

LIFE.

O Life, how slight! A little sweet, A brief delight, And then—no meet! O Life, how vain! A little spite, A little pain, And then—good-night!

—(Charles G. D. Roberts, in Independent.)

A WHITE ONE.

The air was thick with steam and impregnated with the smell of soap, and the temperature was by no means low, more especially as the sun was streaming in through the uncurtained windows. But the laundry girls were used to these inconveniences and thought nothing of them. They chattered continuously over their work, not because they were happy or because they had anything particular to say, but because they had no conception of the dignity of silence.

The only exception to the universal untidiness was manifested in the person of one whom the girls called 'Liza' (the 'i' being pronounced as if it were the 'i' of 'the'). This 'Liza', the preliminary 'e' of whose name was invariably dropped by her acquaintances, was a hunchback, and her face, though it possessed the merit of cleanliness, was almost repulsively ugly. The complexion was sallow, the mouth badly shaped, the eyebrows obtrusively dark and heavy; very sad were the eyes beneath them, and had there been any one to note their wistful look, but 'Liza' did not encourage scrutiny, and, indeed, the brown eyes were not remarkable in themselves, and were moreover half hidden by the drooping lids, from which she glanced in a sideways, half-sinister manner. 'Liza' was not very popular among her companions, partly because she chose to be exclusive, and partly because she could on occasions say unpleasantly sharp things. But there was one person whom she loved, and that was Miss Callender.

By and by the ringing of a bell created a diversion among the workers. Almost simultaneously eight pairs of red, soapy arms were drawn out of the wash-tubs, eight pairs of red, crinkled hands were wiped on some portion of convenient apparel, and eight pairs of ill-shod feet tramped into an adjoining room.

At a table in this room stood a young lady, very sweet in appearance and prettily dressed. She nodded in a friendly way to the girls, and shook hands with each one as they passed. She had their interest at heart, and made it her duty to come two or three times a week and provide them with dinner. This dinner consisted usually, as on this occasion, of a plate of soup and a large slice of pudding, for which they paid a penny; a second helping of either could be had for a farthing, so the payment was merely nominal; but the girls were exempt from the feeling that they were the recipients of charity.

The coppers were "dabbed" down on the table in a little pile, and Miss Callender ladled out the soup, which was quickly and noisily consumed. The young lady watched the other women, smiling. Perfectly dainty herself, their roughness did not seem to repel her.

"Girls," she said presently, in her quiet, clear voice, "I am going to give a party in the Mission Hall. Will you come?"

There was a chorus of delighted assent, accompanied by a general clattering of spoons on the almost empty plates.

"Lor, Miss, what sort of a party might it be, now?"

"Oh, friendly," said Miss Callender, "Music, and plenty to eat, and—you may bring your sweethearts."

This caused a prolonged giggling. "Might we bring more than one?" inquired Polly Blaines, who enjoyed the distinction of being the prettiest of the girls.

Miss Callender shook her head disapprovingly. "You oughtn't to have more than one," she said, smiling.

"Oh! as for that, Miss, I don't want any. I'm sure; but there, the more you draws off, the more they comes on. That's how it is with men, and that's why them as don't want 'em, always has the most admirers."

And Polly, conscious of a fascinating reticence nose and a dimpled chin, tossed her head in the air.

Whereupon all the girls, not to be outdone, and by no means reticent on the subject of their love affairs, fell to talking about them, fuding the topic eminently congenial, and treating it in a manner which displayed no more vulgarity of heart than is concealed by certain ladies. Miss Callender rather encouraged them, she checked them; she liked them to be perfectly natural before her, and was glad of anything which gave her an insight into their lives and characters.

Two there were who kept silence; one a little newly married woman, to whom love was too sacred for common speech; and 'Liza.

The pudding she had begun to attack seemed to stick in 'Liza's' throat, and she had great difficulty in gulping it down, for the other hunger of which she was often conscious, the hunger of the heart, now so asserted itself as to make her oblivious of bodily needs. Something there was, too, of bitterness in her mind as she listened to the talk of these others. Perhaps Polly's words did more to cause it than anything else; "Them as don't want 'em always has the most admirers." Looking up, she suddenly met the eyes of this girl. To her morbid imagination they expressed pity, perhaps scorn. She crimsoned.

There was a momentary lull, so that they all heard her when she said in a peculiarly loud, harsh, defiant voice: "Mine isn't livin'; mine isn't."

"Yours? Did you have a sweetheart once?" asked the married woman, not ungenially, though there was the slightest perceptible accent on the pronoun.

"And why not?" asked 'Liza, and her voice was louder than before. "It isn't only pretty girls as has people caring for 'em. There's other things besides looks."

"Of course there are, dear," said Miss Callender, soothingly, for 'Liza's eyes flashed ominously. "Goodness is worth much more to a man."

"What was his name, 'Liza?" asked Polly Blaines.

Polly was conceited, and 'Liza, hyper-sensitive, scented patronage. "I ain't going to tell yer," she said. Then, with swift contradiction, "his first name was Charlie."

"Was he handsome?" asked Polly, pinching her neighbor under the table, so that the latter, a high-colored, coarse-looking girl, gave a little squeak.

"I never see anybody better looking," said 'Liza, with promptitude. "He wasn't any of yer pink, dolly men." (Polly's favored suitor happened to be fair.) He was dark and his nose was straight, like a gentleman's, and his teeth was white, and" ('Liza warmed to her subject) "he used to wear a red siltie, with a pin in it. And," she went on, "he always gave me lots of presents—lots, and he loved me so, as he couldn't bear me out of his sight. Oh," she cried excitedly, "he did love me, and we was so happy, keepin' company, and he was a-goin' to marry me"—she paused abruptly. Indeed, her shrill voice had got almost beyond her control.

"What did he die of?" asked one of the girls, with genuine compassion in her tones.

'Liza looked at her—gasped—hesitated a moment—then rose and pushed back her chair.

"That don't matter to no one," she said, in a hard voice that yet had a catch in it. "He's dead, and that's enough; and you needn't any of you ever talk to me about him. So there!" And she went back into the laundry.

There was a moment's silence. Miss Callender sat looking thoughtful; then she rose and followed 'Liza into the next room, closing the door. The other girls regarded one another with some surprise. 'Liza was usually silent and was considered morose, but her affliction had made them kind to her in their rough way, though she was certainly not a favorite among them. But now that they realized that she had a romance in her life the love of sentiment, which is in every woman, made them feel a sympathy for her hitherto unknown.

'Liza was standing by her washtub, and she had already plunged in her hands and begun to vigorously soap one of the heap of towels she had to wash. Her lips were set tight together, her bosom was heaving, and a tear had rolled down her cheek and dropped off it on her coarse apron. She put up her arm, her hands being soapy, and laid her elbow across her eyes for a minute.

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or poor girls. Ain't it nat'ral to want to be loved?" "Most nat'ral, dear," said Miss Callender to whom 'Liza was just then a revelation.

"Then," went on the girl, emboldened by the sympathy which was rather in manner than words, "when folks are kind to me it's mostly pity as makes 'em; and I hate to be pitied. It ain't because they wants me with 'em; there's even some, I suppose, as wouldn't care to keep company with me in case folks should stare. And, oh, I'm proud, I am—I'm awfully proud. There's none so proud as them as is despised, you know."

"I don't despise you, Eliza," said Miss Callender, spontaneously. "And I'm sure others don't."

"If I thought you liked me a bit, not because you pitied me, I'd be uncommon glad," said 'Liza, shyly. "I s'pose," she went on, half-ashamed at her own confidences, "it wouldn't make no manner o' difference to you, me, likin' you?"

"Indeed it would," Miss Callender answered, and she bent forward and kissed 'Liza on the forehead.

'Liza turned away quickly. "I reckon I'd better get on with my work," she said, huskily.

And at that minute the door was opened, and the others came trooping in. Miss Callender exchanged a few words with them and then went back to get her things.

From that day began a new era for 'Liza. Whether it was that Miss Callender singled her out for special attention, or because they were really capable of a lasting impression themselves, it is impossible to say, but it is certain that she was differently treated by the other women and equally certain that this treatment had a salutary effect upon her. Repellant at first, she grew daily more approachable, less suspicious, more gracious, and her better qualities came into play. Perhaps the influence of Miss Callender had not a little to do with this, for from the beginning 'Liza had loved her, and now her feeling was little less than worship. And to love another is so good for a woman's soul that it works like magic on her whole being. It made possible to 'Liza the comprehension of a love higher than Miss Callender's; and the little London heathen, being taught by her dear lady concerning those things of which she had been ignorant hitherto became what the girls called "religious."

Toward the end of the summer, she consented to be confirmed, and went to classes, and this seemed to the others to make 'Liza more important, especially when she explained that "there was ladies at the classes."

'Liza was nearer being happy now than she had ever been in her life, and yet she seemed sadder too. Often she heaved great sighs that made her neighbor turn and look at her, and frequently there were marks of tears on her face; so that by-and-by it grew evident to the others that there was something weighing upon her.

As the time for her confirmation drew near 'Liza looked graver than ever, and more worried. At last it came to the day itself. She had obtained a holiday from the laundry, through the influence of Miss Callender. What was the surprise of that lady and the others, therefore, when, in the midst of the mid-day meal, in rushed 'Liza. She had on a clean print dress, made for the occasion, but her hair was disordered, her face pale from fatigue and excitement, her eyes shone brightly.

"Hallo," exclaimed the girls in a breath. "My! ain't she a swell." They thought she had come to show off her dress.

"Eliza," exclaimed Miss Callender. "What do you want? You will be late for your confirmation."

"Oh, Miss," gasped 'Liza, almost breathless, as she was, "I had to come. I've tried and tried to say it, and I never could; and at first it seemed a white one. But, lately, it's come 'atween me and God. And I've thought on it at night, in bed, and when any of you had been kind to me, it ha' cut me like a knife. And, oh, Miss, when you've spoken of him, I've been a near fallin' down and explaining to yer, but somethin' held me back. And I told God, and he seemed to say it wasn't any use my just tellin', unless I undid it. Oh, please, all of you, I don't care now what you think of me, or if you despise me. I can't go to church until I've told yer. Him as I talked of was only what I dreamed about when I was lonely, evenings and times; and there wasn't no Charlie, really, and no one ain't never loved me, nor wanted to marry me."—(Ladgate Monthly.)

Preventing Coal Dust Explosions. A successful method of preventing coal dust explosions has been adopted in various German mines. The usual method of sprinkling water in dusty parts of the mine has only a limited value, as much of the dust generated in the mining of coal is hereby unaffected. Water is now forced under a pressure into the coal to be mined, thus not only setting the dust in advance but facilitating the removal of the coal. Holes one meter deep are drilled at a distance of about three meters. Here wooden plugs are inserted and through them are run iron pipes from 1 to 1 meter long, with openings between 2 and 3 millimeters large and connected with rubber hose. Important factors in the successful application of this method are the water pressure obtainable, the quantity of water injected and the firmness of the seam, the last item depending to some extent on the size of the coal pillars in the workings.—(Chicago News.)

Customer—Isn't that a pretty good price for a porous plaster? Druggist—Yes, but think how long it will last.

"THE GREAT HUNGER."

FAMINES ARE PERIODICAL OCCURRENCES IN RUSSIA.

Some Account of the Present Famine in That Country and Other Noted Starvation Crises.

Famine in Russia is periodical like the snows, or rather it is perennial like the Siberian plague. To be scientifically accurate, one should distinguish two different varieties of it, the provincial and the national, the former termed gold-dorka, or the little hunger, and the latter gold, or the great hunger.

Now not a year has elapsed this century in which extreme distress in some province or provinces of the empire has not assumed the dimensions of a famine, while scarcely a decade has passed away in which the local misfortune has not ripened into the national calamity.

Nor is the nineteenth century an exception in this regard. If we go as far back as the year 1100 and follow the course of Russian history down to the present year of grace, we shall find that while the "little hunger" is an annual occurrence, as familiar as the destruction of human lives by wolves, the normal number of national famines fluctuates between seven and eight per century.

It is curious that the circumstance that we can thus speak of the periodicity of this terrible scourge, much as the astronomers and meteorologists discourse of that of a comet or an abnormally warm summer, should be balm to the hearts of Russian shivoniks who are delighted to shift to the shoulders of Providence or Nature responsibility for the fruits of their own mismanagement.

The present century, which has yet eight years to run, has already had its full share of these visitations which some optimists regard as automatic checks on over-population; in 1801, 1808, 1811, 1812, 1833, 1840, 1860 and 1891. These are the national golds.

The provincial famines frequently equal them in severity if not in extent, and so complete and child-like is the people's trust in Providence and the Czar, who, it is hoped, will utilize in good time the abundance of the harvest in the neighboring provinces to relieve their needs, that the crops are allowed to lie rotting in some places until the peasants in others are beyond the reach of hunger and of human help.

The fifth and six decades of the present century ushered in scenes of misery which would have provoked a bloody revolution among peoples in whose breasts duty had implanted that spirit of manly resistance which is proportioned in most men to the wrongs they are destined to endure.

Travelling some five or six years ago through a large district afflicted by the famine of the goldolok variety, I found myself behind the scenes of the lowest theatre of human existence which it is possible to conceive.

Multiplying by an enormous figure the sights one sees in the lugubrious wards of a typhus hospital and intensifying the horror they inspire by substituting hunger for disease, criminal neglect for inevitable necessity, one may form some idea of a state of things which should have rendered the system that produced it forever after impossible.

Kazan was then the center of the famine-stricken district and the country-folk roamed about journeyed hundreds of miles on foot, dragging themselves feebly along in search of food and finding only graves.

Many of them lay down by the roadside, in ditches, in the yards of deserted houses and gave up the ghost without a murmur against their Little Father, the Czar. "It was touching and edifying to witness their Christian submission and unshaken faith in God," exclaimed many of the higher tschivoniks, who seemed to feel that nothing in their life became them like the leaving it.

In 1887-1888, when the abundance of the harvest in Russia seemed to partake of the nature of the miraculous, the distress in certain districts was to the full as intense and disastrous as at present. "In many villages the people are absolutely destitute of food," run the accounts published at the time; "large numbers have to take to begging, but as the same monotonous misery reigns all round, after having crawled from neighbor to neighbor, they have nothing for it but to drag themselves back to their hovels and sicken of hunger."

In the Government of Suobensk the peasants lived during the year on bread made partly of rye and partly of the husks of rye, often eaten with the worm-eaten bark of the oak or the pine, which still without satisfying the cravings of hunger." Lack of fodder killed the cattle in thousands, but not before a resolute effort had been made to save them by feeding them on the straw-thatched roofs of hovels.

Last year, writes E. B. Lakin in the London Fortnightly Review, there was another partial famine of considerable proportions, scarcely noticed by the English press, the progress of which was marked by the usual concomitants: merciful homicide, arson, suicide, dirt-bread, typhus and death.

The evil is undeniably chronic; the symptoms are always the same, and the descriptions of them published an or fifty years ago might be copied afresh to-day or next year as faithful photographs of the life in death of millions of Russian Christians.

Scarcity of food has long since come to be looked on as a necessary condition of the existence of the people who manage to supply a great part of Europe with corn.

The Czar has been aware of it for centuries, and I have done all that they could be expected to do to prepare for it.

In 1724 Peter I. decreed the establishment of district granaries to reserve corn, and Catharine II., thirty years later, commanded her Minister to get about putting his ukase into execution.

There is a leap year in the annals of distress; the famine extends over a much larger area, but is not a whit more intense than it was last year, five, ten, or fifteen years ago.

The district affected extends from Odessa on the shores of the Black Sea through Little Russia, athwart the rich black loam country celebrated for its marvellous fertility, straight through the country watered by the Volga, across the Urals, growing wider and wider till it reaches Tobolsk; in other words, it covers a tract of land 3,000 miles long and from 500 to 1,000 miles broad, which supports a population of only forty millions.

These Atlases on whose shoulders a great part of the weight of the Russian empire rests, are, in a gradual way, undergoing the process of petrification which their prototype experienced on a sudden when he gazed at the countenance of Medusa.

SURPRISED THE DEALER.

How a Dead Chicken was Made to Astonish Its Owner.

"How do you sell these chickens—live weight?" asked the man with the twinkle in his eye, putting his hand on a fowl which had its throat cut and its feathers plucked, and was apparently as dead as a chicken can be.

"Haven't any live chickens, sir," replied the marketman.

"Why, what do you call this?" As he spoke a low, dolorous squawk came from the bench where the chickens lay.

The marketman started and turned a trifle pale. "W-what's that?" he gasped.

"I say," repeated the other, "you don't call this a dead chicken, do you? Hear that?" And again came the squawk.

The marketman fairly trembled. "I—I," he began, and then, as the squawk was repeated, he stood motionless, unable to say a word.

"Strikes me it's rather cruel to pull off a live chicken's feathers and leave it lying about in this way," continued the other. "I suppose you have to do it to assure your customers that the fowls are fresh. But you'd better not let the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals catch you at it."

"I thought it was dead; honest I did!" cried the marketman. "I bought it for a dead chicken. Why, I wouldn't have had this thing happen for anything. Suppose there had been a lady in here. She'd have fainted away."

"Oh, you thought it was dead, did you? I'm not so sure about that. On the whole, I don't know but it's my duty to report you to the S. P. C. A."

"Please don't, sir; please don't! I'll kill the chicken myself and you can have it for nothing if you won't say anything about it."

"Oh, I'm not to be bribed; but, as if you're not my fault, I'll let you off if as you say, you'll cut the poor chicken's head off and draw it, and while you're about it you'd better make sure that these other chickens are dead by treating them in the same way. I don't care if you send one of them to my house when you've killed and drawn them."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir; I will," exclaimed the marketman, eagerly.

The wise-looking man walked out, smiling softly to himself.

"That's a trick that everybody doesn't know," he said.

"How did you do it?" I asked.

"Why, it is simple enough. You can make any dead chicken squawk by pressing its breastbone just right; that is, if it hasn't been dead too long. I suppose the movement forces the air out of its lungs in such a way as to produce the noise. I started that fellow a little, but if I've done a good thing for the health of his customers."—(Buffalo (N. Y.) Express.)

Moving Sidewalks.

There is now in operation in the Exposition grounds at Chicago an experimental movable sidewalk 300 feet in length, the same except in length as will be exhibited during the World's Fair.

This encloses an oval patch of ground and consists of two movable platforms running side by side, and both going the same way. The first or slow platform runs at a rate of three miles an hour which makes stepping on while in motion extremely easy. Another step puts the passenger on the fast platform which runs six miles an hour. It has been working two weeks and has carried as many as 500 persons at one time. The inventor claims for the invention a carrying capacity of 40,000 an hour past a given point. One advantage claimed for the moving sidewalk is that it can be put up on a level with the second stories of buildings, increasing the capacity of the streets.—(St. Louis Star-Sayings.)

A Strange Material.

A prospector in Montana has found a strange mineral that takes fire and consumes itself when exposed to the air. When taken from the ground it is quite the appearance of iron ore and is much as heavy. The first that was taken out was piled up near the shaft one evening and the next morning was found to be smoking. It continued to grow hotter until it arrived at almost a white heat, remaining in that condition several days, after which it gradually cooled off. It was then found to be but half its first weight, and resembled much the fragments of meteors that are found on the surface.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

A RECENT traveller in Morocco says that for people who dress in white and love to be very neat in their personal appearance the Moroccans are very indifferent to the cleanliness of their towns. Around the most beautifully furnished houses are heaps of refuse and the bodies of dead animals. All the care of the people is centred upon the interior of their houses. They furnish them as expensively as their means permit; but what is outside their walls does not trouble them.

The Seattle (Washington) Telegraph says that a good, practical example of rain-making by concussion was seen in that town recently. Some men who were clearing up Alton street put a heavy blast of dynamite under a stump that it was desirable to get rid of and touched it off. A tremendous concussion followed, and although the sky was comparatively free of clouds it began to rain at once and showered heavily for some while. But it rains occasionally in Oregon and Washington.

Not more than half a mile from Port Penn, Delaware, in a sheltered cove between two tidewater streams flowing into Delaware Bay, there are within an area of five acres more than fifty dugouts, or rude earthen houses, used by the Indians of the region more than a century ago. The mounds are fast disappearing, but the earth thereabouts abounds in arrow heads, tomahawks, and other Indian relics, while the bones of many savages lie buried hard by. Some of the neighboring farmers hold the land that was granted to them in the earliest colonial days, and one of the oldest inhabited houses in the United States, a substantial brick structure, is still standing near Port Penn and in good repair. Probably three-fourths of the white inhabitants are descendants of colonial settlers.

DAROTA, which claims everything so large that it appeals to the imagination of the discoverer as well as that of the man who is told all about it, now announces that it has the most wonderful artesian well in the world. The water is said to spout from it a distance of 100 feet in the air, and the supply is 10,000 gallons a minute. The pressure is 200 pounds to the square inch. A land-boomer calculates that this well, which is at Huron, would furnish to each man, woman and child in North Dakota four gallons of water every hour.

The fact brought out at the late Prison Congress that crime has increased relatively in the United States and decreased elsewhere has naturally caused unfavorable comment, and encouraged inquiry into the cause of this unpleasant showing. The statement is based on the great decrease shown in the number of prisoners in Europe and their increase here. In twenty years the prisoners confined in England and Wales have fallen from 19,318 to 19,099, although there has been a large increase in population. Whereas in the United States in ten years our prison population has grown from 12,691 to 19,538.

The southern part of Washington County, Ill., is said to be peculiarly rich in Indian relics, which may be found on almost every farm. The banks of the Elkhorn, Locust, Boanocoup, and Mud Creeks, which flow through the region, were once favorite camping-places of the red men. Among the relics which have been recently ploughed up are a battle-axe of hard flint, pink in color and weighing six pounds, which is now in the possession of Mr. George Martin, of Nashville, Ill.; a pipe-stem, embellished with raised scroll-work, a great variety of arrow and spear-heads, and an axe-head of green stone. More interesting than the remains of the Indian tribes is an oddly shaped piece of stone which a son of Farmer Halbert ploughed up on the bank of Locust Creek about a month ago. Observing some faint lettering upon the stone, he carried it home, and when it was washed, the inscription stood out: "D. Boone, 1785." Above the inscription, which seemed to have been made with a knife or some other sharp instrument, was the faint outline of a rude attempt at picturing an arrow, and above this an indentation the size of a large bean. It appears to be a bona-fide relic of the great hunter, Boone, who made several hunting trips to southern Illinois, and passed through the country when he moved west from Kentucky.

It seems that Christmas, as the anniversary of Christ's birth, was observed as far back as the fourth century. But we have few details of the observance, and it is not until we come to the era whose customs are preserved to us in song and ballad that we can discover many details of the festivities attendant upon the time. We learn that the good King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table made merry at the Christmas season, feasting being their principal method of observing the day, as became such a body of worthies. William the Conqueror duly observed Christmas, and since his time there more or less formal observance of the day has been uninterrupted. In the olden times, before the Christian era, the innumerable gods and goddesses of mythology had played important parts in the festivals of their believers. When the belief in their existence and influence on human affairs was swept away, popular fancy transformed them into legendary witches, elves, and good spirits, and in the earlier masks, or plays, which became a part of the Christmas observances, we find these mythical beings curiously interwoven. As early as the twelfth century spectacular plays were presented at Christmas time, and for half a dozen centuries they and their successors held sway in England. In Germany some form of pageant, spectacle, or play has been common in connection with the festivities for hundreds of years.