

The Ladies' Garland.

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THE REPOSITORY.

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THE STEP-MOTHER.

It was a fine summer evening about sunset, when a young man, well mounted, rode through a small village. There was nothing striking in the circumstance, but the earnest manner with which he begged to be directed to the nearest inn, and a certain wildness in his appearance, were calculated to excite observation. 'For God's sake,' said he, to a teamster who was driving a load of hay, 'tell me where I can find a lodging for the night?'

'May be you have come a long way?' said the man, stopping his oxen.

'I am weary and sick,' replied the stranger, and repeated his request.

'Then you don't want to know which is the best inn, but which is the nearest?' said the man.

'I want a place where I can lodge,' said the traveller, impatiently.

'But if you can have a better one for going a few rods further,' said the man, 'I suppose you would not mind it.'

'I see,' said the stranger, 'you have no intention of directing me;' and he again put his horse forward.

'Hollo there!' said the man, calling after him 'you seem to be in a despatch hurry. You had better put up at the Golden Ball.'

'What do you mean Sam,' said a lad who was lying on the top of the hay, and now reached forward, 'by sending him there, when it is half a mile further? the Doctor is a great deal nearer. If you go along,' continued he, addressing the traveller, 'straight forward till you come to a turn on your right hand, you will soon be at the tavern. You'll know it for sartin, because it has the sign of a Mermaid.'

The stranger, whose strength and patience were exhausted, again attempted to proceed.—'You say,' said he, 'I must take the road on my left hand?'

'I did not say no such thing,' said the man; 'that road leads to the meeting house, and I take it, it is a tavern you want; you must go by that turning, and when you see another to your right, take that, and it will be acause it's too dark, if you don't see the sign of the Mermaid.'

The traveller appeared satisfied with the direction, for he again put spurs to his horse; but his fatigue or indisposition had greatly increased by this parley, and throwing the bridle upon the neck of the well broken steed, he requested one of the men, in a faint voice, to help him to dismount.

There is no mistaking real distress, and the good hearted teamster was quickly at his side, while the lad sprung from his elevated situation to assist him. Before they could disengage him from his horse, his strength totally failed, and they laid him senseless on a bank by the roadside.

A consultation now ensued of what was best to be done for him, and spurred both by curiosity and good nature, they determined to lay him on the hay and convey him to the tavern. The horse was mounted by the lad, and the man turning his oxen, slowly followed.

It was really too dark to distinguish the Mermaid before the travellers arrived, but the lad had gone before and related the adventure.

A new difficulty now occurred. The landlady declared she would not suffer him to be brought into the house, for she made no manner of doubt but he had the yellow fever, and they would all catch it.

The landlord, who acted in the double capacity of tavern keeper and physician, or quick doctor, now entered from an examination of the horse. He had found him of no ordinary quality, and his saddle and bridle, with the neat portmanteau, bespoke the rider a man of some consequence.

Whether from the necessity of turning from the high road, or because mine host of the Golden Ball presented better fare, it is difficult to say; but one thing was certain, that the Mermaid had of late been much neglected. The arrival of a guest was a rare occurrence, and such a chance was not to be lost; the doctor decided that the best chamber should be made ready for the invalid, and Mrs. Don, the landlady, unwillingly set about it. On one thing they both agreed, that their only daughter, Almeria Saccharissa, should not come within the reach of any possible contagion. There is a constant dread of the yellow fever in the country towns round those cities where it has once or twice appeared. Often, during the summer months, reports prevail that this dreadful disease has begun its ravages, and as it is presumed there is much pains taken to conceal it from the country people, from the fear of losing their supplies, suspicion and terror are often falsely excited. This was the case at the present period, a few instances of sudden death at the metropolis, though unaccompanied by any malignant symptoms, had given rise to exaggerated reports of the yellow fever. In vain the physicians gave the most solemn assurances of the city; still it was whispered that people were thrown into their graves, at dead of night, without any funeral procession, any tolling of bells, any black crape or bombazine, all of which ceremonies, in the estimation of many people, greatly alleviate the horrors of death. It was not wonderful, therefore, that both the landlord and landlady should have hesitated about receiving an unknown traveller, with every indication of disease. The 'hardness of the times,' was the strongest argument in favor of the measure, and Mrs. Don, the landlady, after hanging camphor bags around the neck of every individual of the family, suffered the stranger to be brought in and laid in a decent bed. A few restoratives were administered, and as he had fainted from exhaustion, he soon opened his eyes. Dr. Don, who had no hesitation in intro-

ducing himself in his minor capacity as a physician, felt his pulse and inquired into his symptoms. The traveller discovered every sign of impatience, requested to be left alone, and said he wanted nothing but rest. In the morning the doctor again paid him a visit, and hinted at the fears of his wife, but the stranger assured him that he had been travelling several days, and that his indisposition arose from fatigue; but as he still felt weak, he wished to remain where he was, till the next day. The landlord returned to the kitchen with this consoling statement, and entirely interrupted the account that Betty, the house maid, was giving, that 'the sick man was as yellow as the egg she was cooking.' Many conjectures were now hazarded with regard to the traveller's destination. In the midst of them, Almeria entered the room. It was with no small degree of pleasure, that she heard that the gentleman had no symptoms of the yellow fever, that he was a young man, and to remain till the next day. She had a few weeks before returned from a boarding school, where she had been taught every elegant and polite accomplishment. She considered herself mistress of French, had a pretty turn for poetry, and would no doubt have excelled in music, had the doctor's finances allowed her a piano forte, but this was beyond his means; all the indulgent father could do, he had done; he had procured her a small second hand barrel organ, upon which the fair Almeria played, to the astonishment of the few guests that strayed from the high road to the Mermaid. It had some advantages even over Clementi's pianos—it was portable, and her father thought it good, while some exercise to turn the crank of the organ. It is true, that it was not so classic in its form as might have been wished; it resembled neither a lyre, a harp, nor a guitar, but might have been mistaken in its exterior for an old-fashioned coffee mill.

But to what purpose were all Almeria's accomplishments? There were none to admire, and it was with invigorated hope that she flung aside her camphor bag, to make preparations for the stranger, who had asked for breakfast. Perhaps it might be conjectured that these preparations were to contribute to the comfort of the guest; quite the contrary; they were intended to display herself. Any body could get a breakfast; but no body but Almeria could give the apartment that air of gentility that might captivate the stranger's eye. No person that has resided in a small village can be ignorant of the tenacity with which light is cherished. The room destined to receive the guest, presented two windows to the east and two to the south; not a shutter, not even a paper hanging was suffered to exclude the bright luminary of day, as it pursued its glorious course from window to window, cast its broad yellow beam upon the breakfast table, on the mourning pieces and landscapes painted by Almeria, and at last settled on a bright tin reflector, which, from its various angles, sent back multiplied rays. On a small table were arranged various books, with some of them lying open at passages that marked the elegant taste of the owner, whose name was written with many a flourish on the title page. 'Almeria Saccharissa Don.' Nor must the red morocco Album be forgotten, which contained many extravagant