Birchbrook Mill.

BY JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

A noteless stream the Birchbrook runs
Beneath its leaning trees
That low, soft ripple is its own,
That dull roar is the sea's.

Of human signs it sees alone
The distant church-spire's tip,
And ghost-like, on a blank of gray,
The white sail of a ship.

No more a toiler at the wheel,
It wanders at its will;
Nor dam nor pond is left to tell
Where once was Birchbrook Mill.

The timbers of that mill have fed
Long since a farmer's fires;
His doorsteps are the stones that ground
The harvest of his sires.

Man trespassed here; but Nature lost
No right of her domain;
She waited, but she brought the old
Wild beauty back again.

By day the sunlight through the leaves
Falls on its moist, green sod,
And wakes the violet bloom of spring
And autumn's golden-rod.

Its birches whisper to the wind,
The swallow dips her wings
In the cool spray, and on its bank
The gray song sparrow sings.

PAULINE.

The first thing was to induce Anthony to come to Horace street at an hour suitable for the development of the plot. Ceneri made his preparations; gave his instructions to his confederates, and then wrote to his nephew begging him to call upon him that night and hear his explanation of matters.

Perhaps Anthony mistrusted his relative and his associates more than was suspected. Any way, he replied by declining the invitation, but suggested that the uncle should call upon him instead. Then, by Macari's advice, Pauline was made the innocent means of luring her brother to the fatal house. Ceneri expressed his perfect indifference as to where the meeting took place, but, being very much engaged, postponed it for a day or two. He then told Pauline that as business would keep him from home until late the next night, it would be a good opportunity for her to spend some time with her brother—she had better ask him to come and see her during his absence. As he also wanted to see Anthony she must endeavor to keep him until his return.

Pauline, suspecting nothing, wrote to her brother, and, saying she should be all alone until late at night, begged him to come to her, or, if he would, take her to some place of amusement. They went to the theatre together, and it was 12 o'clock before he brought her back to Horace street. No doubt she begged him to remain with her awhile—perhaps against his will. Awful as the shock of what followed was to the girl it must have been doubly so when she knew that her entreaties had led him to his death.

The brother and sister sat alone for some time; then Ceneri and his two friends made their appearance. Anthony seemed displeased at the encounter, but made the best of matters and greeted his uncle civilly. Macari he simply turned his back upon.

It was no part of Ceneri's plan that any act of violence or restraint should take place in the presence of Pauline. Whatever was to be done should be done when Anthony was about to leave the house. Then he might be seized and conveyed to the cellar; his cries if needful being stifled. Pauline was to know nothing about it. Arrangements had been made for her to go on the morrow to a friend of her uncle's, with whom she was to stay, ignorant of the purport of the business which suddenly called the plotters away.

"Pauline," said Ceneri, "I think you had better go to bed. Anthony and I have some affairs to speak about."

"I will wait until Anthony leaves," she said, "but if you want to talk I will go into the other room."

So saying, she passed through the folding doors and went to the piano, where she sat playing and singing for her own amusement.

"It is too late to talk about business to-night," said Anthony, as his sister left the room.

"You had better take this opportunity. I find I must leave England to-morrow."

Anthony, having no wish to let his uncle escape without an explanation, reseated himself.

"Very well," he said; "but there is no need to have strangers present."

"They are scarcely strangers. They are friends of mine, who will vouch for the truth of what I am going to say."

"I will not have my affairs talked about before a man like that," said Anthony with a motion of contempt toward Macari.

The two men were conversing in a low tone. Pauline was not far off, and neither wished to alarm her by high words or by the appearance of a pending quarrel; but Macari heard the remark and saw the gesture. His eyes blazed and he leaned forward toward young March.

"It may be, in a few days," he said, "you will be willing enough to give me freely the gift you refused a short time ago."

Ceneri noticed that the speaker's right hand was inside the breast of his coat, but this being a favorite attitude of his, thought nothing of it.

Anthony did not condescend to reply. [illegible] man with a look of [illegible]h, no doubt, [illegible] himself with [illegible]

[illegible]ything else," [illegible] all insist that [illegible] under my care. [illegible]une shall become [illegible] beggarly Italian [illegible]d."

[illegible]t words the poor boy took one step toward [illegible] exclamation of rage, [illegible] no oath which might warn his [illegible] rasped in his right hand the long [illegible] steel leaped from its lurking place, [illegible]s Anthony March looked up, and then [illegible]w himself back in his chair to avoid [illegible], the blow was struck downward with [illegible] the force of that strong arm—the point [illegible] the dagger entering just below the collar-[illegible]one and absolutely transfixing the heart. [illegible]nthony March was silenced for ever!

Then, even as he fell, Pauline's song was stopped, and her cry of horror rang through the room. From her seat at the piano she could see what had happened. Is it any wonder that the sight bereft her of her senses?

Macari was standing over his victim. Ceneri was stupified at the crime which in a moment had obviated any necessity for carrying out his wild plot. The only one who seemed in the possession of his wits was Petroff. It was imperative that Pauline should be silenced. Her cries would alarm the neighbors. He rushed forward, and throwing a large woollen sofa-cover over her head, placed her on the couch, where he held her by force.

At that moment I made my frantic entrance—blind had helpless, but, for all they knew, a messenger of vengeance.

Even the ruthless Macari was staggared at my entrance. It was Ceneri who, following the instincts of self-preservation, drew a pistol and cocked it. It was he who understood the meaning of my passionate appeal to their mercy—he who, he averred, saved my life.

Macari, as soon as he recovered from his surprise, insisted that I should share Anthony March's fate. His dagger was once more raised to take human life, whilst Petroff, who had been forced by the new turn of affairs to leave Pauline, pinned me down where I had fallen. Ceneri struck the steel aside and saved me. He examined my eyes and vouched for the truth of my statement. There was no time for recriminations or accusations, but he swore that another murder should not be committed.

Petroff supported him, and Macari at last sullenly yielded, with the stipulation that I should be disposed of in the manner already related. Had the means been at hand I should have been drugged at once; as it was, the old servant, who as yet knew nothing of the tragedy which had taken place, was roused up and sent out in search of the needful draught. The accomplices dared not let me leave their sight, so I was compelled to sit and listen to all their actions.

Why did Ceneri not denounce the murder? Why was he, at least, an accessory after the crime? I can only believe that he was a worse man than he confessed himself to be, or that he trembled at his share in the transaction. After all he had been planning a crime almost as black, and when the truth as to the trust money was known, no jury in the world would have acquitted him. Perhaps both he and Petroff held human life lightly; their hands were certainly not clean from political assassinations. Feeling that a trial must go hard with them, they threw their lot in with Macari's, and at once set about baffling inquiry and hiding all traces of the crime. From that moment there was little to choose between the degrees in criminality of the three men.

Now that they were all sailing in the same boat, they had little doubt of success. Teresa perforce was taken into their confidence. This was no matter, as, devoted to Ceneri, she would have aided in a dozen murders had her master decreed them. First of all, they must get rid of me. Petroff—for Ceneri would not trust me in Macari's hands—went out and found a belated cab. For a handsome consideration the driver consented to lend it to him for an hour and a half. It was still night, so there was no difficulty in carrying my senseless form to it without observation.

Petroff drove off, and having deposited me in a by-way a long distance from the house, returned the cab to its owner and rejoined his companions.

And now for Pauline. Her moans had gradually died away, and she lay in a death-like stupor. The great danger to the accomplices would be from her. Until she recovered nothing could be done save to carry her to her room and place her under Teresa's charge. When she awoke they must decide what course to pursue.

But the pressing thing was, how to make away with the dead body of the murdered man. All sorts of plans were discussed, until one at last was adopted, the very audacity of which no doubt made it a success. They were now growing desperate and prepared to risk much.

Early in the morning a letter was despatched to Anthony's lodging, saying that Mr. March had been taken seriously ill the night before, and was at his uncle's. This served to stop any inquiry from that quarter. In the meantime the poor young fellow had been laid out as decently as possible, and with everything that could be done to suggest a natural death. A doctor's certificate of death was then forged. Ceneri did not tell how the form was obtained. The man he got it from knew nothing of its object. An undertaker was then ordered to send a coffin and a deal case for the same the next night. The body, in Ceneri's presence, was simply placed inside it, with none of the usual paraphernalia, the reason given for such apparent indecency being that it was only a temporary arrangement, as it was to be taken abroad for interment. The undertaker marvelled, but being well paid, held his peace. Then, by the aid of the forged certificate, the proper formalities were complied with, and in two days' time the three men, in the garb of mourners, were travelling to Italy with the body of their victim. There was nothing to stop them, nothing suspicious in their manner or in the circumstances of the case. They actually took the coffin to the town where Anthony's mother died, and they buried the son by the side of the mother, with his name and the date of his death recorded on the stone. Then they felt safe from every body except Pauline.

They were safe even from her. When she at last awoke from her stupor, even Teresa could see that something had gone wrong. She said nothing about the scene she had witnessed; she asked no questions. Her past had vanished. According to the instructions given her, Teresa, as soon as possible, took her to join Ceneri in Italy, and he saw that Macari's crime had deprived the brother of life and the sister of reason. No search or inquiry was made for Anthony March. Carrying out his bold plan to the very letter, Ceneri instructed an agent to take possession of his few personal effects at his lodgings, and to inform the people there that he had died at his house and had been taken to Italy to be buried with his mother. A few friends for a while regretted a companion, and there was an end of the affair. Nothing having been heard of the blind man, it was supposed he had been wise enough to keep his own counsel.

Months and months passed by, whilst Pauline remained in the same state. Teresa took charge of her, and lived with her in Turin until that time when I saw them at San Giovanni. Ceneri, who had no fixed home, saw little of the girl. His presence did not awaken any painful recollections in her mind, but to him the sight of his niece was unbearable. It recalled what he was eager to forget. She never seemed happy in Italy; in her uncertain way she was pining for England. Anxious to get her out of his sight, he had consented that Teresa should take her to London—had, in fact, come to Turin on that particular day to arrange as to their departure. Macari, who, even with a brother's blood between them, considered her in some way his property, accompanied him. He had been continually urging Ceneri to let him marry her, even as she was now. He had threatened to carry her off by force. He had sworn she should be his. She remembered nothing—why should he not wed her?

Bad as Ceneri was, he had recoiled from this. He would even, had it been possible, have broken off all intercourse with Macari; but the men were too deep in each other's secrets to be divided on account of a crime, however attrocious; so he sent Pauline to England. There she was safe from Macari. Then came my proposal, the acceptance of which would take her, at my expense, entirely off his hands and out of his companion's way.

Hence our strange marriage, which even now he justified by saying that should the girl grow attached to any one, should any feeling corresponding to affection be awakened in hear clouded mind—that mind would gradually be built up again.

This, not in his own words, was Ceneri's tale. I now knew all I wanted to know. Perhaps he had painted himself in better colors than he deserved; but he had given me the whole dark history freely and unreservedly, and in spite of the loathing and abhorrence with which he now inspired me, I felt that he had told me the truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOES SHE REMEMBER?

It was time to bring our interview to an end. It had lasted so long that the civil captain had more than once peeped in with a significant look on his face, as much as to say there was such a thing as overstepping the limits of even such an authority as I held. I had no desire to protract the conversation with the convict. The object of my long journey had been attained. I had learned all that I could learn. I knew Pauline's history. The crime had been fully confessed. The man with me had no claim upon my consideration. Even had I felt inclined to help him I had no means of so doing. Why should I linger?

But I did linger for a while. The thought that my rising and giving the signal that my business was finished, would immediately consign the prisoner to that loathsome den from which he had emerged, was inexpressibly painful to me. Every moment I could keep him with me would be precious to him. Never again would he see the face of a friend or acquaintance. He had ceased speaking. He sat with his head bent forward; his eyes resting on the ground. A tattered, haggard, hopeless, wretch; so broken down that one dare not approach him. I watched him in silence.

Presently he spoke; "You can find no excuse for me, Mr. Vaughan?"

"None," I said. "It serms to me there is little to choose between you and your associates."

He rose wearily. "Pauline will recover, you think?" he asked.

"I think—I hope I shall find her almost well on my return."

"You will tell her how you have found me; she may be happier in knowing that Anthony's death has indirectly brought me to this."

I bowed assent to this dreary request.

"I must go back now," he said, with a kind of shiver, and dragging his weary limbs slowly toward the door.

In spite of his sins I could not let the wretched being go without a word.

"Stop a moment," I said. "Tell me if there is anything I can do to make your life any easier?"

He smiled faintly. "You may give me money—a little. I may be able to keep it and buy a few prisoners' luxuries."

I gave him several notes which he secreted on his person.

"Will you have more?" I asked. He shook his head.

"I expect these will be stolen from me before I spend them."

"But is there no way of leaving money with any one for your use?"

"You might leave some with the captain. It may be, if he is kind-hearted and honest, a portion of it may reach me. But even that is doubtful."

I promised to do so, and knew that, whether it reached him or not, I should feel easier for having made the attempt.

"But what will your future be? Where are they taking you, and what will be your life?"

"They are taking us right to the end of Siberia—to Nertchinsk. There I shall be drafted off with others to work in the mines. We go all the way on foot and in chains."

"What an awful fate!"

Ceneri smiled. "After what I have passed through it is Paradise opening before me. When a man offends against the Russian law his one hope is that he may be sent at once to Siberia. That means going from hell to heaven."

"You would if you had lain like me for months, untried and uncondemned. If you had been placed in a cell without light, without aid, without room to move. If you had heard those next to you screaming in their madness—madness brought on by solitary confinement and cruel treatment. If every morning as you woke you had said, 'I, too, shall be an idiot before nightfall.' If you had been frozen, beaten, starved, in order to make you betray your friends; if you had been reduced to such a state that your death warrant would be welcome; then, Mr. Vaughan, you would look forward to and long for the gentle rigors of Siberia. I swear to you, sir," he continued, with more fire and animation than he had yet displayed, "that if the civilized nations of Europe knew one-tenth part of the horrors and deeds in a Russian prison, they would say, 'Guilty or innocent, no human beings shall be tormented like this,' and for the sake of common humanity would sweep the whole accursed Government from the face of the earth!"

"But twenty years in the mines! Is there no escaping?"

"Where could I escape to? Look at the map and see where Nertchinsk is. If I escaped I could only wander about the mountains until I died or until some of the savages around killed me. No, Mr. Vaughan, escapes from Siberia only occur in novels."

"Then you must slave until your death?"

"I hope not. I once gathered together much information respecting Siberian convicts, and, to tell you the truth, was rather disgusted to find how incorrect the common opinion is. Now I can only hope my researches showed me the truth."

"The treatment is not so bad, then?"

"It is bad enough, as you are always at the mercy of a petty tyrant. There is no doubt but for a year or two I must slave in the mines. If I survive the toil, which is very unlikely, I may, by finding favor in the ruler's eyes, be released from further work of that description. I may even be allowed to reside at some town and earn my living. I have great hopes that my professional skill may be of use to me. Doctors are scarce in Asiatic Russia."

Little as he deserved it, my heart echoed his wish; but as I looked at him I felt sure there was small chance of his enduring even a year's toil at the mines.

The door opened and the captain once more looked in. He was growing quite impatient. I had no reason for wishing to prolong the conversation, so I told him I should have finished in a moment. He nodded his head and withdrew.

"If there is anything more I can do let me know," I said turning to Ceneri.

"There is nothing—Stay! one thing. Macari, that villain—sooner or later he will get his deserts. I have suffered—so will he. When that time comes, will you try to send me word? It may be difficult to do so, and I have no right to ask the favor. But you have interest, and might get intelligence sent me. If I am not dead by then it will make me happier."

Without waiting for my reply he walked hastily to the door, and with the sentry at his side was marched off to prison. I followed him.

As the cumbrous lock was being turned he paused. "Farewell Mr. Vaughan," he said. "If I have wronged you I entreat your pardon. We shall meet no more."

"So far as I am concerned I forgive you freely."

He hesitated a moment and then held out his hand. The door was now open. I could see the throng of repulsive, villainous faces—the faces of his fellow-prisoners. I could hear the jabber of curiosity and wonder. I could smell the foul odors coming from that reeking den crowded with filthy humanity. And in such a place as this, with such associates, a man of education, culture and refined taste, was doomed to spend his last days. It was a fearful punishment!

Yet it was well merited. As he stood on the threshold with outstretched hand I felt this. To all intents and purposes the man was a murderer. Much moved as I was by his fate I could not bring myself to grasp his hand. My refusal may have been harsh, but I could not do it.

He saw that I did not respond to his action. A flush of shame passed over his face; he bowed his head and turned away. The soldier took him roughly by the arm and thrust him through the doorway. Then he turned, and his eyes met mine with an expression that haunted me for days. He was gazing thus when the heavy door was shut and hid him from my sight forever.

I turned away sick at heart, perhaps regretting I had added anything to his shame and punishment. I sought my obliging friend, the captain, and received his word of honor that any money I left with him should be expended for the convict's benefit. I placed a considerable sum in his hands, and can only hope that a part of it reached its destination.

Then I found my interpreter, and ordered horses to be at once procured and the tarantass brought out. I would start without a moment's delay for England—and Pauline!

In half an hour all was ready. Ivan and I stepped into the carriage; the yemschik flourished his whip; the horses sprung forward; the bells jingled merrily, and away we went in the darkness, commencing the return journey which counted by thousand of miles. It was only now, when burning to find myself at home, that I realized the fearful distance which lay between me and my love.

A turn of the road soon hid the gloomy ostrog from my sight, but it was not until we were miles and miles away that my spirits recovered anything like their former tone, and it was days before I ceased to think, at nearly every moment, of that terrible place in which I had found Ceneri, and to which I saw him again consigned after my business with him was finished.

As this is not a book of travel I will not recapitulate the journey. The weather nearly all the time was favorable, the roads were in good condition. My impatience forced me to travel almost day and night. I spared no expense; my extraordinary passport procured me horses when other travellers were compelled to wait—my large gratuities made those horses use their best speed. In thirty-five days we drove up to the Hotel Russia at Nijni Novgorod, with the tarantass in such a dilapidated condition that in all probability another stage would have finished its work in this world. I bestowed it, a free gift, upon my guide, who, I believe, sold it immediately for three rubles.

From Nijni by rail to Moscow; from Moscow to St. Petersburg. I only tarried in the capital long enough to pay my respects to Lord ——, and once more thank him for his assistance; then, having collected what luggage I had left there, away for England!

On my road back from Irkutsk I found letters from Priscilla at Tomsk, at Tobolsk and at Perm, also more recently written ones at St. Petersburg. All up to the date of the last was going on well. Priscilla had taken her charge to Devonshire. Having been reared in that county the old woman had a great belief in its virtues. They were at a quiet, but beautiful little watering-place on the north coast, and Priscilla averred that Pauline "was blooming as a rose, and seemed as sensible as Master Gilbert himself."

No wonder after hearing this good news I was eager to reach home—longing, not only to see my wife again, but to see her, as I had never yet seen her, with her mind restored. Would she remember me? How should we meet? Would she at last learn to love me? Were my troubles at an end or only begun? These were the questions which could only be answered when England was reached.

Home at last! How delightful to stand among one's countrymen, and hear nothing but good, intelligible English around one. I am bronzed with exposure to the wind and sun, my beard has grown to a great length; one or two acquaintances I met when I reached London scarcely knew me. In my present trim I could not hope that I should awaken any recollections in Pauline's mind.

By the aid of a razor and fresh apparel I was soon converted to a fairly good semblance of my former self, and then, without having appraised even Priscilla of my return, I started for the west, to see what fate had in store for me.

What is a run across England after a man has made such a journey as my recent one? Yet, that pitiful hundred and fifty miles seemed to me as long as a thousand did a month ago. The last few miles I had to go by coach, and, although four splendid horses spun us along, each individual mile seemed as long as a Siberian stage. But the journey was at last ended, and, leaving my luggage in the coach office, I sallied forth, with a beating heart to find Pauline.

I went to the address given in Priscilla's letter. The house was a quiet, little building, nestling on a wooded bank, with a sloping garden in front, full of late summer flowers. Honeysuckle twined round the porch, great sunflowers stared fiercely from the beds, and carnations sweetened the air. As I waited for the door to be opened I had time to approve Priscilla's choice of a resting-place.

I inquired for Mrs. Drew. She was not at home—had gone out with the young lady some time ago, and would not be back until evening. I turned away and went in search of them.

It was early in autumn, but the leaf showed no signs of fading. Everything was green, fresh and beautiful. The sky was cloudless, and a soft balmy air fanned my cheek. I paused and looked around me before I decided in which direction to go. Far below my feet lay the little fishing village; its houses clustered round the mouth of the noisy, brawling stream which ran down the valley, and leaped joyously into the sea. On either hand were great tors, and behind them inland hills covered with woods, and in front of me stretching away and away was the calm green sea. The scene was fair enough, but I turned away from it. I wanted Pauline.

It seemed to me that on such a day as this the shady woods and the running stream must offer irresistible attractions; so I found my way down the steep hill, and began walking up the riverside, whilst the merry stream danced past me, throwing its rich brown peat-stained waters into a thousand little cascades as it shot over and foamed round the great bowlders which disputed its passage.

I followed its course for about a mile—now clambering over moss-grown rocks, now wading through ferns, now forcing my way through pliant hazel boughs—then in an open space on the opposite bank I saw a girl sitting sketching. Her back was toward me, but I knew every turn of that graceful figure well enough to feel sure she was my wife.

If I had needed extra assurance I had but to look at her companion, who sat near her and appeared to be dozing over a book. I should have recognized that shawl of Priscilla's a mile away—its like has never been known on earth.

Hard as I found it to do so, I resolved not to make my presence known to them. Before I met Pauline I wanted to talk to Priscilla and be guided by her report as to my future method of proceeding. But in spite of my determination I yielded to the temptation of drawing nearer—from where I stood I could not see her face—so I crept on inch by inch till I was nearly opposite the sketcher, and, half hidden by the undergrowth, I stood watching her to my heart's content.

There was the hue of health upon her cheek—there was the appearance of health in every movement, and as she turned and spoke a few words to her companion there was that in her look and in her smile which made my heart bound. The wife I returned to was a different being from the girl I had married.

She turned and looked across the stream. Carried away by my joy I had entirely emerged from my lurking place. With the river between us our eyes met.

She must in some way have remembered me. Were it but as in a dream my face must have seemed familiar to her. She dropped her pencil and sketch-book and sprung to her feet before Priscilla's exclamation of surprise and delight was heard. She stood looking at me as though she expected I would speak or come to her, whilst the old servant was sending words of welcome across the noisy stream.

Had I wished to retreat, it was now too late. I found a crossing-place and in a minute or two was on the opposite bank.

Pauline had not moved, but Priscilla ran to meet me and almost shook my hands off.

"Does she remember—does she know me?" I whispered, as I disengaged myself and walked toward my wife.

"Not yet; but she will. I am sure she will, Master Gilbert."

Breathing a prayer that her prophecy might come true, I reached Pauline's side and held out my hand. She took it without hesitation, and raised her dark eyes to mine. How did I refrain from clasping her to my heart!

"Pauline, do you know me?"

She dropped her eyes. "Priscilla has talked of you. She tells me you are a friend, and that until you came I must be content and ask no questions."

"But do you not remember me? I fancied you knew me just now."

She sighed. "I have seen you in dreams—strange dreams." As she spoke a bright blush spread over her cheek.

"Tell me the dreams," I said.

"I cannot. I have been ill, very ill, for a long time. I have forgotten much—everything that happened."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Not now—not now," she cried eagerly. "Wait, and it may all come back."

Had she an inkling of the truth? Were the dreams she spoke of but the struggles of growing memory? Did that bright ring which was still on her finger suggest to her what had happened? Yes, I would wait and hope.

(To be continued.)

In some parts of North Carolina candles and kerosene lamps are still considered articles of luxury, while resinous torches are to be had gratis.