

*SHIRT WASHING IN A TWOPENNY LODGING-HOUSE.*

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THAT the one half of the people in this world don't know how the other half live, is what has often been remarked. The difference between life in the fashionable west-end of Glasgow, and life in an east-end twopenny lodging-house, is about as wide as the Atlantic, and at a first glance might be considered almost tragic in some of its severer aspects.

In a certain sense this is only too true. And yet, strange as it appears, Humour, broad-featured and hearty, often sits laughing at the side of Tragedy in such places, as if the lot of the poor ragged lodgers was not a jot less happy than that of the more favoured sons of fortune outside.

It was Sunday morning at Jean Glancey's "tippenny doss," in the Saltmarket of Glasgow, as it was elsewhere in the city.

The morning was a bright and pleasant one for the concluding week of a more than usually wet and stormy February, and the same sun that shone benignly down on the oriel windows of the west-end parlours and palatial roofs of the wealthy of the city, tempting the richly-caged singing birds to burst into song, also glinted cheerily on the rag-stuffed windows of the wretchedly housed denizens of the lower quarters of the city.

Wherever the sunshine could get at, there was really no mistake about its cheering influence. It brought a wan smile to the face of the ill-clad, ill-fed victim of bronchitis, who saw in it a prophecy of warmer airs, and remission from hacking night-coughs and shivery hours abed. It warmed the pavement flags for the bare-feet of the little arabs of the street, so long bitten by frost and snow. It tempted to song the little linties that sat caged, here and there, on the window sills of the poor, and touched, with the

light of beauty, the budding sprigs which had root in numerous flower pots and boxes along the lines of windows in even the poorest streets. For even the abject poor in many cases love the beautiful; and, thank God, the highest and purest types of beauty and music in the world—the sunshine, the changing colours of the sky, the melody of the song-birds in the summer woods, and the unmatched beauty of the wild flowers of the wayside—are free alike to all.

And the sunshine of this particular Sunday morning was a fact as cheering as it was visibly obvious. It even penetrated the back windows of Jean Glancey's twopenny lodging-house, and lay in silver patches on the floors and turned-up bedding in the different sleeping-rooms.

But beautiful as the morning was in itself, it was *Sunday* morning in Jean Glancey's, and that always spelt washing-day with a number of her ragged lodgers.

Sunday morning seems, at first thought, an out-and-away misappropriation of the domestic wash tub. Very true; but what is a man to do who has only one shirt in the world to wash and nobody to wash it but himself? Take it off and wash it. Exactly. And that's what Jean Glancey's lodgers regularly did of a Sunday morning, about, say, once in the three or four weeks. For Sunday was an idle day with them, and the cleansing process meant soap and hot water, and these necessities were only obtainable through the favour of Bel Macpherson, the strapping cook, and most readily on a Sunday morning, when her own wash-tubs were empty and out of use, and a small bit of soap was for that reason not valued at a premium price.

On the particular Sunday morning under notice, there were some half-dozen of Jean Glancey's lodgers busy washing their shirts.

The most noticeable of the group at first sight was a broken-down semi-genteel looking being, who had remark-

ably fine eyes, and wore his hair long. This person was Gabriel Thinchaffs, a street-ballad seller and poet, who made his own songs, and sung them himself when he could not get other street-ballad singers to buy them and sing them for him. Thinchaffs was a truly ethereal and poetic spirit, being about as thin in face and body as a well-worn George III. sixpence, and looking, physically, not unlike a man whom fate had destined to study cold roast through the intervening glass of a cook-shop window. For although poor Thinchaffs had both pockets and a stomach, as most men have, yet he seldom had anything to put into either of these commodities. But if Gabriel Thinchaffs was poor in world's gear, he was extremely rich in that perennial possession of the poet's volatile breast—hope. His one crippling weakness indeed was that he hoped the impossible, and drank positive nectar from the brilliant delusion. Fame and gold were in the future! That was his living gospel of hope, the one panacea which made light the bitter arrows which a malignant fortune, or rather misfortune, daily lodged in his heart. Without this perennial nectar of hope it is questionable if even Bel Macpherson's strong cookery could have long redeemed Gabriel Thinchaffs from that sad penalty of poetic genius—a too early grave. Thinchaffs, in fact, was a sort of accentuated local Micawber, invariably on the extreme tip-toe of tense expectation, and, by a reverse process of logic, always down-at-heel. As a co-relative of all this, it is scarcely necessary to mention that poor Gabriel Thinchaffs was an habitual lodger at Jean Glancey's tuppenny "doss." He was poor, it was true, but did not his splendid poetic genius glorify his humble tripe suppers, and was not his twopenny bed nightly made beautiful by the lights and scents scintillated from the hovering wings of the nine muses of poetry! Gabriel Thinchaffs believed and felt it to be so, and, of course, a man's individual beliefs and feelings are everything—to the individual man.

The next noticeable figure was Whaler Jack, a wrecked sailor, who had lost an arm, and the half of a leg through frost-bite on the desolate coast of Labrador, though in reality he had never been further afloat than Dumbarton. Whaler Jack, however, was a knowing cove, and had a handy way of pulling back his "lost arm" into his vacant shirt-sleeve, and straightening down his doubled-up leg, when his day's begging was over, and he had reached "port" in Jean Glancey's twopenny lodging-house.

A third character of the group was an old blind street fiddler called Rosin-the-Bow, who industriously scraped cat-gut with horse-tail hair all day long for a living. He had nothing of your modern violin solo-player about him, neither in his appearance nor his *airs*. He played simple tunes in simple fashion, and mostly on the first position, with his elbow flung high in the air, and had never heard of the great Paganini, even by name.

The remaining character we shall here notice was Lang Geordie Johnstone, a local speech-crier, whose attenuated body and crane-like neck, elongated to the length of a hen's by crying speeches, agreed but ill with the cold east wind of a raw February morning. The east-wind, in fact, was Lang Geordie's persistent enemy and bubbly-jock. It put a roopie craw in his throat, harled up hard "spits" from his rather narrow chest, and gave him a vari-coloured face, in which *blue* was the predominant colour.

A right picturesque lot they looked as they stood over their wash tubs, these gangrel creatures, the speech-crier's long crane-like neck cracking audibly over the steaming pail, the wrecked sailor hitching up his duck pants every other second, prior to a fresh attack on his striped under garment in the pail before him, the blind fiddler feeling for the soap which another lodger had appropriated for his own use and pocket, and the heavenly-minded poet sneezing out

the rejected steam of the pungent soap-suds as not being exactly the inspiring elixir of poetry.

What accentuated the humour of the situation still further was the fact that each of the three amateur shirt-washers had their ragged coats pinned as closely up to their throats as was possible, for the purpose of hiding their bare chests and keeping out the cold.

"A blooming fine job this is for hus hinderpendant professionals," remarked Whaler Jack, hitching up his trousers, and squirting out a long streak of yellow tobacco juice; "it looks hard gales on the weather beam, it does. Bless'd if I don't think I'll back the ship's mainyard, take in a blooming doxy for a wife, and set hup a domestic histablishment of my own. Tea in bed and a clean washed shirt ov a Sunday morning would prove quite hup to Tommy, I reckon; eh, swells?"

"Oh, beautiful dream! most lovely and engaging dream!" exclaimed the romantic poet, involuntarily dropping his half-washed shirt back into the steaming pail. And the next moment he dramatically clasped his hands together and turned up his eyes to the ceiling, as if lost to the world in prayer.

"Hy, hy, there, poet!" exclaimed the speech-crier, rubbing the soap out of his eyes, which the rapt poet, in striking his wet palms together, had unwittingly jerked into them; "if it's Bel, the cook, ye're dreamin' about, ye needna throw vitriol into the twa een o' a successful rival. I'm afore ye there, Thinchaffs, in spite o' yer poetry and love valentines. Poetry's a' good enough in its way, but let me warn you, a man can hang himsel' as effectually wi' a rope made o' poetry as wi' yin spun oot o' common hemp. Be advised by me, Gabriel, and tak' oot a city porter's license without loss of time, if ye really mean matrimony."

"Vile pelf again!" sighed the idealistic poet, "the world, and its mean hunger for perishing bread, *will* step in

between the soul and its sublime conception of the beautiful."

"Blow poetry and the beautiful say I," chimed in the wrecked sailor, "tip us a quid o' tobaker, mate, will yez?"

"Conception o' the beautiful!" re-echoed the practical speech-crier, dropping his half-washed shirt into the hot pail in astonishment, "conception o' the beautiful! Hang me up by the twa heels for a bit o' hame-fed mutton if that's no a bricht yin! Whaur's the beauty o' a man washing his yae shirt in a tippenny lodging-house on a Sunday morning, wi' his oot-at-elbows-hand-me-down-coat buttoned up to his shilpit chin; an' his nose an' twa een nippin' wi' saip-suds, an' rinnin' wi' watter like the spoot o' a hillside burn? I can see as faur thro' an inch brod as onybody, but, hang me, Thinchaffs, if I can perceive the spirit o' the beautiful in sic an acute condition o' things as that!"

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the idealistic poet, "the rich man is not necessarily a happy man. A man may be happy with one shirt only, or even with no shirt at all. There was once on a time a great King,—"

"Hear, hear! now we'll have a yarn," put in the wrecked sailor, hitching up his loose pants in true sailor fashion.

"There was once on a time a great King," resumed the poet, "who fell ill of being too well off and having nothing to do. He summoned his two principal Court physicians, who each saw he was in first-rate bodily health, and was sick only from having nothing to do.

"What is the matter with me?" demanded the King.

"You are quite well, I perceive," replied one of the two Court physicians.

"Take off his head to-morrow!" was the King's rejoinder.

"The physician was dragged off and thrust into prison.

"What is the matter with me?" the King next demanded of the second physican.

"You are very ill, I perceive, but could be made well in

a single hour by getting into the shirt of a really happy man,' answered the physician, who had no wish to share the fate of his companion.

"Go and fetch me the shirt of a truly happy man, wherever he is to be found,' said the King to his courtiers.

"They searched everywhere among all classes of people for a thoroughly happy man," the poet continued, "and at last, after a long search, they found a poor ragged tinker sitting laughing loudly, and gaily chatting with a companion on the roadside. Here was their chance to get the shirt of an obviously happy man. The King's courtiers approached, and offered the tinker a hundred pieces of gold for his shirt to cure the King's melancholy. The tinker rolled over in broad and hearty laughter when he heard it.

"Come, come,' said the courtiers, 'will you sell us your shirt? See, there is a hundred pieces of gold for your shirt to cure the King of his melancholy.'

"Ha-ha-ha!" once more laughed aloud the tinker, 'go back and tell your royal master that the happiest man you met to-day had not a shirt to his back!'

"There you are," triumphantly added the poet; "a man's soul is far above linen shirts, as I have often told you. Poetry and the beautiful go hand in hand, and are a thousand miles above twopenny lodgings and Sunday morning shirt-washings in Jean Glancey's infirmary."

"Blow poetry and the beautiful, mates," once more put in the wrecked sailor, with a shrug of the shoulders, "it's hard seas on the weather bow for the most of huz sailor coves while ploughing life's stormy main; but book me for a chicken-hearted land-lubber if I consent to let the briny 'weeps' flow down my sun-tanned cheeks! Tip us a Christian quid o' tobaker, poet, will yez? The blooming 'locker's hempty here," and the wrecked sailor expressively slapped his trouser pockets.

"I cannot stoop to reason with you," said the poet, once

more resuming his washing operations. "Understand, I am not at all of your kidney; neither are you of my ecstatic temperament. You live in a low servile worldly sphere; I cling to the stars."

"Jean Glancey's," said the speech-crier, "the door to the left; twa stairs up."

"No, no," angrily said the rapt poet, "I am not one of the common herd. I live in a world of imagination, of fancy, of beautiful dreams. In a word, I am a poet, I tell you, and I cling to the stars!"

"Ay, when Bel, the cook, chucks ye owre a fat bane to sook," retorted the speech-crier, "it's then ye're in a world o' really beautiful dreams; it's then ye're clingin' in reality to the beautiful stars; isn't that the case, Thinchaffs?"

"Proceed with your base insinuations, vile man," returned the stung poet somewhat warmly, "I tell you I am above your low biscuit-and-cheese philosophy, as the stars are above the earth," and having thus loftily exercised himself, the romantic poet wrung his shirt as dry as his feeble strength of arm would allow, and then shook it out flat to critically survey its cleansed surface.

"Blow biscuits and cheese, say I!" once more sung out the wrecked sailor; "can't yer dry up yer blooming jaw an' chuck a poor fellow a quid o' tobaker? Sling us a Christian chowe, poet, and, so help me Tommy! you can put down Whaler Jack for 250 copies of yer volume of poems—*when they're printed!* I'm a cove wot likes to hencourage hobscure merit, I does."

That was the proverbial last straw which invariably broke Gabriel Thinchaffs' poetic back. He could stand nonsense fairly well, he always declared, and didn't actively object to "funning," even when the barbed joke was pointed at himself. But to joke him on his prospective *volume of poems*, that was in his eyes the one unpardonable sin, the unkindest cut of all. He had once had dreams of a volume and fame,



poor man. What rhymer that ever kicked six clinking lines together hadn't? The dream of a volume and fame, however, were now long entombed in that insatiable grave of poetic ambition, perished hopes. And Thinchaffs could not stand to be joked on the subject. It cut deep into the flesh of his over-sensitive heart. Therefore, when the "wrecked sailor," who had been clamouring in vain for a Christian quid of tobacco, retaliated by offering to subscribe for 250 copies of his volume of poems—*when printed*—poor Thinchaffs lost his head and his temper together, and picking up his newly-wrung shirt, he shoved his hand inside the pail of soap suds and fished up the small bit of soap he had been using, preparatory to vacating the hostile spot.

"Whaler Jack," he then said, assuming a deeply dramatic tone of voice, "you are a person of low instincts, an individual of prosaic mind and ultramarine habits. I cannot stoop to talk with you; good-by!" And having thus delivered himself, the romantic poet walked off.

"Hy there, poet!" shouted the wrecked sailor, "who are yez calling a horse-marine and a low-minded hindividual, eh? You've very spryly taken away the soap, I see, and, blow me for a fresh-water marine, if yer don't take yer pail o' suds along with it; down helm on ye, for a mean land-lubber! *there!*" And, suiting the action to the word, with a powerful swish, Whaler Jack threw the liquid contents of the poet's deserted wash-pail slash over its owner's back. "He shipped that sea neatly, I reckon," laughed Whaler Jack, as he saw the poet emerge from the baptism of sapples like Neptune rising with dripping locks from the bed of the ocean.

"Eh, ye thowless gang o' ne'er-do-weels!" sang out Bel Macpherson, the stout cook, dashing in among the shirtless disputants, with dishevelled hair and a wet dish-clout in her hand; "to think ye'd fling yer dirty shirt-washings owre my clean scullery fluir! The like o't's no on

record, here or faur enough! Oot o' my gaet wi' ye, ye shirtless gangrels! To yer beds till yer linen's dry!" and with great vigour and spirit the buxom cook slashed and lashed the disputants right and left till she had effected a summary clearance of the apartment.

The effect was magical. In two seconds the room was emptied of the ragged shirt-washers, who slunk back to bed in the lump, or crowded round the fire-place till such time as the stout cook had wrung out their half-washed shirts, and dried them at the big kitchen fire.