

We are happy to reprint this splendid piece (recently discovered by Harry Ogle in a volume seeming to promise nothing of lantern interest) in which we find a deep seriousness of purpose (rather rare in Lantern readings) together with

a brilliant reversal of the usual literary use made of the image of the lantern show; instead of the reality of a lantern show generating fantasy we have here an imagined show projecting reality.

*The world becomes a dream and the dream becomes the world.*

NOVALIS

# THE WEDDING BONNET

from

## OUR SOCIAL BEES

by Andrew Wynter

I WAS the other day in the company of half-a-dozen young ladies—gentle cousins—all of them as merry as little larks, as busy as lamplighters, and as important as the preparation for the great event in female life—a wedding—could make them. The bride's bonnet had just come home, and I had the satisfaction of seeing a dozen lily-white hands all in one tumultuous group, arranging and shaping it to the face of the fair maid herself. It was pronounced on all hands quite the thing—a love of a bonnet, in fact; and after having deposited it in the centre of the table, and hunted under the sofa and in all quarters of the room to make sure that the cat was not there, they left me with an especial charge not to touch it for the world. I promised accordingly, as I sat dozing before the fire, and they left me alone to pursue their welcome task. Presently, a knock, knock, came to the door; it speedily opened, and a strange gentleman in respectable black entered with a magic-lantern under his arm. Somehow or other I was not a bit astonished at his entrance, but took it quite as a matter of course. "So you have a bride's bonnet there," said he, looking at me with his keen gray eyes; "all smiles and happiness, I suppose?"

"Yes," said I, as though he had been the oldest friend in the world, "little Anne——"

"Ah!" said he, interposing, "people must marry, I suppose; but I have a word or two to say to you about this gimcrack." And stepping up to the bonnet, he turned up his cuffs like an expert chemical lecturer, took it in his hands, blew upon it, and as quickly as a child's card-house rattles to the ground, the bonnet lay in pieces before him. Satin, blush-rose, feather, frame-work, and the very cotton with which it was sown, lay grouped under his hands. He then deliberately wiped the illuminated lens of his magic-lantern. "Let us begin," said he, "from the beginning," taking in his grizzly fingers the blush-rose, and stripping its stem until the iron wire of which it was composed was laid bare. Before even this thread of metal can be produced, men must dive into the bowels of the earth to procure the ore and the fuel with which to smelt it. "I will show you the true history of the making of this bonnet." With that he turned the focus of the lantern upon the wall, and I saw a picture of a deep pit into which men continually kept entering, and as continually emerging from, like so many emmets, black and filthy to the last degree; and further in the mine, toiling up steep ascents, women on their hands and knees, with chains round their bodies, dragged up the heavy corves of coal.\*

"But this," said I, "surely is not fit employment for women?"

"Well," said he with a shrug, as if mimicking a general expression, "what's to be done? Somebody must do it."

With that he changed the slides, and I saw a child, not more than five years old, sitting in a narrow low passage in the remotest darkness of the mine. I saw him pull something he held in his hand, a little door opened, and the woman harnessed to the corve passed onwards; the door shut to, and the child was again in the darkness, huddled up in the corner to protect himself from the cold and damp. Noticing my surprise, my strange visitor remarked, "This sort of thing soon uses them up, but there are plenty more in the 'labour market.' What so cheap as flesh and blood? But we have forged the tough iron and spun the fine wire. Now for the artist's touch."

As he spoke, a fresh slide rattled through the lantern; and in a mean room I saw a poor girl, winding delicate gauze round the iron wire, and with wan fingers, mocking nature in one of her most beautiful moods. As she added petal after petal of the rose she was making, she stole hour after hour from the night. "You see," said he, "she tints the flower from the colour of her own poor cheek. Alas! that the human rose should decay that this artificial thing might flourish!" He said this sadly, but immediately added, in his usual tone, "but there—what's to be done? The pay is slow starvation, I admit; but these women crowd the labour-market so, that they are glad enough to slave even at this work—if not, a worse fate awaits them."

"But we have only got as far as the flower in our lecture," he said, and held out the blush-rose he had taken from the bonnet; he then put it aside with the triumphant air of one who has just made a successful demonstration.

"Here," said he, holding up a piece of the glazed calico lining, "I will show you something interesting about this," and immediately threw out upon the wall a picture which differed from all that had gone before it. Tall palms, and all the luxuriant vegetation of the East, shot up. Then a village was seen upon the banks of the Ganges. In the open air workmen sat at their looms weaving cloth, and singing as they wove.

"Have you noticed the scene enough?" said he. I nodded, the picture dissolved, and instead of the former scene of beauty and industry, I saw a village in ruins, through which the wild dog alone roamed, and the jungle grew up to its very foot.

"You see," said he, anticipating my eager query as to the cause of this change, "when the power-loom first began to revolve, and the tall chimneys of Manchester to rise, the poor rude looms on the banks of the Ganges, and their frugal, industrious workers perished at a blow. But you know competition is the order of the day—the weak in these times must go to the wall."

Perceiving that I did not exactly understand the Christian spirit of this doctrine, he added, with a more earnest tone, "Perhaps the time will come, when the transition from a slow to a more speedy method of production, through the agency of machinery, will be made with some mitigation of all this sudden and unlooked-for misery—but while I am moralizing my lamp is burning, and I have a score of slides yet to show you."

With that the lantern threw upon the wall another picture. It was an African desert, and an Arab on horseback was hunting down the swift ostrich, which with outspread wings sailed along the burning sand. At length, worn out by the greater power of endurance of his pursuer, he was taken and slain, and his captor rewarded himself for his trouble by plucking from the yet bleeding bird his waving plumage. In the distance, a caravan comes winding along towards some distant mart, to which the Arab attaches himself—the wells fail the moving multitude, and one by one, man and beast, fall and leave their whitened bones as a track-mark for future travellers across the wastes; but the merchandise is borne home, though human life is lost.

"You would not think, to see with what negligent elegance this feather falls," said the stranger, holding up its white sweep, "that man had given even life in the struggle to bring it to this perfection. But there, what's

to be done?—we always thought more of matter than of man. We have not quite finished yet," said he, taking up the cane framework of the bonnet; "we must go to the New World for our next picture."

As he spoke, he adjusted a new slide, and showed a Brazilian plantation, in which the slaves laboured under fear of the cow-hide of the overseer. "The bees who make the honey," said he, with his cold sneer, "how grateful man is to them! I suppose you think *we* have no such slaves. I have two or three choice slides here," said he, holding up the transparent glasses—"a figure or so of an exhausted milliner, and a Spitalfields weaver in his little garret, weaving inch by inch glossy satin, whilst his own poor family have only rags to cover them; but I have shown you enough of the misery that has gone towards making this little trifle. The pretty little miss, when she puts it on, and carries it so lightly on her head, will little think how it has been derved, and forged, and weaved, and built up into such a becoming fashion—but it is worth a thought about." With that he blew lightly on the scattered materials, and they rushed together again as speedily as they had before fallen to pieces.

"And now," said he, in the rising tone of one coming to his peroration, "I am not altogether such a bad sort of a spirit as you might have taken me to be. So I will give you a sentiment of much importance to the working bees in the busy human hive, and that is—

A HAPPIER PRODUCTION AND A BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH."

And clapping his magic lantern under his arm, he wished me a good evening and disappeared.

"Why, Tom," said a sweet voice close to my ear, at the same time a soft little fist thumped me on the back—"why, Tom," said Anne, "you have been talking such strange things in your sleep this last half-hour. I told you how 'twould be, eating so many nuts." And truly I had gone fast asleep with my feet on the fender, and saw this vision.

And now, gentle reader, do not be angry with me if, imitating the tactics of the newspaper puffs, which begin with some alluring title and gradually lead on to the "Mart of Moses," or the as inevitable "Macassar," I have struck in your heart upon an universal sympathy, and thus beguiled you into the less interesting channels of social economy. But for once the puff, like the foam of the tankard, is all on the top, and it will be seen, perhaps, that there is more substance in the matter below than the title warrants. Considering how important a portion of the community are the productive classes, it is no slight matter that we endeavour to rid their daily occupation as much as possible of the needless repulsiveness and danger that in too many cases at present attaches to them. As for the proposition of "A better distribution of wealth," it has occupied the attention of all the most enlightened economists, but they have looked upon it as a thing rather to be desired than capable of accomplishment. In the various joint-stock associations, however, and mutual benefit societies which have spread lately so widely among the middle and working classes, by which profits are diffused through the masses instead of centring in large capitalists, one of the methods by which the problem is to be worked is perhaps hit upon.

\* Since this paper was written, this degrading kind of labour has been prohibited by the Legislature.