

Poets' Corner.

SONGS OF OUR LAND.

BY FRANCES BROWNE, THE BLIND POETESS, OF DONEGAL.

Songs of our land, ye are with us for ever,
The power and the splendour of thrones past away;
But yours is the might of some far flowing river,
Through Summer's bright roses or Autumn's decay.
Ye treasure each voice of the swift passing ages,
And truth which time writeth on leaves or on sand;
Ye bring us the thought of poets and sages,
And keep them among us, old songs of our land.

The bards may go down to the place of their slumbers,
The lyre of the charmer be hushed in the grave,
But far in the future the power of their numbers
Shall kindle the hearts of our faithful and brave.
It will waken an echo in souls deep and lonely,
Like voices of reeds by the summer breeze fanned;
It will call up a spirit for freedom, when only
Her breathings are heard in the songs of our land.

For they keep a record of those, the true-hearted,
Who fell with the cause they had vowed to maintain;
They show us bright shadows of glory departed,
Of love that grew cold and the hope that was vain.
The page may be lost and the pen long forsaken,
And weeds may grow wild o'er the brave heart and hand;
But ye are still left when all else hath been taken,
Like streams in the desert, sweet songs of our land.

Songs of our land, ye have followed the stranger,
With power over ocean and desert afar,
Ye have gone with our wanderers through distance and danger,
And gladdened their path like a home guiding star.
With the breath of our mountains in summers long vanished,
And visions that passed like a wave from the sand,
With hope for their country and joy from her banished
Ye come to us ever, sweet songs of our land.

The spring time may come with the song of our glory,
To bid the green heart of the forest rejoice,
But the pine of the mountain though blasted and hoary,
And the rock in the desert, can send forth a voice.
It was thus in their triumph for deep desolations,
While ocean waves roll or the mountains shall stand,
Still hearts that are bravest and best of the nations,
Shall glory and live in the songs of the land.

THE DISINHERITED SON.

A LEGEND OF FURNESS ABBEY.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE LORD WALTER DE CONISTON AT THE ABBEY OF FURNESS.

THE evening's refection was over at Furness Abbey, and the bell was chiming for vespers, when a young monk who had but lately finished his novitiate, John Broughton by name, was summoned to the Abbot's parlor.

There, in company with that dignitary, he found the Prior, and the boy whom we have seen in the boat launched for the aid of the rash youth who meditated self-destruction on the Lever Sands.

This boy was the youngest of the three sons of Randolph de Coniston, Earl of Thurston, of whose castle on the banks of the lake not a vestige now remains.

A dour fierce lord was Randolph, a determined Lancastrian, who had fought under the Earl of Richmond at Bosworth, had been among those who proclaimed him Henry the Seventh on that field where the fortunes of the White Rose were quenched in blood, and had remained in high favor with that astute monarch till the time of his death.

Like that of the king, to whom he had been so devoted, the Earl of Thurston was a man of harsh and severe character.

After the death of Henry the Seventh, he withdrew with his lady and their three infant sons to his Castle of Coniston.

The free and joyous mood of Henry the Eighth, in the early part of his reign, little suited the austere nobleman, who would have made an admirable reiving border baron of the middle ages.

The Countess of Thurston, a gentle, timid lady, would fain have remained at court, where she had been most kindly received by the gracious Katherine of Arragon.

But the merrimakes, the pageant, the joustings, and feastings in which the young king delighted, were denounced by the sullen, gloomy earl. From his flat his wife had no appeal, and very sorrowfully she accompanied him to the gloomy solitude of his castle, where she died ere her youngest son Walter had completed his fifth year.

Earl Thurston delighted only in war and the chase.

The deep forest of High Furness, in those days abounded with game of every description, afforded the earl ample sport in the comparatively peaceable pursuit of the chase. The proximity of the Scottish border afforded him the still more exciting gratification of an occasional foray.

Of his sons, the two elder, both in person and disposition, resembled himself.

Had their mother lived, it is possible that her wise and loving care might have softened the turbulent temper of these boys, the second of whom, Oswald, the same wild youth whom we have seen on the Lever Sands, was perhaps even more fierce and obdurate than his brother.

With all his faults, however, Oswald de Coniston was gifted with strong natural affections.

Fiercer and prouder, but less hard and wholly selfish than Randolph, the Earl's eldest son, he was capable both of inspiring and feeling strong attachments.

Thus, there were various of the retainers who would have laid down their lives for him. To his younger brother, little Walter, a fragile, delicate child, he half supplied the place of the mother whom the little fellow had so early lost.

His devotion to the child was touching. He would climb the steepest rocks, and hang midway between earth and sky to procure for little Walter a wild flower or a bird's nest. He would fish, hunt, shoot, to furnish the most delicate trout, the most delicate venison, the daintiest birds, to tempt the sickly appetite of his young brother.

To harder tasks than these he sentenced himself for love of little Walter.

In sooth, to a boy of his hardy frame and active habits, it was a very hard task to devote himself to the clerical arts of penmanship and illuminating MSS.

But then the supreme delight of Walter was in transcribing the wonderful stories of cruel enchanters, fiery dragons, distressed ladies, and valorous knights, with which the pages of the ancient romancers teem. Still better did the child love to play on the pure, smooth, shining parchment the gorgeous tints of purple, azure, and vermillion, brightening and enriching all with the burnished gold leaf.

Half his pleasure was, however, destroyed if Oswald was not at his elbow to assist him in the task. Many a time had Oswald chafed at the taunts of his elder brother, when with his hawk upon his wrist he sneered at the lad who, instead of roaming by the mere or the forest, sat poring over books or dabbling with inks and pigments to please a sick child. The rough Earl would sometimes join Randolph in his scoffing speech; but Joslyn Brathwaite, the chief huntsman, swore that his lord did not, after all, love his second son the less for his devotion to little Walter.

He knew indeed that Oswald was as light of foot, drew as keen an arrow, and wielded as stout a sword as Randolph.

On one occasion, when the child Walter was ill of an infectious fever, Oswald watched three nights and days without the door of the sick chamber, which the leech had prohibited him to enter.

When the boy recovered, Randolph, who scrupulously avoided approaching him during his illness, scoffingly bade Oswald assume the cap and pinnars of a nurse, for that lance he must be unfit to level, or bow to draw.

Then came a great outburst of Oswald's fierce temper. He sprang at his brother, and shook him till he swayed like an aspen in a northern gale.

Heaven knows in what the fray between the lads might have ended, for the sullen Randolph essayed to draw his dagger from the sheath. The shrieks of little Walter, however, alarmed the household; and the Earl, who was within, having arrived in time only to receive the still invalid boy in his arms in a dead swoon, he interposed his authority between his elder sons.

He took part with Oswald, and uttering a sentiment but little in accordance with his customary rough manner, he bade Randolph remember that it was characteristic of a true knight to be bold as a lion, yet gentle as a lamb.

He bade both the boys to a trial of skill with the lance and the longbow, promising a jewelled baldric to the victor. That rich prize was won by Oswald, and ever afterwards the sneering Randolph termed him his father's favorite; but he never ventured to dispute his prowess in warlike sports again.

In a sort of fashion Oswald was indeed a favorite of his father; but the affection of the Earl for his other sons did not incline him to swerve a jot in his design of accumulating wealth for his heir.

Still matters might have had a quiet ending, and Randolph de Coniston might have succeeded his father as Earl of Thurston, and left sons to inherit his name, and Oswald might have accepted the portion of a younger son, the lance and the sword, wherewith to hew his way to fortune, and this woeful story, as it must needs prove in the end, might never have been to be told, but for that fair and fatal source of nine-tenths of the troubles of mortal life—a woman!

There was one Sir Richard Egremont, a stern old knight, a friend of the Earl of Thurston from his youth, and a man after his own heart.

Like the Earl, Sir Richard was a widower; but instead of being the father of three brave boys, the knight's only child was a daughter.

Much had the brutal and stupid knight grumbled at the child's sex, and so often reproached the poor Evelina that she was not a bold hearty boy, that the poor girl was quite ashamed of her unwilling fault, and passed her time in fruitless wishes that she could inherit her father's sword as well as his land.

Sir Richard died when his daughter was about fourteen years of age, and little loss had she by his death, which would indeed have been her gain had the knight been possessed of the good sense to leave her under the guardianship of some matron.

That, however, he considered by no means necessary, and he nominated as her sole guardian his friend the Earl Thurston, adding thereto a proviso that she was to wed the Lord Randolph de Coniston when of suitable age.

Should she refuse to be bartered thus, as if she were a hound or a horse, then the whole estate—a very rich one—was to lapse to Earl Randolph, with the exception of a small dowry to secure her maintenance in a convent.

If, on the other hand, the young noble should ungallantly refuse the lady, the offer of her hand and fortune was to be made on the same terms to his brother, Lord Oswald.

Little chance was there, however, that Evelina Egremont would have to endure such an affront. She was a fair, beautiful girl, timid and yielding to a fault; who, had she detested Randolph de Coniston, would never have summoned courage to dispute her father's will and refuse to be his wife. Happily, as it at the time appeared for the poor girl, her inclinations in this respect were not at variance with her duty. Haughty and overbearing at all times, morose and sullen as Randolph