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FOR THE REGISTER.

THE CROOKED OAK.

It was at the hour of twilight that an aged man sat beneath the branches of a venerable elm, whose limbs like his own had known the weight of many years. He had been the counsellor of counsellors and the companion of kings; but as the weary bird sinks to her rest at evening, he had quitted ambition and the world, that at life's close he might enjoy the dreamy repose that the solemn and imposing quiet of nature, so beautiful and so majestic, can so well impart to the mind. For him loneliness dwelt not in solitude; and retirement from the many, only brought him into closer communion with nature and himself. But now he was not alone. Around him were heard the young voices of laughing childhood, the graver notes of maternal rebuke, and the deep but quiet tones of manhood. The grandsire sat amid three generations of his race. They were soon joined by another, whose flashing eye and impatient gesture indicated the fiery passions and vehemence of youth. An exclamation of surprise and of pleasure showed that his presence was unexpected. The old man first addressed him.

"Whence come you my son?'

'From the world that you have quitted, my father. A score of years has taught me some portion of the wisdom of fourscore; and like you, I have left a world where the fate of hope, of love and of ambition are all written in one word—disappointment. I have tried all, and all have betrayed me; and I fly back to solitude, not like the stricken deer, to conceal the festering wound, but with the quiet conviction of experience, satisfied and calm."

'Aye, as the volcano,' replied the old man with a smile. "My son, different ages require different duties; and the repose which is both necessary and proper for me, is degrading to you. Your task is active—mine passive. It is your's to be up and doing—mine to suffer and be still. For love, I am too near the world of shadows to enter with you into the world of dreams—for ambition, if not excessive in degree, nor criminal in its object, it is your duty. You seek solitude, not from contentment, but from disappointment. With life's end unattained, and its duties neglected, you fly to solitude as an escape from wasted feelings, and fruitless passions—I, because I have no longer feelings nor passions that the world can awaken. You seek it because you feel at war with a world that has baffled your hopes—I, because I have no hopes that it can baffle.—Your sun is overclouded—mine is gone down. He who at your age has ceased to wrestle, aye manfully, has ceased to be a man"

'But my father,' said another of the group who stood near, 'why disturb the tranquility of life with turbulent pursuits? Why rouse up passions in the breast, whose fires once kindled consume and destroy their possessor—or the hopes yet wilder that ambition weaves? How much better is the calm but steady pursuit of wealth, at once to fill out life with activity, to guard the heart from consuming passions, and pride from the mortification of disappointed ambition!'

The conversation was here interrupted by the group of young children, who crowded clamorously around the visitor, to claim long expected and long promised playthings.

The old man smiled. 'My children,' said he 'here is an eloquent comment upon our subject. Do you not see from the cradle to the grave all are alike? Each one has his own engrossing object of desire; and though the object be different, the desire is the same. Danger is found, not in the pursuit, but in its intemperance, and that danger dwells equally in every object;—or rather the danger is in the man, not in the object. One kneels at the shrine of ambition, another at that of love, another in the temple of Mammon. It matters little whether the bauble we pursue be glory, or love—a rattle or a sceptre—a kite or a crown. It is the pursuit that makes our occupation, and occupation that makes our happiness. Different temperaments and characters require different stimuli to urge them to the race; but whatever be the motive, that race must be run.

"And is this then my father our doom?' said the young man mournfully,—'Are we always to pursue, and never to win? always to strive but never to attain? Is the star that we worship to be ever as distant as bright?'

'Discontented boy,' replied the old man, 'he who pursues, wins in every pursuit—he who strives, conquers in the very struggle. Know my children that man is never contented; and he who with human frailties and feelings should enter paradise, would find even paradise joyless, with nothing to desire or to pursue; and that the weeds of discontent will spring up, when the ploughshare of pursuit is passed over. Listen.'

'In the neighborhood of Ispahan there dwelt a peasant whose daily bread was barely won by daily toil. His possessions were small, except that best of possessions, the hearts of those he loved. Day after day saw him go forth contented and cheerful to his daily toil. Home became dearer for the absence from it that business required; and the sunny welcome of domestic love lighted the hours of meeting, and lent wings to the moments of reunion. But in an evil hour he heard of Selim the happy. 'And how has he obtained that title' he inquired? 'By having not a desire ungratified," was the reply. The happiness of Selim worked in his mind, and he went to his stately mansion, that he might at least enjoy the sight of so much happiness. "Alas!' thought he, as he gazed through the gilded palisades that fronted his dwelling, 'why was all this happiness showered upon one man! Why was not Mustapha as happy as Selim? Why should I go forth to toil day after day in poverty and want, while upon this man is exhausted all the blessings and happiness of life?' By degrees he became gloomy and morose. Day after day, he came to the house of Selim, that he might envy his happiness, and ruin his own. His business began to be neglected. A cloud rested upon the sacred sunshine of home. Love was fast losing its loveliness, and pleasure its power to please.

'Were I but Selim, how happy should I be!' It happened one day, as he was thus poisoning his own happiness, Selim passed by, and heard his exclamation, 'My friend" said he, 'would you witness the happiness of Selim, enter.' Mustapha gladly obeyed, and followed the happy Selim into his dwelling. A lovely wife and an amiable family greeted the husband's and father's return.—They seemed but to live in his smile. An entertainment was then served up, during which music, soft as seraph's lyres, floated around. The air was filled with perfumes. The gush of fountains as they fell from the alabaster urns of sculptured Naiads into a marble basin, and were conducted away by small marble tubes, filled the mind with ideas of freshness and coolness. Viands were served on golden plate, and the air was gently stirred by slaves with large fans.—The finest statues and paintings were placed around. Sofas were ranged along the wall, that the happy Selim might thus sleep with every sense at once gratified. When the entertainment was over, Selim took his guest into his garden, when a new scene of enchantment lay before him. There were marble basins, in whose clear waters glanced the brightest scales of a thousand fishes, as they darted to and fro; fountains, whose spray filled the air with a delicious coolness; statues stood in different parts of the garden. An artificial grove resounded with the singing of a thousand birds, whose bright wings gleamed in the sun, as they sported through the branches. The perfume of myriads of flowers filled the air, and all conspired to fill the mind with images the most delicious and enchanting. The peasant gazed around him with unutterable delight. To him, all except the countenance of his host seemed radiant with happiness and joy. But on that countenance there was a settled gloom, that seemed at variance with all the beautiful harmony and happiness that reigned around. Unable to fathom the cause, he at last ventured to enquire.

The rich man shook his head despondingly, 'I am gloomy,' at length he replied, 'because I am miserable. Of what use is all this splendor to me, when with all my wealth, I am unable to accomplish my desires?—One deep cloud darkens my days. It humbles my hour of triumph, and blackens my moments of joy. I lose all the happiness that should flow from the possessions that I have, in bitter and unavailing regret for that which I cannot attain. In vain would domestic love brighten my sorrow, so long a there is a sealed fountain within; whose waters of bitterness it cannot sweeten. I wander about discontented and unhappy.—By day I picture in imagination the perfection that I cannot attain—by night I dream of the joy that can never be mine; and I wake in all the bitterness of disappointment, to regret that the day should return to deprive me of the poor shadow that only thus I can make my own.

'Alas!' thought Mustapha, 'and after all then, all this splendor makes not its possessor happy.' 'May I be permitted to inquire then,' he asked, 'into the cause of this deep despondency? Doubtless that blow must be heavy, which can so mar all the happiness that should be yours. Yet forgive me if my question be painful, and do not reply. I know that there are sorrows, in which the soul seek not companionship, and spurns alike communion and complaint. Upon such I would not intrude. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and it is not for the stranger to intermeddle with its joy.'

'Alas!' replied Selim, 'it is but too true—yet to your sympathy will I expose the sorrow that consumes me. Look there'—and he pointed to an obscure corner of the garden. The eye of Mustapha followed the direction of Selim's finger, then reverted with a look of ineffable surprise to his face. But there, nothing was visible but the strong expression of deep and unfeigned sorrow, and again he turned his eyes to the point that Selim's finger indicated. At last, unable to express his astonishment. 'I see nothing there,' he said, 'but a crooked oak.'

The finger of Selim fell, and his hand dropped to his side. 'Aye! there it is,' said he. 'For fifty years the object of my ambition, I may say of my life, has been to make this garden perfect. It has been my thought by day, and my dream by night. I have lived for it, and I have loved it. But for that tree, I had been happy. But do what I will that tree is always there, and always crooked. Twice has it been hewn to the ground, and then the gap caused by its vacancy marred my plan even more than its deformity. I planted others in its place, and they died or by some strange fatality they too became deformed. I have struggled in vain with this tree. But all is fruitless. My plans are crushed—my hopes blasted—my life and its labors have been vain;—and bursting into a passionate flood of tears, the unhappy man walked despondingly away.

'And is this then' thought Mustapha, 'the happiness I envied? Is this the delight of illimitable richness?—of having nothing to desire? Then welcome my wants and my contentment! I have learned that gold cannot purchase pleasure—and that happiness dwells not in boundless wealth, but in a contented spirit.'

The old man rose to depart; but after moving a few steps, he stopped and turning again to the young man, whom he had more particularly addressed, 'Go my son,' said he "the world is before you. You have life's mountain to bring down, and its vallies to fill up. Faint not because fair hopes are sometimes crushed, but struggle most manfully, when disappointment presses most heavily. You have honorable objects of honorable pursuit—and you are happy. But when real difficulties have vanished before vigorous efforts, when life's task becomes light and its rough places are made smooth, when its objects of earnest pursuit are obtained, and the *ennui* caused by too few desires arises—then *beware of the crooked oak.*'