

THE EXAMINER:

A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF POLITICS, LITERATURE AND NEWS.

EDWARD WHELAN]

This is true Liberty, when free-born Men, having to advise the Public, may speak free.—EURIPIDES.

[EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Vol. IV.

CHARLOTTETOWN, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, MONDAY, MAY 14, 1855.

No. 44.

Literature.

HAIR-LOVE.

"There seems a love in hair, though it be dead,
It is the gentlest, yet the strongest thread
Of our frail plant,—a blossom from the tree,
Surviving the proud trunk."—LORD BYRON.

During a late excursion to the seaside we were struck by the appearance of a wide mouthed, old fashioned glass bottle, placed upon the mantelshelf of the humble sleeping apartment it was our fate to occupy for one night only, ere we passed on to gayer scenes. The contents of the said bottle puzzled us not a little, just at first, to decipher; consisting, as we presently found out, of several pieces of human hair, of divers shades and colours, not braided, but each tied singly together with a piece of thread, or faded ribband, to which a small slip of paper was attached bearing a name on it. But some of them were sadly discoloured from age, and not being written very legibly at first almost wholly obliterated. We remembered just glancing at it the night before, and taking it for some curious specimens of moss or sea-wood, and were still looking with much interest on these newly discovered relics, when our simple hostess entered the room. She was surprised to see us already up and dressed; and, upon our turning the conversation to the object which we still held in our hands, told us that it was her children's hair.

"But you will laugh at my old country fashion."
"No, indeed," was the eager reply.
"Let me see," continued the old woman, encouraged by our evident interest in the subject, "there ought to be nine of them. First, there was Tom, the grey-headed man who drove you hither. Ah, you would not think, to look at him now, that his hair was once so black and shining. He was a handsome youth, was Tom, just like his poor father! but time, and sorrow, and poverty, work great changes! Then came George, who died abroad of the fever. And little Walter; nothing would do but he must be a sailor also; but he never came back from his first voyage. Then there was Mary and Susan, twins, and so much alike that people used to be puzzled to tell them apart; but Susan's hair was a shade darker. Well, she died too; and poor Mary pined and pined away until she grew to a mere shadow, and then followed her; they do say that twins seldom survive each other. Next was Hetty—no, that's not it. I can't make out the names very clearly, but I know Hetty's hair; it was like threads of gold—we never see such hair now a days! Ah, that's my poor Hetty's! but not so bright and sunny! The ladies used to stop me in the street to admire Hetty's hair, and they all said that she was too beautiful to live long. God's will be done! It is a weary world for one like her, so good and gentle; and, doubtless, He took her away in His love from the evil to come!"

The aged woman paused in her simple relations; her eyes were filled with tears, and we could not, for the life of us, help weeping too. Hetty had, it seems, been the mother's darling—her "summer child," as Frederica Bremer would have said.

Then there is Kate; she married a soldier when she was but sixteen, and went abroad with him. But it is so long now since we have heard anything of her that she may be dead also before this—she was never very strong poor child! Next came Robert, married too, and living near London, but badly off. And Bessie, my merry little Bessie!—the comfort of my old age! Hark! she is singing now like a bird!—bless her! But she'll be leaving me before long, I suppose! Ah, well, please God we shall all meet together in heaven!"

For some moments neither spoke, while the singing came nearer and nearer, and, presently afterwards, Bessie's bright young face appeared at the entrance, to tell us that breakfast was ready.

"I'm afraid I have wearied you," said the old woman, as she put back the bottle reverently into its accustomed place. We assured her with truth that such had not been the case; but felt sad, nevertheless, to think how the families of the poor, ay, and the rich too, for the matter of that, come to be divided and scattered up and down in the world. And what a sweet fancy was that hair-love, which kept alive the remembrance of each in the widowed heart of their aged parent! Many a sad and truthful reminiscence, heard and experienced years ago, golden links in the chain of memory and association, come back with the recollection of that old relic bottle.

There was a pale, quiet-eyed girl, governess in a family with which we were once intimate, who used to be very kind to us children, and let us rummage her bag of embroidery silks, or set her cotton box 'to rights,' as we termed it, just whenever it suited us, and seemed glad to purchase a few hours' peace at any price. Poor thing! it was but little rest she got, what with one and another; and then she was so good natured, so wonderfully sweet-tempered, never saying an angry word to any of us. We all loved her dearly, and sometimes, when we saw her resting her head upon her hands, and looking so sad and weary, would whisper to each other that poor Miss M—— had the headache, and hush our wild sports all at once, but the worst of it was we soon forgot it again, growing as noisy as ever, and she never thought to chide us.

In the store-dried cotton box was one little packet which had frequently excited our curiosity. It was carefully sealed up and she always evaded our questions on the subject, taking it gently away, and declaring that she would not lose it for the world; from which we naturally concluded that it must be something very valuable indeed. It chanced, however, on one particular evening, when we had as usual begged hard for a sight of this concealed treasure, that she smiled sadly, and prepared, with a sweet and patient kindness to gratify our restless curiosity. But we noticed that her hands trembled as she untied the slender fastenings.

"Only a lock of hair!" was our first exclamation of wonder and disappointment. And then followed a whole string of inquiries, "Whose is it? Your parents? Or your brother's, perhaps?" for we knew that she had a brother in India. The poor governess only shook her head; but we could see the tears falling fast and silently upon this little relic; and, half sorry that we had prevailed upon her to open it, dared not ask any more questions.

Not long after this, Miss M——'s health became so delicate that it was thought best that she should return home for a while, and try the effects of her native air. Every one was sorry to part with her, and hoped that she would get quite well, and come back to them again very soon. But we never saw her any more. Some say that she died of consumption; others, of a broken heart! Anyhow, the story of her secret grief so long and meekly borne, together with that of the much treasured curl, was buried with her.

A history somewhat similar to the above is related of a young Creole, residing many years ago in a select establishment for young ladies, in the neighbourhood of London. Ayesha was what is called a parlour beauty; and being considerably older than most of the girls, and proud and reserved in her manners, could not boast of a single friend or confidant in the whole school, nor did this seem to afford her the slightest uneasiness. She was evidently happiest when alone; and none loved or cared for her sufficiently to seek, or interrupt her in her solitary meditations. Ayesha was as thoughtless and extravagant as she was rich; and so generous, that if one of her schoolfellows only happened to admire any trinket, however valuable, she would take it off directly, and insist upon her keeping it. But still, for all her riches and her warm generous heart, she was not beloved; something more than this is needful for affection.

Returning home from church one dark, winter night, Ayesha lost a small gold bracelet, which she always wore. The most diligent inquiries were made after it without success, while the girl, who cared so little in general for these things, became strangely restless and unhappy, offering a reward which must have been double the value of the lost jewel, to whoever could find and restore it to her.

After the lapse of a few days it was brought back by a poor old woman, upon whom Ayesha not only cheerfully bestowed the promised reward, but gave her a thousand thanks and blessings beside. And when the woman was gone, she sat down and burst into a flood of passionate weeping; while the girls gathered round her in silent wonder and commiseration. It seemed so strange for her to weep whom they had thought so cold and proud. At length one of the teachers remarked, that the bracelet did not appear to be so very valuable after all.

"To me," said Ayesha, "it is above all price!" And turning it half round, her companions saw that there was hair in it; and some among them ceased to wonder.

A few days afterwards Ayesha's parents came to fetch her home, and her schoolfellows noticed to one another that the hair could not have been theirs, which was black instead of light. Whose it was, and why so cherished by that silent and lonely girl above all her other treasures, is a mystery which has never been solved to this day. Human life is full of such romances; and stranger, far stranger oftentimes than fiction.

Hair-love is equally for the rich and poor. The relief may be gorgeously set, but in that case it hallows the gold and not the gold it; and is not a whit more precious in the jewelled casket than simply tied with a faded end of riband. A love token which all may exchange. Flowers wither; miniatures, however like, are but a resemblance. But this is a part, as it were, of the beloved one! An actual and living relic, speaking to the heart with a strange power; and recalling many a sweet bygone hour of a happiness which we felt even then must be too great to last.

The old man turns over the boards of his youth. There is a cold, mocking smile on his thin, compressed lip. His brow is wrinkled and contracted, his eyes stern and deep sunken; and worse than all, his heart has become seared and hardened. Merrily leap up the devouring flames on that comfortless and lonely hearth, as he flings into them, one by one, the records of past days. A pocket-book, a purse, delicately embroidered, a white kid glove, for it was white once, some withered flowers, a MS. poem! Yes, he was a poet,—that proud and aged man, or would have been, had not the fountain of song been too soon turned into bitterness and scorn. Next came a tress of hair—the same bright hair whose silken folds he had so often twined around his fingers in happier days—and now, unbidden, and like 'sea-birds,' as dear old Christopher North calls them, 'that come unexpectedly floating up from some inland vale,' a tale of past recollections swept across the old man's heart, until he bowed down his stern head, and wept like a child. A blessing upon those white sea-birds of memory! touching the floodgates of bygone thoughts and feelings with their gentle wings, and nestling and brooding over the world weaned soul, until it grows calm and peaceful beneath their soothing influence.

A young girl sits alone, with a pale cheek and flashing eyes, holding in her trembling hands a tress of black, shining hair—her own! but which she never thought to have received again thus. What a tale of heart-withering misery does such a scene present! and we fear it is far from being an uncommon one. How well does she recollect when he half begged, half stole it from her, with many a fond caressing word and earnest vow! And how she would have staked her very life at that moment upon his fidelity, as she had already done her happiness! They had just heard of the estrangement of some mutual friends, and wondered together. It seemed impossible for those who loved one another ever to quarrel. Alas! for the hour when we first wake up from this sweet dream, and see the dark summer-cold gathering over the sun-shine of an affection that had withstood so many trials, and we fondly thought would never fail us. Well, if that could pass away in showers of weeping only; but far oftener it deepens into a tempest of fierce wrath, whose angry waters make shipwreck of our peace for evermore! A word, perhaps, might have allayed its fury. One drop of the oil of human kindness flung upon the raging billows of passion—but we are too proud to utter it—and repenting only when it is too late, sit down amid the ruins and pray to die.

No one who saw that young girl a few years afterwards would ever have imagined the tress of raven hair to be hers, which had turned since then into a silvery grey; or, but for the pale cheek and withered form, suspected the dreary weight of woe so long and smilingly endured, for she was too proud to complain. They pitied her when her heart broke at length; they should rather have rejoiced!

The absent daughter married and far away, sends home a tiny curl in a letter—it is that of her first born! 'The softest, silkiest, brightest hair, she verily believes, in all the world! And its dear little head is quite covered with it, like so many rings of gold. Ah, if they could but see it! Why it seems but yesterday she was but a child herself, the merriest of the household band—the most mischief-loving, provoking, and yet fascinating being one can well imagine. Threats and reproof were alike thrown away upon her; but a fond word would bring her to her mother's side in a moment, all penitence and humility, although ten to one, the next she was as wild as ever. But she became grave all of a sudden, married and took to housekeeping by instinct as it were, for she could have had but little previous experience in these matters; but love makes us apt scholars, and became a very pattern wife and mother. We need not say how that tiny curl will be kept and prized by the happy grandmother, who wept for joy as she remembered all this. Mindful, at the same time, with the sad experience which is the heritage of old age, of the precariousness of all human felicity, and

how many as bright a bud of fair promise as that golden-haired child were now among the angels of heaven!

The young soldier, perishing on the field of glory, prays with his dying breath that a lock of his hair may be cut off and sent in remembrance of him to his mother and his poor Mary. And when it reaches them, having travelled perhaps hundreds of miles, how sacred and holy is such a relic? We can fancy the aged mother's tears and kisses, and 'his Mary,' laying it on her heart, and never being known to smile again on earth, although she continues meek and patient to the last. The death of a beloved object seldom fails to sanctify and make us better—to wean us gently from earth to heaven; such, at least, is the intention of all our afflictions, if we could but think so; while change and estrangement harden and petrify the affections until they seem turned to stone! 'It is a perilous thing,' says Frederica Bremer, 'when the beloved image in the heart of man is destroyed, since with it the best of his life is annihilated.'

The lover sends a lock of hair to his mistress, friend to friend, parent to child, child to parent. We verily believe the same hair-love to be universal, and pregnant with a thousand romantic and touching episodes.

An old lady dwelling in the wildest and most beautiful part of Derbyshire, and whose house had the reputation of being haunted, why we know not, unless that it was the very place of all others asprit might have been supposed to fancy for its wanderings, once kept a quantity of pale brown, silken hair in a drawer—thick clustering tresses, half as big as a person's hand, and long in proportion. They had belonged to her only child, and the poor mother found a sad consolation in stealing away to look at, and kiss, and weep over them by the hour together.

Helen W—— was far from being beautiful, but her eyes were bright and gentle, and her hair the admiration of all beholders. It swept the ground when she stood upright, but then, to be sure, she was not very tall; and when braided and twisted around that small classic-looking head, after a peculiar fashion of her own, formed a rich and yet simple coronet that a queen might have envied. Some people said that it was a sign of weakness and ill-health; but such was not the case with Helen.

There were never thought to be any spirits then haunting these ancient halls; perhaps the girl's sweet voice, which might be heard singing up and down the gloomy corridors from morning till night, served to exorcise them, or the living sunshine of her presence banished every darker superstition. Nor were they so lonely then, for the youthful and the noble came to stay there for weeks together; at which time they danced every night in the old banquetting hall until the fabled banners seemed to catch the contagion of their wild mirth, and swayed to and fro with a quick, restless motion. It was on one of these occasions that Helen's long hair, escaping from its fastenings, swept the marble floor as she whirled round and round in the gay waltz, and then, stopping all of a sudden and colouring to the very tips of her little slender fingers, took as long a time in her agitation as there was any need, to wind it up, while her partner's whispered praises only served to increase her embarrassment.

Helen knew that she had beautiful hair, she had been told of it a thousand times; but it was something quite strange to hear that she herself was also beautiful—at least in his eyes, who poured forth all his sweetattery, and if so, she cared for no other admiration in all the world. But she would not tell him this; but only laughed and shook her head, declaring that she did not believe one word of all those pretty speeches—but her blushes betrayed her.

The following morning the young Count de V—— called to ask her of her mother for his bride; and the news soon spread over the country that the gentle Helen W—— was engaged to be married to him in the spring, after which event they were still to reside, for the present at least, at the old hall; which was good tidings for the poor, who loved her dearly, and would have been sorry indeed to have lost their kind benefactress.

Helen never danced so much after this, but loved better to sit apart, but not alone, in the deep recess of the old-fashioned window. Some of her young companions used to wonder among themselves what they could find to talk about night after night, but grew wiser perhaps before long. Not only the Count who might be supposed to be somewhat prejudiced by his affection, or the fond and happy mother, but even the very domestics, noticed the striking improvement in Helen's personal appearance—she really was growing beautiful! There was a bright colour upon her fair cheek, a light on her tranquil brow and in those meek, loving eyes, inexpressibly touching.

A few weeks before the wedding was appointed to take place, the Count de V—— had occasion to go up to London on business of importance, which was not, however, expected to detain him above a day or two; but lovers' partings are solemn things. For the first time, the timid Helen not only suffered but returned his embrace, clinging to him with a sad foreboding tenderness. And when he would have quitted her at length, she called him back once more to her side, as if she could not bear the thought of her separation, even for so short a time.

"Why, I scarcely know what to make of you, my little Helen!" said her lover. "Your cheeks are burning, and yet your hands feel as cold as ice!"

"Yes, I am silly to agitate myself in this manner when you will be back again so soon. There, go now, and God bless you!"

That night the girl was in a high fever, caught, it seems, at a neighbouring cottage, where she had been to visit a poor sick child.

"Mother," said she, in the intervals of her delirium, "I am glad that Henri is not here; he would have been so grieved at my illness, and I shall be well again by the time he comes back!"

"I hope so, dearest? And Mrs. W—— likewise thought that it was best he should be absent, since his presence could not do any good. Like Helen, she had no fear. But, meanwhile, the fever increased in violence, and the physician himself evidently grew anxious as to its result.

"Mother," said the invalid again, as she heard them talking together around the bed, "whatever happens, do not let them cut off my hair! He would be sorry!"

"But still more so to lose you, my precious child!"

"Ah! has it come to that? Take it, then, and God's will be done!"

Mrs. W—— cut off all Helen's beautiful tresses with her own hands, for she knew her life was at stake; and now that the invalid felt it also, she never moaned or shrank back for life was very dear to her. And then, gathering it together, the fond mother put it carefully aside, with many tears. Helen could not weep; her eyes were dry and burning, her temples throbbled strangely. A few hours

afterwards she beckoned to her mother, and asked her to send for Henri, which was immediately done; but it was all over when he came back, and he had only to follow his young betrothed to her early grave.

Soon after this the Count de V—— went abroad, and the poor bereaved mother was left alone, with nothing but that sweet hair-love to console her.

We can remember a girl at school who kept the hair of all her young companions and friends, braided in neat little braids, with the initials of the original possessors attached to each, and had already accumulated quite a store of these treasures, to which she was continually adding; for Catherine was possessed of one of those happy and affectionate dispositions that seem to love every thing and every body that comes in its way. She was, perhaps, somewhat too visionary and romantic for this cold and every-day world; but that was far from being a fault in our eyes then—or now, for the matter of that; only that we pity where we used to sympathise. Alas, for those of the passionate feeling and the dreaming hope! Meeting her some time afterwards in society, we inquired concerning these school-day treasures. Catherine laughed.

"Ah!" said she "I have burnt them all long ago. What was the use of keeping such silly things!"

"So it is," as poor L. E. L. says—and no writer was ever better skilled in the hidden revelations of the human heart, except that they bore, in general, too much the sombre hue of her own sad and prophetic spirit. "So it is. What changes are wrought in a few passing years! How we do grow cold, indifferent and incredulous,—we who were so affectionate, so eager, so confiding! We set out in life with believing too much, and end in believing too little."

Leigh Hunt mentions some one who, as he writes, 'in pure classic taste and graceful tenderness kept the hair of a deceased friend in two marble vases.' But to us there seems something cold and overdrawn in this exquisite refinement of sensibility, and we infinitely prefer the poor old country-woman's glass bottle!

We were told the other day of a little school-child who cried bitterly upon being shown the hair of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, queen of France, which is said to have turned as white as snow in one single night of terror. She had heard and read of this many and many a time without thinking much about it, but that was very different to the real sight of that silvery tress, 'bleached by sorrow.'

"Which would you rather have? asked her mother,—the hair or the ring? The latter was of massive gold, and sparkling with gems; but the veneration in that child's heart was brighter still.

"The hair, to be sure, mamma!"

Oh, yes, hair is more precious than jewels a thousand times, especially when it is that of the loved or dead! We smile to receive the one; the other makes us weep and tremble in the midst of our deep happiness. The former is displayed with pride; the latter hidden in tenderness. Hair-love is the secret dream of a fond heart; at once a poetry and a reality! A luxury to the happy—a consolation to the afflicted—a blessing to the bereaved! A lock of hair, as it has been powerfully expressed, 'is an actual relic of the dead; as much so in its proportion as ashes, and more lively and recalling.' Now, hair caressingly, it twines its long silken folds round our fingers with a living fondness—or we fancy it; while our breath stirs its thin threads until it moves and speaks with the sweet, still voice of an undying memory! Verily, we have a gentle faith in hair-love.

Colonial Legislature.

THE MAINE LIQUOR BILL.

WEDNESDAY, April 4.

On motion of the Hon. Mr. Palmer, the House resolved itself into committee of the whole to take into consideration the petitions praying for the abolition of the liquor traffic, Mr. Perry in the chair.

Hon. Mr. PALMER.—Mr. Chairman, the resolution I am about to submit is the same as that which passed this House last year, and the Bill in accordance with it was thoroughly discussed here at that time, and it was well debated in the Legislative Council, which body thought fit to postpone the measure till this Session. Great disappointment was naturally felt by the friends of the Bill, but they had, as all others, to submit to the will of the Legislature, and await the time for action. And, Sir, since that, the question has lost no interest; on the contrary, it has received vast accessions of strength. It has been agitated sufficiently to keep it prominently before the public; the number of those who have petitioned for it has increased, and the petition which was entrusted to the Hon. Mr. Lord, Mr. Haviland and myself, contains, I believe, more than 8,000 signatures; those signatures I believe to be genuine. It was stated that the names of children had been appended to former petitions. That objection does not apply to the present one. There are few, if any signers under sixteen years of age. There may be the names of some females subscribed to it, but not to any great extent; and, Mr. Chairman, if it were otherwise, that should not detract from the consideration which it should receive from this House. On the contrary, that very circumstance should give additional weight to the application, as the sex is distinguished for its intelligence and nice discrimination of the moral condition of society. It may be as well to state that in placing the several sheets of signatures together, two similar ones have been appended to this petition. This is purely accidental, as the duplicate was intended to go before the Legislative Council, and with that trifling exception, I believe all the signatures to be entitled to credit. The question involved, as is well known, is one that for a long space of time, particularly for the last two or three years, has been so thoroughly discussed and investigated, and such opinions have been expressed by men able and eminent, that but little new ground is left for any one to travel over. I observe, Sir, that the result in Nova Scotia this year has been the same as that last Session. It passed the House of Assembly and was postponed by the Legislative Council. In New Brunswick it has received the sanction of both branches, and it will be in operation in a few months. In Canada it has passed the House by a large majority, and in several of the United States a prohibitory law has been in operation for a considerable period of time. With these examples before us, Mr. Chairman, I say it is not hazardous in us to adopt this law; we cannot be accused of crude or hasty legislation when we adopt a principle so generally approved in other countries. For myself, I have always been of opinion that there was nothing immoral in the moderate use of spirits as a beverage; yet it was no less constitutional and expedient to restrain their use by interposing legislative prohibition, if no other