

LITERATURE.

THE BARDS.

When the sweet day in silence hath departed,
And twilight comes with dewy, downcast eyes,
The glowing spirits of the mighty-hearted
Like stars around me rise.

Spirits whose voices pour an endless measure,
Exhaustless as the founts of glory are;
Until my trembling soul, o'erswept with pleasure,
Throbs like a flooded star.

Old Homer's song, in mighty undulations,
Comes surging, ceaseless, up the oblivious main;—
I hear the rivers from succeeding nations,
Go answering down again:—

Hear Virgil's stream in changeful currents strolling,
And Tasso's sweeping round through Palestine,
And Dante's deep and solemn river rolling
Through groves of midnight pine.

I hear the iron Norseman's numbers ringing
Through frozen Norway, like a herald's horn;
And like a lark, hear glorious Chaucer singing
Away in England's morn.

In Rhenish halls I hear the pilgrim lover
Weave his wild story to the wailing strings,
Till the young maiden's eyes are brimming over,
Like the sweet cup she brings.

And hear from Scottish hills the souls unquiet,
Pouring in torrents their perpetual lays,
As their impetuous mountain runnels riot
In the long rainy days:—

The world-wide Shakspeare—the imperial Spenser,
Whose shafts of song o'er top the angels' seats;—
While delicate, as from a silver censer,
Float the sweet dreams of Keats!

These are the Bards who, like our forests, tower,
Firm in their strength as are the mountain trees!
I were content could I but be a flower
Up at the feet of these!

NIGHTMARE ON THE RAILS.

"Is my special engine ready?"
"In a moment, sir; the engine-man will be here directly. What speed do you wish?"

"At least a mile a minute."
"Very good, sir; the line is perfectly clear, and with only one light carriage it can be easily done."

"I shall not want even that; I have all my despatches ready in my pocket, and shall go upon the engine!"

"You will hardly have eyes left in your head if you do, sir. Better have a first-class carriage put to."
"Never fear; I am tolerably accustomed to that sort of thing. Never blink an eye in the longest of your tunnels."

"Very well, sir; you know best. 'Tis your train, and of course you may either ride on the engine or in a carriage, as you please."

"The engine, then; and pray be smart; every moment spent here is lost."

I stood during the foregoing conversation upon the platform of an extensive railway station in a large town in the north of England. My interlocutor was the resident superintendent. I was the bearer of despatches of great importance for a London morning newspaper, and somewhat more than three hours was the utmost space of time I could afford to shoot over the 200 miles of rail which separated me from the office in the Strand.

It was a pleasant summer evening, and the rich radiance of the setting sun streamed through the skylights of the huge iron roof, and sparkled among the web of interlaced bars and bolts which stretched, in vistas of angles and lozenges, and all manner of mathematical figures beneath it—the metallic rafters of the terminus. On the half-dozen rails which divided the two platforms lay, as usual, long strings of first and second-class carriages, in the process of being furbished up by a lazy gang of corduroy-clad porters. On the left line of rails stood my special engine, bright and brazen, and shrieking as it shot its spiral column of rushing, whistling steam upwards from the brass cone, which appeared to act as chimney for the fierce vapour.

Some half-dozen porters, policemen, and newsvenders stood carelessly about to see the start; and the stoker of the "special," a greasy-looking mass of soiled fustian, with a wonderfully dirty face, clambered mechanically about the engine, after the manner of his tribe, listlessly rubbing the gleaming metal with a handful of oily rags.

I was growing fidgety and impatient. Throwing a glance upwards, I saw that the sun no longer lighted the high windows—the station was fast assuming the dusky grey of evening.

"What can be the matter with Westhorpe?" exclaimed the superintendent. "He don't stay long here, if that's the way he does his duty."

"I have sent two porters after him," said a policeman; "he reported himself fit for duty this morning."

"Wait! He has been ill?" said I.

"He's ne'er the same man, sir, since Mary Slane died so suddenly," replied the policeman.

"Oh, bother! we can't allow love-sick engine-drivers on this line," struck in the superintendent.

"But why don't you let me have another man, if this Mr. Westhorpe of yours is not fit for his work? You have plenty of hands, I suppose?"

"Why yes, sir; but the fact is, that our men have been a good deal worked lately, and as Westhorpe sent word this morning that he was ready to come back to day, we made our arrangements accordingly."

"Seven o'clock past," I replied, glancing at the station dial; "if you do not start me in five minutes, I countermand the engine, and will have my own remedy by law."

But before the five minutes were elapsed, the tardy engine-man made his appearance. He was muffled up in a shaggy pea jacket, a handkerchief was wound round the lower part of his face, and the brass-bound front of his cap was pulled down over his forehead, but I could observe the bright hollow glare of his eyes, and the clammy pallor of his cheeks. Attributing these appearances, however, to mere passing indisposition, I took no particular notice of them, nor did I remark with any attention, although it was visible enough, the restless, nervous state in which the man appeared to be: his hand trembled, he glanced quickly round from face to face, and then began, in an odd, fidgety manner, to button and unbutton a button in his jacket. These appearances might have alarmed me at another time, but I was too eager for the start to attend to them.

"I say, Westhorpe," exclaimed the superintendent, "if this is the way you choose to treat your employers, I can tell you that you shan't long be one of the employed, my fine fellow."

The engine-man muttered something, I know not what, and mechanically got upon the engine.

"You shut the three o'clock train at Bramsby station—do you hear, Mr. Westhorpe?—and the one o'clock goods-train at Thornly Cross: they will wait for you in the sidings. And, I say, mind you keep a sharp look out; don't spare the whistle; and go easy through the stations."

"Oh, I'll look after all that," I exclaimed, nodding to the superintendent as I clambered upon the engine.

"You know I'm an old railway bird. Good night. We shan't let the grass grow under our wheels. Come, now, Mr. Westhorpe, go ahead, and let's have a taste of the quality of the 'Tartarus.'"

The engine-man touched his cap, pulled one lever down, thrust another back, the driving wheel stirred, slid violently round a dozen of times without advancing, and then "biting," according to the technical expression, we moved along the platform, the superintendent following us and reiterating instructions to the driver.

The loud, panting "chee—chee—chee" of the engine rapidly grew quicker, and we rolled along the outskirts of the station—by policemen with bundles of red and white flags, and porters leaning upon switch handles; and, with trivial jolts from one interlacing line of rails to another, grazing long, motionless lines of massive first-class carriages and arrays of coarse trucks; and by the opening of sheds, from whence the livid gleams of furnaces and the ring of hammering, gleamed and rattled; and by hissing, shrieking pilot engines, now motionless, the hot cinders dropping all glowingly beneath them, anon crawling backwards and forwards as engines at railway stations always do, as if they had something on their minds and could not rest peaceably. And then came the loud, tearing rush, with which we flew under bridges; the whistle and the dismal shriek, and the smothering blast of steam and damp rushing air as we tore through a short tunnel, and soon we were fairly upon our way in the open country, the lights and high chimneys of the great manufacturing town sparkling and towering behind, and before us the fields, stretching away on either side from the long line of rails, and just losing their distinctness in the rising evening mist.

"On, Mr. Westhorpe! crack on! A good supper, and a better bottle of wine for you, when we get to town!"

"Thank ye, sir!" said the man, but without looking into my face; and then turning away, he began to grope for something in the matting on which he stood, muttering all the while to himself. There was something odd, indescribable, in the man's manner; and I observed that the stoker looked at him with evident uneasiness, and addressed him not a word.

All this while the speed of the engine was rapidly increasing. The clattering of the opening and shutting valves, as they alternately let on and cut off the steam, grew faster and faster, till they rattled like the continuous roll of a drum. The hedges by the wayside flew by in a long dusky line, which might have been shrubs, or stone wall, or wooden palings. The swaying motion of the engine grew to be a quick, swinging jolt. The white poles which supported the wires of the electric telegraph flew by as though defiling in rapid procession; bridges loomed a moment before us like dark stripes curling the sky, and then, with a steam shriek and a bound, were left behind. On!—along high embankments—down with a sweep between deep cuttings—past stations, with their neat waiting-rooms, and high signal poles, and railed platforms! On, on! Milestone after milestone flew by. The steam monster seemed instinct with life. It bounded like a mad thing on the rails; the couplings of the tender creaked and strained;

the glare from the furnace and the lighter gleam from our big, eye-like lamp, flew like flashes of aurora borealis along the green slopes of cuttings; the red-hot cinders from the chimney went sparkling aloft into the air; and, although not a breath of wind was stirring, a hurricane, cold and piercing, such as the eye could hardly withstand, appeared to be tearing by us back into the lonesome night.

So far all was well. We were going at a great, but not unprecedented speed, and I was too well acquainted with railway travelling to feel nervous. I knew the line was clear, and the night was quite bright enough for us to perceive any signal half a mile off.

Meanwhile, Westhorpe stood fidgeting away with the engine, urging backwards and forwards the handles of the levers as they worked with the mechanism, as though he would increase their speed. He was never still for a moment, and kept continually stamping and shuffling with his feet. The stoker leant against the rails, clutching them, as it struck me, in an alarmed anxious manner. I could observe this by the light of a very large and brilliant lamp, which hung on a hook close to the gauge which tells the height of the water in the boiler.

On, on, on!—mile after mile, and station after station! On by dark clumps of trees—and past the lights of villages and solitary farm houses—and across long, dim expanses of wild, open country! We might be already from twenty-five to thirty miles on our journey.

"Tartarus goes bravely," said I, making an effort to speak, and shouting the words into Westhorpe's ear.

The stoker came up close to us, and listened for the reply.

The engine driver looked quickly from one to the other of us, his eye glared like a wild beast's, and then he suddenly exclaimed to his fellow-labourer,—

"Coke, Jeffries, coke! More steam, more steam!—the gentleman must have more steam! Never mind life!—steam—steam!"

I was startled by this burst, so was Jeffries, as I found the stoker was called. He hesitated.

"Coke—coke!" shouted Westhorpe. "By the heaven above us there, do your duty, or over you go on the rails!"

The man still lingered with the spade in his hand. Westhorpe kicked open the furnace door. I heard the roar of the fierce fire above the howl of what appeared to be the tornado we were stemming.

I interposed. "I think we're getting over the ground very well," I faltered.

Jeffries made a motion, as much as to say, "There, you see!"

"You don't want to go quicker?" said Westhorpe, speaking low and very fast.

I shook my head.

"Well, I do!" roared the excited man. "Coke, Jeffries, coke!"

And he struck the stoker a violent blow with his clenched fist. For a moment I stood stupified. I would have given all the world to be left safe and sound on the dreariest spot of the dreary common we were passing. Jeffries, without a word, took up the spade, and threw the black masses into the fire, which crackled and roared again. By its glare, as he stooped, I saw that, under its mask of smut, his face was deadly pale.

And still on, on! The engine appeared to fly. The quarter-mile-stones seemed to shoot by as quickly as did the telegraph poles a quarter of an hour ago, and the sway was terrific.

"Music!" shouted Westhorpe, "music! We'll have music! Here's my boiling water organ!"

And as he spoke, he set on the steam-whistle: its scream went through and through my brain. The stoker looked at me. I saw he was trying to catch my eye, and the expression of his face was one of consternation and horror. All at once the horrible whistle ceased.

"It might give warning," Westhorpe muttered; "and besides, it's wasting the steam."

I shuddered. Suddenly the driver turned from the engine, and stepping to the tender, gazed long and anxiously back. Jeffries took advantage of the motion, and clutched me by the arm.

"Hush!" he said, breathlessly.

"What is the matter with the man?" I said.

"Hush! He is mad, I thought so these two days."

"Mad! I felt the cold sweat break out at every pore. A mile a minute with a mad driver! My flesh crept, and I got sick and faint."

"We must master him between us," gasped Jeffries.

"We can," I said: "it is our only chance. Come on!" The words were hardly uttered ere Westhorpe sprang—bounded round.

"I heard you!" he shouted; "I did! Treachery, treachery!—two to one! But, come, come!"

There was a moment's pause: not one of the three stirred. Then I saw Jeffries' hand gliding towards a heavy hammer which lay close to him. The maniac, for such he was, glared from one to the other of us. I could not fix his eye, but I felt that he watched my every movement. I gasped for breath. Jeffries' hand was close to the hammer, when, with a yell which rung high into the air amid the thunder of our onward pace, Westhorpe flung himself upon the stoker. He had observed his manœuvre to gain possession of the hammer.

"You would, would you?" the madman growled out between his clenched teeth,— "then take it!" He flung