

Highland Park News

VOL. I.

HIGHLAND PARK, ILL., NOVEMBER, 1874.

NO. 8.

THE DEAD POPLAR.

My sympathetic tree is dead,
The "Poplar" loved so well,
The falling of its withered leaves
Was like a funeral knell.
All tremulous and full of nerves
To me they ever seemed,
And in the softest summer calm
Still quivering they gleamed.
Mute friend! it gave me joy untold
To view thee standing there
Within thy quiet, sheltered nook,
Thine was a beauty rare.
I love the Maples, towering high
In majesty and pride,
I love the Weeping Willow near,
And Mountain Ash beside.
Each tree within our garden ground,
Each shrub, and plant, and flower,
Has love and care, but never shared
My Poplar's gentle power.
The evergreen—so beautiful,
Hard-hearted still appear,
And all unmoved, they seem to me—
When winter winds are drear.
The trees around, with naked arms
Upturned, for pity seek,
They, surely, do not care for me
Like my fair Poplar, meek.
Alas! the early autumn wind
Its leafless branches sway,
No more its presence gives me joy,
I mourn its swift decay.
And I must bid it sad farewell—
Its joys are with the past,
How soon earth's brightest blessings flee
And leave our sky o'er cast.
Beyond these scenes of change and pain,
Of sorrow, blight and gloom,
I turn me to that fairer land
Of verdure and of bloom,
Where, on the banks of that sweet stream,
Forth springing from God's Throne,
The wondrous "Tree of Life" doth stand,
In beauty here unknown.
Its leaf shall never fade nor fall,
It knows no withering breath,
Its branches nevermore decay,
Nor feel the touch of death.
And when beneath its healing shade,
By living fountains led,
I shall be more than satisfied
Though earthly joys are dead.

HIGHLAND PARK, Oct. 23, 1874.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

CHAPTER I.

Not the gorgeous curtain of the theater, but the domestic curtain which shades from public view the scenes of every day life, its joys, and sorrows.

One dark night in October, which month has been so beautiful, and whose star-studded sky has so seldom been dimmed with clouds, I was walking slowly homeward, alone from a pleasant company of friends. The bright tinted forest trees, which, by the light of day, were so beautiful, were all one sea of blackness. The leaves rustled in the stillness, seemingly to be conscious of loneliness, and shuddering at the darkness. I scarce could keep the sidewalk, and frequently stepped off on the right and left. The stillness was oppressive; I sighed for policemen, and city lamps. As I proceeded slowly along, my mind reverted to a subject of conversation among the company which I had left. "A hard winter for the

poor." I wondered if there were any in our little village who had real fear of suffering, when work should stop, and the fierce blasts of winter should blow. I thought not, and was reassured, unconsciously, as I passed the house of Deacon Johnstone and my path was lighted by the brightness which poured in generous floods of light from his large windows from garret to basement, dispelling the gloom, and denying the charge of want. I paused to admire and for an instant enjoy the cheering influence; the amber curtains were not fully drawn, the window was slightly raised, and I could view the sumptuous parlors, and the deacon seated cozily at an elegant table with Mrs. Johnstone beside him busy with fancy work. It was a picture of comfort, and it made me feel cheerful and I lingered. The Deacon, you know, is a very upright man, he owes no man anything. He is a successful merchant, he attends to his business and his business takes the care of him. He dresses in black broadcloth and wears seven shirts a week, and a thousand dollar diamond proclaims him a man of the first water. His early education was neglected. He knows better the price of merchandise, than the merit of either ancient or modern poets or the importance of any science, philosophy, or art. But he is a good man, and an orthodox man. He was born so and is satisfied to follow where he supposes his fathers have gone. At ten o'clock sharp his well fed and illuminated cheeks press his immaculate pillow. He is systematic in all things. He is a deacon and is proud of it. His father was a deacon too. He is a pillar of the church: he pays a round price for a good pew, and he uses it well; his well dressed form adorns the corner seat every service, morning and evening, summer and winter. He contributes a regular sum for the "Home and Foreign missions," but never to irresponsible beggars or for irregular cases of suffering, but turns all such off as not on his list of charities. He is highly respected and the minister always seeks his advice and listens with open-eyed approval to his wise counsels. This is the cozy man I see.

His wife is his counterpart—his mirrored likeness; she worships him, as he admires himself. I was about to pass on when I was attracted by the deacon's heavy voice who stretched himself back, and addressed Mrs. Johnstone. Well wife, we should be very grateful, that the kind Father watches over us so generously in such hard times as these; I feel very comfortable that we have all things stored away for the winter, and that we are sure against being troubled to get in supplies in a small way, from hand to mouth. No retailer can make a cent off me—all at whole sale cash down prices—great difference, twenty per cent. at least. It's a disgrace to buy at retail. We are all right for the winter! 30 tons of coal, all kinds of flour, bin full of splendid potatoes, sugars, syrups, teas, coffee, everything complete at cash down prices; wife let us be thankful. Yes my dear, says Mrs. Johnstone, I am especially, that all the children, and ourselves are all ready, such nice woollens and at such low prices. John and Charley, like their furs, and overcoats, so much, and Amanda is delighted with her seal skin sacque. Oh, yes! our heavenly Father is very good to us Mr. Johnstone. I feel it, oh, yes!

But, wife, we must be economical these hard times, though my business never was more prosperous, I think I will get along without Peter this winter, and let the cook make the fires, and Isaac the coachman, must work for less or we will make a change, and you can reduce the wages

of your domestic help I am sure, for this, every one says, is to be a hard winter. You must not hire the extra laundress to help, our work is not so very heavy and you can dispense, now, with the sewing girl; that you are hiring. We must set an example of economy to those whom our Maker has been less partial to.

Yes, dear, I think we must.

I passed on and meditated not fully pleased.

CHAPTER I.

What I had seen and heard while gazing, without intention, behind the curtain of this sumptuous abode of Deacon Johnstone, while it at first cheered me when I merely saw, now, what I heard confused me, and I hardly understood the situation. I strolled along absorbed in thought, the scene of plenty, satisfaction, and expressed gratitude for what they themselves were to enjoy, the sharp criticism and covetous greed when the necessities of others, dependent upon them were thought of, and the hard times only being considered with reference to themselves, when they admitted that they were being blessed, while most people were forced to economize, spoiled all the pleasure I had experienced from the brightness which flowed out into the darkness from this house of abundance. I had stumbled along into a less frequented neighborhood where the walks were poor, and the homes of no pretence, when suddenly a piteous groan and then an agonized wail of pain or sorrow, startled me, and chilled me with horror, I stopped trembling where I stood; loud sobs and the same agonized cry of a woman pierced the air, then the hoarse voice of a man trying to soothe the one who was suffering, or dying, in awful agony. I was passing a little one story cottage on the public road, a dim light glimmered in the window over hung with a shawl in which was a large rent and within I could see forms moving about. I tremblingly but hurriedly went and looked in and all was clear, sorrow, and pity and a yearning compassion for the sufferers in the scene drove out the fear that overcame me when the piteous tones of agony first thrilled through me in the dark stillness of the night.

What I saw alas, is no new thing in the world, but something that humanity protests against, and can never get used to, never, and the kind Father who made the bright sun for all, the broad fertile fields for all, who filled the sea and rivers for all, who furnishes always enough for all, of both that which is useful, and also that which is beautiful, must look down in wonder at the strange suffering of humanity amid so much plenty. Here was as sad a sight as the eyes of God or man can look upon. A family driven by poverty to the last extremity of want. A father, a mother and five little children crowded into a house of two rooms, without glass in the windows, one bed, a table, a stove, and two broken chairs. On the table burned dimly a candle stuck in a bottle, two children sat upright on the bed crying with fear, two older ones stood in mute despair behind the table in a corner and watched, like animals their father and mother. The mother a tall slender woman with dark hair, eyes deep sunken, a thin care worn face of more than ordinary character, was thrown backward as she gazed wildly up to the ceiling in a vacant stare, uttering the wild sobs and awful cries that had so startled me. The husband walked restlessly up and down the floor, his hands folded behind him; his nails set deep into the flesh of his hands, and a mingled look of desperation and despair upon his countenance. The cause, the way

(CONTINUED ON FIFTH PAGE.)