perhaps turn, that we may get a sight of the face whose heart has thus been, as it were, made known unto us. I speak here only of the profounder feelings of the human bosom, lying too deep for tears, and far, far too deep for smiles; there where deep calleth unto deep in the recesses of that book of mysteries, the human soul.

If we are in a cheerful mood the sight of another face beaming with smiles, or simply tranquil—that holiest of all states of the mind—is welcomed by us with a kindred feeling of pleasure. Even when sad of heart ourselves, if affliction have not made a *Marah* of bitterness within us, we witness the sight of cheerfulness in others with a gentle benevolence, giving thanks that the light of the great and beautiful earth is not darkened to every eye: but a sad face, one that beareth the superscription of sorrow—the still, soul-speaking traces of endurance—awakens our holiest interest, our heart goeth out in compassion, and we would fain whisper the language of condolence. Most sweet and blessed is this ordination of the Divine will, that in a world like this, where joy is but the oasis in the great desert of suffering, heart should thus beat responsive to heart in its utterance of distress; that its going forth should be more prompt at the great call of weariness and grief than mirth or gladness. Yet let no one believe his heart to be right who curls the lip in scorn or discontent when a glad face appealeth to his own. No, no, whatever be our own lot, let us rejoice with those that do rejoice, and the more that such are in the world, keeping our souls fresh with the dew of youth.

Often when some peculiar expression of face or some touching accent of pathos has attracted my attention in a passer by, I have found myself unconsciously weaving a sketch of what might possibly be the history of the individual. In this way I have created a little drama, in which my characters were all made to act in concert, and all approached a certain crisis. Nor is this an idle

amusement, for alas! to one that hath known sorrow a wild and mysterious leaf is revealed, by which an insight is obtained to (it is sad to think) how many others. I recollect at one time passing a couple, the one a pale, gentle looking girl, leaning on the arm of a dashing youth, who at the very moment they passed me was arranging a faultless whisker, even while the poor girl was looking into his face and earnestly and with deprecating tenderness saying, "But when you are gone away you will forget me." They passed on, but my heart ached for that forlorn girl, just learning her woman's destiny of love and tears, hoping and sorrowing and enduring even to the grave. Alas! alas! that such is womanhood: but let her not faint, for many are the sources that pour blessedness into her cup of life. The cup may be deeply drugged, indeed, but it holdeth the pearl in solution. Not to the flinty rock descendeth the refreshing dew, but to the plant scorched by the noontide heat, and drooping for lack of rain.

To one whose sympathies are alive whenever the voice of humanity is heard, the merest trifle will be full of truth; it will utter a still small voice, but eloquent with teaching; and then he will cover his face with his mantle and go forth, for surely the deep wisdom of humanity will be unfolded before him. He passes a scrap of paper upon the pavé: it hath letters inscribed thereon. He may pass it idly by, and yet who can divine the nature of emotions that swayed the head that dictated those lines. It may be the work of the gay and thoughtless, but ten chances to one that poverty, sickness or sorrow were lurking beneath. Here is one that a gust of wind deposited at my feet, and a strange instinct induced me to pick up and read. How earnest, how simple and touching is its record. We feel it is the utterance of a woman, a wronged, betrayed, yet patient, loving, and suffering woman. Ecce signum.

MY DEAR PHILIP:—I waited here till six last evening in hopes you would have come as you said you would when we parted. Indeed I know not what to do. I am fearful our dear child will not hold out long if I cannot procure nourishment for her. If you could by any way muster me one dollar I will ever be grateful to you, for I ought not ask you, knowing how you are situated yourself. *But what am I to do?* or to whom can I go for relief? I will be back by half past eleven or twelve o'clock. In the mean time I will go and see if I can get a chance in some shipping office for a vessel.

Yours most truly,

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P. S.—Pray let me see you by twelve if possible.

I have suppressed the name, for who would bruise the broken reed; and even she, heart-broken in her sorrow, may light upon these pages. "One dollar" only she craves in her urgent necessity, and that not for herself, but her starving child. How unselfish is her love! and yet were it otherwise she would be less than woman. "I ought not to ask you, knowing how you are situated yourself. But what can I do? to whom can I apply for *relief*?" O woman, woman, how affecting is thy appeal, wrung out in the very agony of hopeless, helpless misery. If a shadow of reproach lurks beneath thou art unconscious of the infliction, for thy gentleness dwelt upon thy child and thy unworthy companion only. And he was in perplexity, in trouble too, but in far, far less than thou wert: for thy own tenderness hath and ever will be thy foe: thy kingdom is within, and disorder there must fill thee with dismay.

Alas! weary and perturbed bosom, thou hast the prayers of at least one heart, and if a tear of hers could wash a stain from thy soul thou hast one sin the less registered against thee. Gentle and sorrowing Magdalene, to whom much is forgiven the same loveth much.

Human life is not all sorrow; there are pictures of humble quietude refreshing to behold; glimpses of common everyday content that make us almost envy those of less refined sensibilities: where the heart hath a perpetual sabbath, and the little toils, the little details that make up the sum of a woman's life are enough, and more than enough to satisfy its capacity for enjoyment: where an extra lace, or a new ribbon giveth a thrill of delight, and no greater trial is imagined than a soil upon a fine dress, a mistake in the compound of a favourite cake, or the failure of a "batch" of bread, or, greatest of all, a "rainy washing day." Contented souls, rest in your felicity: why should the seventh seal in the book of life be revealed to ye, causing silence and dread and mystery: ye may not comprehend them.

A little urchin of some dozen years had become master of a ball of yarn, a treasure picked up in the street. He seated himself upon the carpet and was busily employed in making a ball, the foundation of which was to be gum elastic. In the centre of the old ball was a fold of paper, which he opened and threw aside. Now letters, however uncouth, have a charm for me, and there was a quaintness about the almost printed characters appealing to my eye that attracted the attention. Upon one side were figures, running all diagonally: they might have been the milk score of the good wife. Just below were certain hieroglyphics in the shape of the first rudiments of writing by a child; and the pupil must have been an apt scholar, for the specimen nearly rivalled the copy. But the

pith of the MS. was on the reverse. I shall give it literally, otherwise we shall lose all clue to the history and family of the worthy writer.

"Mrs Chase will you be so good as to lay out the 25 cents in soft bakers bread for Zilpha a loaf or roll or soft biscuit for we have not very good flower of late you may wrap it in the cloth you carried home your cheese in and send it by your father, Mrs Giles sends you a couple of goose wings."

Alack, for there is no name affixed. But excellent and praiseworthy woman, I can gather thy whole history from this little sybilline leaf thrown to the winds of heaven. Thy penmanship too, is decorous and matronly, and although a professor of the art might refuse to recognise some of thy strokes, yet are they characteristic of thyself. Would thou hadst given thy name, but alas! in thy simplicity it did not occur to thee, that it was in the least necessary; for Mrs. Chase was well aware who must be the mother of Zilpha, and the neighbour to good Mrs. Giles, the donor of the "goose wings." We have here not only the writer, but we learn much of Mrs. Chase and Mrs. Giles likewise. A kindly neighbourhood was theirs, abounding in friendly offices, and the business and habits of each open to the other. Do we not see that Mrs. Chase had lately made a call in which the good woman had carried home some extra cheese nicely folded in a napkin, and now she desires the bread may fill the same station, and be sent by the matron's father. Good old man, he has survived the active period of life, and now finds amusement in watching the gambols of the children, as he sits upon a bench beneath the old elm tree that shelters the dwelling of his daughter, Mrs. Chase. Then too little Zilpha is a pet, and her mother hath a bland and becoming smile, and a kindly voice to welcome the gentle old man.

Mrs. Giles must have been a thrifty housewife, who kept a stock of geese, and knowing the exceeding nicety of Mrs. Chase, the care with which dust and annoyances of every kind are removed, she hath deputed the writer to transmit a couple of wings as a suitable offering to so exact a housewife. Beautiful picture of primitive simplicity, of rural content and decent household cares. A blessing be upon ye all. I know not where may be your abiding places, whether Mrs. Chase is still busy with her "goose wings," whether Mrs. Giles is still living to impart her neighbourly good offices, whether little Zilpha be still munching her "roll" or "soft biscuit" as set forth in the note, whether the "poor flower" be all exhausted, or whether all these things have passed away as a dream that is told. Enough, that the spirit of their own contentment went forth to gladden one heart, and to assure her that somewhere is, or hath been, a spot of sunshine, where the shadow so lightly passed, that we scarcely could say, "behold it is here."

LEAVES BY THE WAYSIDE.—No. II.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

WHOEVER has visited the dainty little city of Portland, reclining between its hills, and looking off upon its hundred isles, has not failed to observe the unusual air of thrift and enterprise so strangely contrasting with its verdant and placid country-like aspect. It is a place offering few inducements to the foreign emigrant, who merely uses it as a thoroughfare to other and larger cities, where a penny can be easier turned, or vice and idleness better tolerated. The consequence is, that the inhabitants are of a less heterogeneous character than those of any other place of the same size to be found in the Union. Sturdy descendants are they of the primitive Pilgrim race; strict observers of the Sabbath, which they never call Sunday; regular goers to church three times upon the Sabbath day, besides to a prayer meeting in the morning, and the Sabbath School at noon; through the week the concerts of prayer, the conferences, the stated lectures, inquiring meetings, &c. &c., leave little time for the practice of wickedness even were any so disposed. Patronisers of literature are they, and staunch supporters of the public schools, and it is astonishing to see the numbers of the rising generation that daily appear at these great safety valves in our institutions; sturdy-looking, open-browed children, with red cheeks, clean aprons, and plaited ruffles, telling volumes of thrift and tidiness at home. There is one thing more to be observed, and that is, the large proportion borne by the gentler sex as compared with the other, more especially to be remarked upon the Sabbath. He would say at first sight the women represent the religion of the place; and this most probably is true, here as well as elsewhere, for alas! they are ever taught to feel their dependence, and instinctively spread out their hands for support; they turn from the cold or deserted altars of human affection, to cling but the more vehemently to the very horns of the altar, before the mercy-seat of heaven. It is true in this way, but not true if he would infer that the other sex are negligent of spiritual affairs. Let him listen to the "notes" read by the clergyman previous to that long preliminary prayer, and he may be able to divine the cause. These "notes," as they are technically called, are variously worded, according to the taste and education of the writer, though the style is pretty much the same in all cases, from the simple and ungarnished petition of Betsey Slocum, in one of our fishing districts, which ran in this wise,—*"Betsey Slocum desires your prayers for her husband, gone a whaling,"*—to the more refined one that came into my possession.

Passing down one of the principal streets, of a

bright summer morning, with a sky brighter than can elsewhere be found, and all the bells of the merry churches ringing a glad peal for worship, and the streets filled to overflowing with well-dressed and cheerful-looking people, I observed a highly respectable looking matron leading by the hand a chubby boy of four years, while, two and two, followed a train of eight or ten lads and lasses, all nicely dressed, and all bearing the most unequivocal likeness to one another; each carried a clean folded handkerchief, a fan, or "psalm-book" in hand, and all moved with the utmost regard to decorum. Presently a lad of fourteen, or thereabouts, in giving a sort of flourish with his handkerchief, dropped a slip of paper upon the pavement, which I of course picked up. The youth must have known what he had done, for he half turned round, looked a little nervous, and not a little mischievous, and then passed on.

I knew enough of Portland usages to understand the nature of the affair, and did not hesitate to open the paper. Whatever might have been the intentions of the lad, I at once resolved that that staid matron, followed by so many thrifty devout branches, should not be disappointed in her devout goings forth. I walked on in the rear of the party, and on entering the vestibule of the church gave the note to the sexton, where he stood gravely pulling back and forth the rope of the bell, knowing that in due time he would present it to the "minister." Accordingly, when the "notes" were read, this happened to be the first.

"Mary Dyer desires your prayers for her husband, absent on a long voyage, that God would be pleased to bless and preserve him in his absence, and return him in safety to his family."

No sooner was the name read than the simultaneous movement of heads in one direction revealed to me the location of the pew of Mrs. Dyer. There sat the worthy matron, clad in her faultless robes, all beseeching a religious woman, and one well to do in the world, looking steadfastly towards the pulpit, conscious that all eyes were bent upon her; but was she not without reproach? were not her children about her, crowning her as with a glory, and might not her name be uttered, even in the great congregation, and bring no blush to her cheek, other than that of noble pride, that she was even as she was? There were her children, too; the chubby boy had climbed upon the seat at the unwonted sound of his mother's name pronounced in the "meeting-house;" there the pretty daughters, blushing and hanging their heads; there the boy of ten, tickling and "hunching" the graceless

youth who had dropped the note, and who now sat staring with his mouth open, and a face of crimson. Beautiful and happy group, my heart blesses ye as ye rise up again to my mind's eye in all the freshness of yesterday. Ye are severed now, I feel that ye are, for it is the lot of all; and the mother, if she still live, is white-haired and old, but no evil, no evil that bows down and debases the image of God stamped upon the souls of his creatures, can ever fall upon those children of many prayers.

Then followed other petitions, for those "bound to sea," "absent at sea," and thanks were returned for those who had escaped its perils, and who were now permitted to appear again in the house of prayer. There was still one, the last read, that of "Jane Hammond, desiring prayers that the death of her husband, at sea, might be sanctified to her and her child for their spiritual and everlasting good." Following the movements of others, my eye rested upon a slight and youthful figure, habited in deep mourning. She did not rise with others at the prayer, but sat grasping the hand of her child, with her face buried in her handkerchief. As the low tones of the clergyman arose in that hushed place of worship, she sat with heaving chest, evidently weeping with all the bitterness of a young heart as yet new to sorrow. But when her own case was presented at the mercy-seat, as, "Thy young handmaiden, stricken down with affliction, called to bear the yoke, even in the days of her youth, bereaved of him who was to have been her companion in this vale of tears, her support and comforter," low sobs escaped her till she wept aloud. Many were the tearful eyes bent upon the young widow, who was known to have cherished the most devoted attachment to him whom she now mourned.

I will not follow thy fortunes, O gentle weeper; I will not ask if thy vows are again plighted; if thy prayers are now put up for another; no, I rejoice that I know it not, for my own heart tells me that, whatever necessities may have swayed the gentleness of thy nature, in the sanctuary of thine own heart thou dost still respond to thy *one only love*.

Now, reader mine, hast thou not divined the reason for the sparseness of male worshippers in churches of the good city? Thou hast undoubtedly perceived that, in a commercial place like this, where prosperity depends so much upon successful maritime adventure, the enterprising of the stronger sex are of "those that go down to the sea in ships, and do business upon the mighty waters," and consequently such must often be missed from the house of prayer.

Accustomed to depend upon her own judgment, to rely upon her own resources, to manage her financial concerns in her own way, as the wife of the sailor must do, in the long periods of his absence, she acquires a steadiness of purpose, an off-hand, business-like air, a staid, and somewhat severe deportment, which, however called for, and however well adapted to her peculiar condition,

certainly sits ungracefully upon any other woman. Hence too she becomes skilful as a disciplinarian, and learns to manage a large family with a skill that might vie with that of her husband upon ship board. Her daughters are sure to be notable, and her sons would shame her if either cowardly or dull. They have a bold daring air, take to climbing instinctively, and always pull a rope in sailor style. How many apologies she would feel bound to make for rearing a sickly child. She is in the right. Women are now beginning to understand these things better, and to shrink from the imputation of imbecility of any kind.

Then the tact of a sailor's wife is inimitable. Sole autocrat in his absence, no sooner does he return than she proceeds to abdicate the throne in his favour. She who has hitherto been sole mistress, giving her orders with firmness and precision, buying, selling, alone and independent, suddenly becomes gentle, yielding, referring everything to his judgment, appealing to him for decisions, and abandoning herself to that sweetest of all feelings to a woman's nature, the sense of protection, the reliance upon one with strength and tenderness to sustain. His frequent periods of absence, the perils to which he is exposed, superadded to the acknowledged generosity and warm-heartedness of a sailor, serve to keep alive the freshness of affection, and to foster the tenderest emotions. A sailor loves with his whole soul, and rarely indeed is it that such affection, protective and self-sacrificing, fails to be reciprocated. The wife may be a termagant, vixenish and exacting to others, but to him she will be tender and considerate. He sees nothing but her notability, her thrift, and affectionate regard for his interest. He confides all things to her keeping, sure that she will manage even better than himself; for his province lies upon the waters, and he hardly can keep his reckoning on shore. Such is the sailor's wife, she belongs to a class *sui generis*, and in judging of her the rules applied to others of her sex would be altogether unjust.

In thinking of her, gentle reader, be sure to give her a bright eye, whatever may be its colour, a ready smile which is sure to go with a cheerful and affectionate heart, and above all, give her a round ankle and small foot. These are essentials. A sailor will fill out his ideas of beauty with various other accompaniments, but without these it could not exist.

Passing through one of the commercial streets of the city, by what is there called the "wood stand," my companion remarked "what a neat foot that woman has!" I observed a tidy-looking woman in hat and shawl, the latter so arranged as to exhibit to great advantage a fine bust, who was "making change" for a load of wood, with a most quiet and business-like air, while a fresh wind exposed a pair of the finest feet I ever saw. As we approached she fixed two brilliant eyes upon the face of my friend with a wholly indifferent air, as if so engaged in her mental arithmetic as to be unconscious of what she was doing. He returned the gaze with one

so totally different that it brought the blood to her cheek and a smile to a pair of very rich lips. Scarcely had we passed her when her elastic figure flitted by us with a step so light, that it seemed hardly to touch the ground.

"I am confident that is a sailor's wife," said I.

"Never," he rejoined. "She is a perfect sylph. I will not believe she belongs to one of that amphibious, rough, coarse race that they are."

"Ay, I see that you don't understand them."

While we were yet speaking I saw upon the pavé a folded paper, which we both recognised as one the unknown had been holding in her hand while engaged with the wood vender, and from which she had torn a corner and probably given him thereon her name and street, for houses are not numbered at Portland. The address was gone, the lady had disappeared, where we knew not, so there was no reason why we should not read it. It ran as follows.

At Sea, on board the ship Trenton,
Lal. and Lon. &c.

My dear and loving Wife:

We have had a pretty rough time so far. A heavy squall, eleven days out, carried away the bowsprit, and handled us so roughly that the ship made water in the hold faster than we could pump it out. We lighted her by throwing our deck load overboard, and soon as the wind slackened, searched for the leak. Thank God, the danger is over, and I can now think of you. Ann, dear, the time I am boxed about on the ocean all passes for nothing. I live only when I am with you. Take care of yourself, dearest, don't fret about me, but let me find you well and hearty, when I get home, and I shall know you love me. Keep Fanny Osgood with you, for she's a nice girl and will keep your spirits up. Confound that —, you know I hate him, and you only spoke of him in your last letter to plague me. Ann, I swore when I come to the name, and thought I could see just how mischievous you looked when you wrote it. You little plague, do you think I don't understand you?

"I forgot to direct about that bank-stock; call upon the owners, and they will do all. Tell them to advance you all the money you want. Don't expose yourself; keep up a good heart till I come home. Here go in a handful of red wafers, every one of which means a kiss. I wish I could pack in a thousand more.

Your loving husband till death,

WILLIAM LISCOM.

"Shame on her," said my friend, "to lose a letter like that. Captain Liscom, you little thought so much tenderness would be scattered to the four winds of heaven!"

"Well, didn't I tell you she was a sailor's wife? And isn't the rough Captain Liscom fully worthy of her?"

"Too good, too good. She's a sad coquette.

Such eyes were never placed in such a head for nothing. And then to tease a husband like that from pure mischief. I would put a bullet through that —, if I were the captain."

"But such a woman, you know, is hardly worth it."

"Isn't she, though! she's just such a one as I should love to distraction. All the better, too, I suppose, for the very uneasiness she gave me. Don't you see that is precisely the case with Captain Liscom. He loves her just in proportion to her sauciness and fun. It is like the frolic of a child, as transparent and as innocent too."

"O, I see you are an able apologist. For my part I think I should like Fanny Osgood better. She must be a "nice girl," as the captain says. She is light-hearted, merry, and discreet withal. You may read her character in those few words of approval. She must have a rosy cheek and dimpled mouth, and I am sure her voice hath the very soul of melody."

"True, true, I should like to see that same Fanny Osgood. Charming women both must be. That captain's wife must be a forger. How demurely she stood with her pretty mouth pursed up, reckoning the value of that wood. Strange practicability. A new aspect for a pretty woman. Let me see; the owners are ordered to advance her all the money she wants. Mrs. Liscom, thou art a thrifty, pains-taking wife, hast a good judgment, and a light and loving heart, as well as thy many other attractions. Captain Liscom, thou art a happy fellow."

After this apostrophe he became unwontedly silent, dragged his cane in the dust, and answered by monosyllables. Happening that evening to pick up a slip of paper from the carpet—for I have before said I have a strange inclination to decipher leaves gathered by the wayside—I found "Fanny Osgood" written in every possible style. I very gravely laid it before him.

"A most sensible employment that," said I, whereupon he coloured deeply, and commenced eating the words he had written. "Still more sensible that," continued I.

"Cousin, how vexatious you are;" and he affected a most unwonted dignity.

Going to church the next day, a soft voice said close at my elbow, "Fanny, I am sure you stole that letter, and keep it from pure love of mischief."

"Fanny Osgood," whispered —, and we turned to behold the saucy, handsome Mrs. Liscom, and sure enough there was the lively, rosy Fanny Osgood. Cousin — looked red, and certainly so equivocal, that, had anybody cried out "stop thief," he would have been the first one seized upon.

After this he took to moon-gazing, to writing poetry, and other desperate undertakings, which it is needless to enumerate. Suffice it to say, Fanny Osgood doesn't write her name Fanny Osgood now.