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Selected Tales.

From the Southern Ladies' Book. A NIGHT ON THE MISSISSIPPI

It was on the 12th of February, 184—, a cold and cheerless night as ever fell upon this sorrow-clouded earth. On the west stretched out the broad, interminable forests of Arkansas; on the east the fertile State of Mississippi; between, with tawny mane, and wild terrific roar, the mighty lion river rushed in solemn grandeur to the Ocean.

Oppressed by the weight of accumulated sorrows, I had left my home, to find, if it were possible, amid the pleasing vicissitudes of travel, some Lethan Draught, some bliss nepenthe for the anguish prying so relentlessly on my spirits. With all the chambers of my soul hung with the sable paraphernalia of grief, I mixed with the denizens of other climes—"among them but not of them,"—a silent but observant spectator of their actions and emotions.

A large and merry crowd of passengers were assembled in the spacious saloon of one of those first class steamers which ply upon the waters of the yellow Mississippi. Glistening chandeliers swung their crystal pendants, and waved their wings or legs over a scene of almost Persian splendor and magnificence. Damask divans and graceful ottomans were scattered around in rich profusion; an opulence of array, heightened in effect by multiplied reflection from the costly mirrors, lining the whole length of the room. A handsome rose wood piano stood on one side, covered with scattered music, and supporting a forsaken guitar; for the services of two celebrated harpists, fellow travellers, together with those of a vagrant fiddler, having been brought in requisition for the evening, it required not a prophet to predict that there was to be—"No sleep till morn, when youth and beauty meet.

To chase the glowing hours with flying feet! Lonely and spare, I leaned against the stern of the boat, partially shaded by hangings of brocade, musing upon the folly and vanity of short-sighted men.—Within a gay saloon, the violet's cherry strain—the joyous dance—the without the pithy clouds, the roaring winds, the restless wave. As I gazed with straining eye to penetrate the outer world of gloom, the whole sky, like an immense wall of starless gloom, loomed up with seeming threat of instant destruction; every timber of our vessel creaked and shook beneath the pressure of steam which she met the foaming waves and the fitful gust; while between the gaspings of that strange mysterious genius of fire and water I could distinctly hear the sullen roar of the turbid flood beneath—that dark, broad interminable grave of hapless humanity which never cries "it is enough."

How soon, thought I, these fair and graceful forms, pale and fragile as wild water lilies, may be borne along this wide and turbid current, in all the helplessness of death! How soon the rush of giant waves may quench the brilliancy of these dazzling lights! How soon the luxuriant layments of mirrors and rosewood may sink beneath the silence of the river's slime, and of our stately steamer, the requiem be—

"See, weed is in her palace halls, She rides the surge no more."

The twisted trunk of some old forest tree rooted amid the sands beneath, may suddenly pierce that slender plank, which is our sole division from Eternity. The channel lost in this impenetrable darkness we may dash in pieces on the melancholy shore, or fate will more terrific, go rapidly down, out in the midst of this broad ocean-river, in wild collision with a fellow-spirit, on its deathful flood.

It was a source of thankfulness with the late lamented Henry Clay, that his Creator had given him a soul incapable of fear; from the wrath of any being but himself; and if the wrath of the Deity be evidenced in frowning skies, the voice of shouting winds, and the heaving together of angry waves, it seemed to me that then and there, even that brave and lofty spirit might have stood mute and veiled, while the "Almighty" form was passing itself in tempests. As for myself, I felt with fear, and my mind almost unconsciously began revolving the chances of escape, in case of any emergency. I looked out the door, it shined in intensity, not the wind in violence. It was bitterly cold. Alas,

that freezing flood, the most expert swimmer could scarcely hope to gain the shore. With a vivid presentiment of danger, amounting almost to certainty, I sought my state room, where I fervently commended myself to the protection of Him, who rides upon the storm and rules the rage of deep. I placed my preserver where it could be conveniently reached, and returned to my solitary station.

I had been so busily engaged with my own thoughts and the appearances with which around me, that the gay company, laughing and chatting around me, had made as little impression as so many moths circling in the light of a brilliant lamp, or I had experienced but a momentary astonishment at their total indifference to, or ignorance of the outward gloom. Most of them, and indeed all the lady passengers, I presume were unconscious of its existence; for the day had, until the latter part of the evening, been a fair and cloudless lapse of sunshine; but on the countenances of two or three elderly gentlemen, I thought I could discern a slight shade of anxiety, which deepened as they returned from frequent observation upon the guards. Such indications were, however, unheeded, where the dreamy harp and the thrilling viol were steeping the soul into delicious forgetfulness of earth; and they, who bounded so gaily on the springing boards, could not know that they were quivering and straining, not beneath the tread of dancing feet, but under the redoubled pressure of steam, and before the buffeting pinions of the blast.

An old gentleman for whom I had formed quite a friendship, entered the side door of the cabin, and approaching, seated himself upon the divan at my side. You have been out, said I, observing the unpropitious weather? "Exactly," was the reply. I have been a constant passenger upon this river, for the last twenty years, and I do not remember to have stemmed it upon a more wretched looking night than this.

"I am surprised at our captain," said I, "for running on such a night. It looks very much like the lives of so many fellow beings. I wonder that some of the passengers do not request him to lay by till morning?" "They have—several have urged him to do so, but he persists in saying there is no danger in running. In truth the river is high, and there is not very much fear of snags at any rate and he declares that his pilot is perfectly acquainted with the channel, and that we are just as safe here as we would be tied to the shore. But I suspect," says my companion, "the fact is, the suddenness of the storm has taken the captain by surprise, and in this impenetrable darkness, it would now be impossible to make a landing. However, don't be alarmed, the moon rises at ten, and it is possible the clouds may break, and give us a clear night after all."

"Oh, no, I am not alarmed. I know it is best to preserve one's presence of mind, when surrounded by danger, and then you know, you may console yourself with the reflection that it is only the body that is in jeopardy."

"No," said he, "I don't know any such thing; I wish I did."

Such a remark surprised me exceedingly; I had often noticed him perusing the scriptures, and I observed that he was a very devout christian, I thought.

"Oh, no, far from it, I read the Bible as a literary curiosity, and with the hope of discovering the truth, if it is there; but I will leave you now, as I see you are as brave a soldier as I."

It was a sad thought, that my silver-haired friend had passed through nearly three score years, without discovering the truth of revelation and the beauty of holiness; but I could but hope and believe that so gentle a spirit as his appeared to be would at last be led into the paths of peace.

Insensibly I began watching the gay surrounding groups of revelers, believing at least, so far with my friend, as to conclude it useless to harrow my soul with images of what might not occur after all, as he said. There was, among our many fair passengers, one who had from the first, interested me deeply. She was from Florida, that lovely land of flowers, and the warm tint of its glowing sun had been left upon her rosy cheek, and amid the rich masses of her waving hair. She had been at a boarding school in New York to receive the finish of her education, and after visiting the Northern Lakes, was returning home under the protection of her brother. Our acquaintance had progressed rapidly, for my own sad spirit rejoiced to gather light from the constant joyousness reigning upon her broad open brow, and welling up forever from the depth of her bright blue eyes.

She was dancing at the time, with a distinguished looking young man, whose becoming uniform, had I not previously known the fact, would have announced his destination to be the standard of his country, which was floating upon the frontiers of Mexico, heurt by a Spanish fleet.

harmonious contrast of physical perfection! Milman was tall, shaft-like as an Indian chief and almost as dark, with masses of midnight curls, clustering over his olive temples, and lending even a darker hue to the large shadowy eyes beneath; while the many graces with which he moved through the measure had evidently been attuned to the martial roll of the "soul-stirring drum," and the shrill pipings of the ear piercing fife. My little Alice was a very fair, light and airy as a sun-beam. Her height was very nearly five feet, three inches above mediocrity, but her proportions were so perfectly symmetric, that she seemed considerably lower. She appeared to have had the most accomplished instructors in dancing, but to have possessed a genius that scorned and rose above the rigid geometrical rules of art.—Nature alone breathed through every movement.

"Like the waving of boughs stepped the graceful and free, Like the bending of flowers above the blue sea."

She was dressed with extreme simplicity, yet in the perfection of taste. A close habit of dark gray cloth, fitted high in the neck, displayed to the best advantage her beautifully turned bust and falling shoulders. A tiny ruff of fluted cambric rose around her delicate throat, bound by a band of black velvet, in which glittered a small but handsome diamond pin. Similar bands and ruffles confined her wrists and shaded her exquisitely shaped hands. It was her usual traveling costume, but I thought as she moved there with her rich masses of chestnut hair, carefully gathered back with a simple comb of twisted shell, a few rebellious ringlets floating down her temples here and there, as if to revel in the free sunshine of her spirit, that the most recherche costume to be of rich brocades and gorgeous pearls could not have added a single ray of light to the lovely picture.

Occasionally, as she lifted her smiling features to those of her companion, I could discern rushing across her mirror-like floating up from her lucid eyes, a flitting shadow which I had not before observed upon her countenance—a deep, dream-like inflection of thought, soft and fleeting as the momentary glow cast upon the white walls of a sun-lighted chamber by the pinions of a passing bird. It was not apprehension; she, like the rest who led the gay seductive dance, heard not the strife of elements without, but, quaffing in rich bursts of golden music, forgot that there was a world beyond our cabin walls.

Milman and herself had; until within a few days past, been ignorant even of the existence of the other; but there was something in the manner of Alice, a "je ne sais quoi," which, though perfectly feminine, would break through the little conventional knowledge she possessed, and betray that she had already suffered her heart to dwell with unusual pleasure upon the graces and assiduous of her fellow traveler. On the contrary, there was nothing in the deportment of Milman which could furnish a clue to the strictest scrutiny by which to determine whether or not his attentions to Alice were more than a warm sentiment of friendship, or at most a passing fancy which began and would end with their traveling acquaintance.

He was evidently an accomplished man of the world, whom at an age not very much under thirty, had thought, read and reflected much, and who had moreover enjoyed the fairest opportunities for studying that intricate volume, human nature. He had mingled in the best society in one of our large northern cities, and was doubtless accustomed to breathe in the ear of beauty complimentary phrases, and flowery nothings, or, as Erin's Bard more prettily expresses,

"To sigh yet feel no pain, To weep, yet scarce know why To sport an hour with beauty's chin Then throw it idly by."

If his eyes followed the fairy steps of this companion through the dance, nothing was involved thereby; so did mine, as in fact did everybody's. If he lingered around her at the guitar, when she charmed company in to silence with the purple-like faultlessness of her voice, he could also rise and lead Miss Arabella Rio to the piano, or immediately become a witness to the absorption in a game of chess with Miss McFarland. He was a mystery also, for my poor little Alice! he did seem rather to prefer her society, but perhaps it was the interest with which the idle school-boy regards the fragile butterfly as it flutters under his hand, and far too faintly evinced he warranted her in bestowing upon him so valuable a gift as her fresh, unworldly heart. But my observations had come too late for warning, even had I been disposed to give it; he had already taken possession of her soul, as some gallant ship bursts into seas where barbers never sailed before.

The musicians called out, "Come a good old-fashioned Virginia reeling dance now to Alice, and charming frolic, utter contrast to all she had been accustomed to see in the proudest stiffs of the orchestra; the bobbing dumplings of hope, the scolding, and the spinning plumes, that of which whirling which would I touch

ancers from a reckless Byron. Free and graceful as a disenfranchised bird, she glided in airy cyclods through its winding mazes, her cheeks flushed with the exercise, and smiles of almost infantile delight breaking over her bow-like lips, and dimpling the soft whiteness of her chin.—Milman was still her partner, and I wondered if it were possible that those deep unfathomable eyes were not drinking in the sunshine of that joyous face, and like shaded camera obscura, painting its lovely lineaments upon his soul in deep and imperishable line of light and beauty.

I could not see his face, but in a sudden turn of the flying dance I caught the expression of hers. He was retaining her hand for a moment, as he bent down to utter some remark, and that same ineffable look of angelic sorrow, which I had before observed—that shadow from the bright wings of the bird of paradise—hovered for an instant over her fair white brow, and threw a beautiful gleaming on what before had seemed almost too rapturous, too intently cloudless for contemplation.

I could not catch the slightest tone that was said, but I saw full well that love was breathing its various lay of mournful swells and joyous symphonies, "its constant chorus of continual change," across the unswept harp-strings of her being.—What a look was that which she turned upon him! The native sunlight of her spirit seemed striving to gush up through its bright blue windows, and penetrate the impalpable cloud of sweet sadness floating over them—her lips, too, quivering with new and unusual emotion, seemed struggling to arch into their wonted smiles of merriment, as if they pendulated between shadow and sunshine.

I question, however, if Milman took in the whole of this reply, for suddenly a wild terrific shock lifted our steamer out of the water, and dashed her backwards up the stream with fearful violence. Another and another shock, upturning tables and chairs, destroyed every thing like perpendicularity in our cabin; and at the same time, a spicily boom, like the report of leaping in long and thundering reverberations upon the sullen waves of the Mississippi. Then succeeded a slow creeping from side to side, like the rocking motions of a settling ship, which produced the most sickening and deathlike sensations.

Instantly all was confusion and distress; wild shrieks broke from many a pallid lip. Some, who had been thrown prostrate, remained kneeling with clasped hands, in all the apathy of despair; others, frantic with alarm, flew in purposeless agony up and down the cabin, while a few found relief from fear in the embrace of insensibility.

It flashed upon me in a moment that no time was to be lost in reaching the guards. The only hope for safety was, that the cabin would part from the hull and float off, in which case our sole refuge would be the deck above. Already it seemed to me that I could hear the gurgling of the waters rising beneath my feet; another moment would bear eternity upon its wings. I could not have stood motionless for more than a second of time, but in that tiny atom of measurement, my whole past life, a vast and many-colored panorama, flew in rapid review before my vision, which seemed suddenly endowed with fearful ubiquity, for its very minutest delineations; while I seemed spiritually to stand afar off upon some invisible eminence and behold my own destruction as swift and wild as the melancholy absorption of some unrecorded meteor in the fathomless depths of midnight chaos.

I shuddered. Loudly exclaiming "The deck! the deck!" I rushed out upon the guards. Milman pressed out behind me, leading almost bearing, the lovely form of Alice. "Fear not," I heard him say, "trust to me: I will save you or we perish together."

We stood, all three hesitating a moment. To our eyes, blinded by the glare we had just left, wave, sky and shore were alike undistinguishable. The keen, cold wind blustering around us, dashed the mad spray in our faces, and pressed the wild thought upon our come as gold as that fearful tide which flowed around and beneath us.

"The deck is utterly hope," said I; "let us breath one prayer, commending ourselves—"

"You are right," interrupted Milman; "let me lift you, Alice."

dark forms were struggling for existence amid the battling waves, while despairing cries of "Save me! save me!" rose from the gurgling foam and pierced our listening hearts with anguish. Just below our feet the battered chimneys and half-submerged cabin of a gallant steamer were racing on the waves a mournful wreck. Her gorgeous chandeliers were still swinging in melancholy mockery above the waters; her hull had gone swiftly down with many a perishing mortal.

We stood gazing in speechless horror on the fearful drama. Like the writhing anaconda, sinking into apathetic repose after the demolition of his prey, the glassy river rolled with sinister smiles above its victims, and settled into calm tranquility beneath the cold rays of the pitiless moon. Those wild despairing cries were hushed forever.

With hearts awe-stricken and oppressed by all we had witnessed simultaneously, we turned to enter the cabin. But it all was now tranquil without, a wild admixture of pain and grief, of sorrow and suffering, which no pen could describe, awaited us within. More than thirty wretched objects were roaming restlessly up and down our cabin, wringing their hands, either in the anguish of mental woe or the agony of physical suffering. The helpless passengers of the ill-fated Swan, who had been rescued from a watery grave, shivering in dripping garments, they stood, bewailing a cherished wife or a cherub child sunk beneath the rushing waves; or with chilled and lacerated limbs, they mingled howls and curses with the most piteous and impatient imprecations for relief.

Involuntarily I drew my hands across my brow, to shut out the harrowing spectacle. How fervently did I there offer up my thanks to Him, who had mercifully preserved us from a similar fate!

But there was no time for inaction.—Our own passengers were still paralyzed with fear. Everything had transpired so rapidly that most were yet under the impression that we were sinking, nor knew boat had sustained but very little damage.

Prompt assistance was required for the unfortunate survivors, and few were in a condition to offer it. Alice was the only lady who seemed to have preserved any presence of mind. Milman was near her, agitated, and, for the first time that I had ever seen him so, deprived of self-control; yet it was evidently not the effect of fear.

Our captain and officers were, with generous humanity, making every effort to alleviate the suffering of the unfortunate passengers. There was a demand for scissors, to cut away the lacerated skin and flesh hanging in shreds from some unfortunate sufferer's arm. Alice sprang to seek the article required.

"You set me a good example," said Milman. "I have some little skill in surgery myself—and now is the time for its exertion."

It was well that he had, for the only medical character on board was confined to his state-room by illness, and unable to afford the least assistance. Milman, however, immediately assumed the command of affairs, and, like a ruling spirit, infused something like system into the wild disorder and confusion reigning around.—With perfect self-reliance, he applied his own remedies, dressing their wounds with the most careful tenderness, and at length succeeding, to some extent, in mitigating the intense anguish of the sufferers.

Alice, too, stood near, pale, and with compressed lips, yet energetic and useful truly "a ministering angel."

It is only such scenes of uncommon trial which shadow forth the real lineaments of character, "as darkness shows us worlds of lights we never saw by day." I had supposed that Milman, from constant exposure to the harsh light of fashionable society, had become merely a brilliant, but cold and unimpressible crystallization, whose indurated spirit could scarcely move out of its own sphere, to sympathize very deeply with the sorrows of humanity; nor had I dreamed of discovering such strength of will and powers of self-command in the character of my merry little Alice. But how mistaken! Of all our large complement of passengers, they, alone, seemed actuated by the tenderest spirit of compassion, and capable of rendering efficient and valuable aid.

Unfortunately, however, with many assistance was of no avail. During the night, more than a dozen had found relief from suffering in death. We found their graves that morning, but upon the solitary shore; no band of mourners was there, no prayers were said, no hymns were sung, but a strain of melancholy winds swept howling by, the silvery cotton-woods above were whispering in sorrowful tones, and the great High Priest, among the rivers of earth, chanted a solemn requiem at their hasty burial.

no space for extended adieus or parting scenes; one kiss upon her snowy brow, a whispered farewell, and we were sun-dered.

As the boat swung back into the river, she was out upon the guards. The same gray traveling habit displayed the exquisite contour of her figure. The rosy rays of the setting sun fell like impalpable worshippers, around her, tingling the waves of her shining hair, and blending with the kindred lucidity of her joyous countenance. "Upon the hill I turned to take one last fond look," Milman was standing near her; he raised his hat; her fairy-like fingers threw me a kiss across the waters, and as they floated away in the lengthening distance, the deepening twilight gathered around, and I saw them no more.

Several months afterwards, I was seated in my own little vine-clad portico, watching the gorgeous exit of the god of day, and listening to the thousand bird-tuned harps which thrilled the dark magnolia trees around me. Memory was busily engaged in linking her chain with the thoughts of my bright and beautiful fellow-traveler, and in retouching the lines she had left upon my soul, when I saw her last, transcendent in her own loveliness, and glittering in the gorgeous mantle of the departing day-god. I could see her out upon the guards again, bending to throw me a kiss, as the vessel, fair and graceful as a swan, glanced swiftly down the stream; her lover was standing at her side, and again I watched them melting in the clustering twilight softly as the bright twin stars of heaven fade before the pinions of the purple rain-mist.

They were peopling my reveries, when by a singular coincidence, my uncle handed me a delicately scented envelope, bearing the Post mark, "Tallahassee, Florida."

"From Alice!" I exclaimed; "coming events cast their shadows before; I was just thinking of her!"

I hastily tore open the envelope; it contained two wedding cards, one bearing at its home, "Trinity Meeting, High St. Tallahassee," the other, in bold and decided calligraphy, "Clarence Milman."

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT PIERCE.

MY COUNTRYMEN:—It is a relief to feel that no heart but my own can know the personal regret and bitter sorrow over which I have been borne, to a position so suitable for others rather than desirable for myself.

The circumstances under which I have been called for a limited period to preside over the destinies of the Republic, fill me with a profound sense of responsibility, but with nothing like shrinking or apprehension.

I repair to the post assigned me, not as to one sought, but in obedience to the unhesitating expression of your will—answerable only for a fearless, faithful and diligent exercise of my best powers.

I sought to be, and am, truly grateful for the rare manifestation of the nation's confidence; but this, so far from lightening my obligations, only adds to their weight. You have summoned me in my weakness, you must sustain me by your strength.

When looking for the fulfillment of reasonable requirements, you will not be unmindful of the great changes which have occurred, even within the last quarter of a century, and the consequent augmentation and complexity of the duties imposed in the administration both of our home and foreign affairs.

Whether the elements of inherent force in the republic have kept pace with her unparalleled progression in territory, population and wealth, has been the subject of earnest thought and discussion on both sides of the ocean.

planted their standard where it has stood against the dangers which have threatened from abroad, and internal agitations which have at times fearfully menaced at home. They proved themselves equal to the solution of the great problem, to understand which their minds had been illuminated by the dawning light of the revolution.

The object sought was not a thing dreamed of—it was a thing realized.—They had exhibited not only the power to achieve, but what all history affirms to be so much more unusual, the capacity to maintain it.

The oppressed throughout the world from that day to the present have turned their eyes hitherward, not to find those lights extinguished or to fear that they should wane, but to be constantly cheered by their steady and increasing radiance.—In this our country has, in my judgment, thus far fulfilled its highest duty to suffering humanity.

It has spoken, and will continue to speak, not only by its words, but by its acts, the language of sympathy, encouragement and hope to those who earnestly listen to tones which pronounce for the largest national liberty. But, after all, the most animating encouragement and potent appeal for freedom will be its own history its trials, and its triumphs.

Pre-eminently, the power of our advocacy reposes in our example; but no example, be it remembered, can be powerful for lasting good, whatever apparent advantages may be gained which is not based upon the eternal principles of right and justice.

Our fathers decided for themselves, both upon the hour to declare and the hour to strike. They were their own judges of the circumstances under which it became them to pledge to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors, for the acquisition of the priceless inheritance transmitted to us. The energy with which that great conflict was opened, and under the guidance of a manifest and beneficent Providence, the uncomplaining endurance which characterized all the counsels of the early fathers. One of the most impressive evidences of that wisdom is to be found in the act, that the actual working of our system has dispelled a degree of solitude which at the outset disturbed bold hearts and far-reaching intellects. The apprehension and dangers from extended territory, multiplied States, accumulated wealth, and augmented population, has proved to be unfounded. The stars upon your banner have become nearly three-fold their original number, your densely populated possessions skirt the shores of the two great oceans, and yet this great increase of people and territory has not only shown itself compatible with the harmonious action of the States and Federal Government in their respective constitutional spheres, but has afforded an additional guarantee of the strength and integrity of both.

With an experience thus suggestive and cheering, the policy of my administration will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion. Indeed, it is not to be disguised that our attitude as a nation, and our position on the globe render the acquisition of certain possessions, not within our jurisdiction, eminently important for our protection, if not, in the future, essential for the preservation of the rights of commerce and the peace of the world. Should they be obtained, it will be through no grasping spirit, but with a view to obvious national interest and security, and in a manner entirely consistent with the strictest observance of national faith. We have nothing in our history or position to invite aggression, we have everything to beckon us to a cultivation of relations of peace and amity with all nations. Purpose, therefore, at once just and pacific, will be significantly marked in the conduct of our foreign affairs.

I intend that my administration shall leave no blot upon our fair record, and trust I may safely give the assurance that no act within the legitimate scope of my constitutional control will be tolerated, on the part of any portion of our citizens, which cannot challenge a ready justification before the tribunal of the civilized world.—An administration would be unworthy of confidence at home, or respect abroad, should it cease to be influenced by the conviction that no apparent advantage can be purchased at a price so dear as that of national wrong or dishonor. It is not your privilege, as a nation, to speak of a distant past. The striking incidents of your history, replete with instruction, and furnishing abundant grounds for hopeful confidence, are comprised in a period comparatively brief. But if your past is limited, your future is boundless. Its obligations through the unexplored pathway of advancement, and will be limitless as duration. Hence a sound and comprehensive policy should embrace, not less the distant future than the urgent present.

The great objects of our pursuit, as a people, are best to be attained by peace, and are entirely consistent with the tranquility and interests of the rest of mankind. With the neighboring nations upon our continent, we should cultivate kindly and fraternal relations. We can desire nothing but the best for all.

CONCLUDED ON FOURTH PAGE.