

"A GATHERING OF HAPPINESS, A CONCENTRATION AND COMBINATION OF PLEASANT DETAILS, A THRONG OF GLAD FACES, A MUSTER OF ELATED HEARTS."

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

THE BED-BOOK OF HAPPINESS

Being a Colligation or Assemblage of Cheerful Writings brought together from many quarters into this one compass for the diversion, distraction, and delight of those who lie abed, — a friend to the invalid, a companion to the sleepless, an excuse to the tired, by

HAROLD BEGBIE

**HODDER AND STOUGHTON LONDON NEW
YORK TORONTO**

**PRINTED IN 1914 BY HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LD.,
LONDON AND AYLESBURY.**

to

SIR JESSE BOOT

*If, in my pages, those who suffer find
Such cheer as warms your heart and lights your mind,
Glad shall I be, but gladder, prouder too,
If this my book become a friend like you.*

RONDEL

_BESIDE YOUR BED I COME TO STAY WITH MAGIC MORE
THAN HUMAN SKILL, MY PAGES RUN TO DO YOUR WILL,
MY COVERS KEEP YOUR CARES AWAY.

THE NURSE ARRIVES WITH LADEN TRAY, THE DOCTOR
CANCELS DRAUGHT AND PILL; BESIDE YOUR BED I COME
TO STAY WITH MAGIC MORE THAN HUMAN SKILL.

AND YOU THRO' FAERY LANDS WILL STRAY, AT LAUGH-
TER'S FOUNTAIN DRINK YOUR FILL, FOR THO' YOUR BODY
CRY "I'M ILL!" YOUR MIND WILL DANCE FROM NIGHT TO
DAY. BESIDE YOUR BED I COME TO STAY WITH MAGIC
MORE THAN HUMAN SKILL_.

THE RENDERING OF THANKS

To Mr. Austin Dobson and his publishers, Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

To Mr. R.A. Streatfeild, Mr. Henry Festing Jones, and Mr. A.C. Field, the publisher, for permission to make use of "The Note Books of Samuel Butler."

To Mr. W. Aldis Wright and Messrs. Macmillan for my quotations from "The Letters of Edward FitzGerald."

To Mr. E.I. Carlyle, author of "The Life of William Cobbett."

To Sir Herbert Stephen and Messrs. Bowes & Bowes of Cambridge for permission to include verses from the "Lapsus Calami" of J.K. Stephen.

To Mrs. Hole, Mr. G.A.B. Dewar, and Messrs. George Allen & Co., for my quotations from Mr. Dewar's "The Letters of Samuel Reynolds Hole."

To Messrs. Chatto & Windus for my extracts from the Works of Mark Twain.

To Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons for permission to make a quotation from "Mrs. Brookfield and her Circle."

To Messrs. Constable & Co. for my raid on the "Letters of T.E. Brown."

To Messrs. George Bell & Son for the verses taken from C.S. Calverley's

"Fly Leaves."

To Mr. E.V. Lucas, prince of anthologists, for the liberal use I have made of his "Life of Charles Lamb."

To Mr. G.K. Chesterton, and his publishers, Messrs. Methuen, Mr. Duckworth, Mr. J.M. Dent, and Mr. John Lane.

To Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. (*the owners of the copyright*) for permission to include letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield.

To Messrs. Gibbings & Co. for my extracts from the admirable translation of Sainte-Beuve.

And to all authors, living and dead, who have assembled in this place to entertain the sick and the weary.

H.B.

FOREWORD

"It is worth," said Dr. Johnson, "a thousand pounds a year to have the habit of looking on the bright side of things."

It is worth more than all money to have the capacity, the power, the will to see the bright side of things, to possess the assurance that there is a veritable and persisting bright side of things, when the mind is gloomed by physical weakness and the heart is conscious only of languor and distress. At such a dull time even a long-established habit may desert us; with our faculties clouded and obscured we are tempted to doubt the entire philosophy of our former life; we sink down into the sheets of discomfort, and roll our heads restlessly on the pillow of discontent; we almost extract a morbid satisfaction from the fuliginous surrenderings of pessimism. Mrs. Gummidge at our bedside might be as unwelcome as Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, or Zophar the Naamathite; but there is a Widow in the soul of all men as mournful and lugubrious as the tearful sister of Mr. Peggotty, and in our weakness it is often this dismal self-comforter we are disposed to summon to our aid. "My soul is weary of my life," cried Job; "I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul."

Now, there is not a wise doctor in the world, nor any man who truly knows himself, but will acknowledge and confess the enormous importance to physical recovery of mental well-being. The thing has become platitudinous, but remains as difficult as ever. If Christian Science on its physiological side had been an easy matter it would long ago have converted the world. The trouble is that obvious things are not always easy. It is obvious to the victim of alcoholic or nicotine poisoning that he would be infinitely better in health could he abjure alcohol or tobacco; he does not need to be philosophised or theologised into this conviction; he knows it better than his teachers. His necessity is a superadded force to the will within his soul which has lost the power of action. And so with the will of the sick person, who knows very well that if he could rid himself of dejection and heaviness his health would come back to

him on swallows' wings. Obvious, palpable, more certain than tomorrow's sun; but how difficult, how hard, nay, sometimes how impossible! An honest man like Father Tyrrell confesses that in certain bouts with the flesh faith may desert us, even the religious faith of a life-time may fall in ruins round our naked soul.

I was once speaking on this subject to Sir Jesse Boot, telling him how hard I had found it to amuse and distract the mind of one of my children in the extreme weakness which fell upon her after an operation. I told him that I had searched my book-shelves for stories, histories, anthologies, and journeyings; that I had carried to the bedside piles of books which I thought the most suitable; and that I had read from these books day after day, succeeding for some few minutes at a time to interest the sick child, but ending almost in every case with failure and defeat. I found that humour could bore, that narrative could irritate, that essays could worry and perplex, that poetry could depress, and that wit could tease with its cleverness. Moreover, I found that one could not go straight to any anthology in existence without coming unexpectedly, and before one was aware of it, upon some passage so mournful or sad or pathetic that it undid at a sentence all the good which had been done by luckier reading. My friend, who is himself a great reader, and who has borne for some years a heavy burden of infirmity, agreed that cheerful reading is of immense help in sickness and also confessed that it is difficult to find any one book which ministers to a mind weakened by illness or tortured by insomnia.

The present volume is the outcome of that conversation. I determined to compile a book which from the first page to the last should be a happy book, a book which would come to be a friend of all those who share in any way the sickness of the world, a book to which everybody could go with the sure knowledge that they would find there nothing to depress, nothing to exacerbate irritable nerves, nothing to confirm the mind in dejection. And on its positive side I said that this book should be diverse and changeful in its happiness. I planned that while cheerfulness should be its soul, the expression of that cheerfulness should avoid monotony with as great an energy as the book itself avoided depression. My theory was a book whose pages should resemble rather an *olla podrida* of variety than a tautological joint of monotonous nutriment. And I

sought to fill my wallet rather from the crumbs let fall by the happy feasters than from the too familiar table of the great masters.

"To muse, to dream, to conceive of fine works, is a delightful occupation." But one must go from conception to execution, crossing the gulf that separates "these two hemispheres of Art." "The man," says Balzac, "who can but sketch his purpose beforehand in words is regarded as a wonder, and every artist and writer possesses that faculty. But gestation, fruition, the laborious rearing of the offspring, putting it to bed every night full fed with milk, embracing it anew every morning with the inexhaustible affection of a mother's heart, licking it clean, dressing it a hundred times in the richest garb only to be instantly destroyed; then never to be cast down at the convulsions of this headlong life till the living masterpiece is perfected which in sculpture speaks to every eye, in literature to every intellect, in painting to every memory, in music to every heart!—this is the task of execution."

Even the compiler knows something of this passion of the artist, experiences some at least of the convulsions of this headlong life, makes acquaintance certainly with this task of execution. To conceive such a volume as a *Bed-Book of Happiness* is one matter, to make it in very fact a *Bed-Book of Happiness* is another and a much harder matter. For, to begin with, one's judgment is not nearly so free and one's field of selection not nearly so wide as the anthologist's whose book is for all sorts and conditions of men, who may be as merry as he wishes on one page, as solemn as he chooses on the next, and as pathetic or sentimental as he likes on the page beyond. One has had to reject, for instance, humour that is too boisterous or noisy, wit that is too stinging and acrimonious, anecdotes that are touched with cruelty, essays that, otherwise cheerful, deviate into the shadows of a too sombre reflection. One has sought to compile a book of cheerfulness that is kind and of happiness that is quiet and composed. One has had always in mind the invalid just able to bear the effort of listening to a melodious voice. To amuse, to distract, to divert, and above all to charm—to bring a smile to the mind rather than laughter to the lips—has been the guiding principle of this book, and the task has not been easy. It is really extraordinary, to give but one instance of my difficulties, how frequently the most amusing work of comic writers is ruined by some chuck-

ling jests about coffins, undertakers, or graves. If any reader in full health miss from this throng of glad faces, this muster of elated hearts, the most amusing and delightful of his familiar friends, let him ask himself, before he pass judgment on the anthologist, before he mistake a deliberate omission for a careless forgetfulness, whether those good friends of his, amiable and welcome enough at the dinner-table, are the companions he would choose for his most wearisome hours or for the bedside of his sick child. And if in these pages another should find that which neither amuses nor diverts his mind, that which seems to him to miss the magic and to lack the charm of happiness, let him pass on, with as much charity as he can spare for the anthologist, remembering the proverb of Terence and counting himself an infinitely happier man for this clear proof of his superior judgment.

I wished to include in this book, from the literature of other countries, such gentle, whimsical humour as one finds in the letters of FitzGerald or the Essays of Lamb. But, with all my searching I could find nothing of that kind, and judges whom I can trust assure me that no other literature has the exquisite note of happiness which sounds through English letters so quietly, so cheerfully, and so contentedly. Therefore my Bed-Book is almost entirely an English Bed-Book, for I liked not the biting acid of Voltaire's epigrams any more than the rollicking and disgusting coarseness of Boccaccio or Rabelais. It is an interesting reflection, if it be true, that English literature is *par excellence* the literature of Happiness.

"He who puts forth one depressing thought," says Lady Rachel Howard, "aids Satan in his work of torment. He who puts forth one cheering thought aids God in His work of beneficence." I have acted in the faith that life is essentially good, that the universe presents to the natural intuition of man a bright and glorious expression of Divine happiness, that to be fruitful, as George Sand has it, life must be felt as a blessing. One of the characters in a novel by Dostöevsky says, "Men are made for happiness, and any one who is completely happy has a right to say to himself, 'I am doing God's will on earth.' All the righteous, all the saints, all the holy martyrs were happy."

Happiness, in its truest and only lasting sense, is the condition of a soul at unity with itself and in harmony with existence. To bring

the sick and the sad and the unhappy at least some way on the road to this blissful state, is the purpose of my book; and it leaves me on its travel round the world with the wish that to whatever bedside of sickness, suffering, and lethargy it may come, it may bring with it the magic and contagious joy of those rare and gracious people whose longed-for visits to an invalid are like draughts of rejoicing health. I hope that my fine covers may soon be worn to the comfort of an old garment, that my new pages may be quickly shabbied to the endearment of a familiar face, and that the book will live at bed-sides deepening and sweetening the reader's affection for its faded leaves till it come to seem an old, faithful, and never-failing friend, one who is never at fault and never a deserter, and without whom life would lose one of its fondest companionships.

CONTENTS

ALLSTON, WASHINGTON:

The Lost Ornament 191

ANONYMOUS:

The Gentle Reader 14

King David and the Gardener 198

Sabbath Bells 275

From the Greek Anthology 313

Letter from an Indian Gentleman to an
English Friend 324

A Babu Letter 327

Mary Powell 341

A Tur'ble Chap 374

After Mr. Masfield 384

Hits and Misses 443

The Broken Window 443

BAGEHOT, WALTER:

Letters 212

BALMANNO, MRS.:

Charles and his Sister 193

BETHAM, M.M.:

Miss Pate 190

BOSWELL:

Dr. Johnson at Court 346

BROOKFIELD, W.H.:

Mr. Brookfield in his Youth 376

BROWN, T.E.:

Letters of T.E. Brown 85

BUTLER, SAMUEL:

Clergyman and Chickens 15

Melchisedec 15

Eating and Proselytising 15

Sea-sickness 17

Assimilation and Persecution 17

Night-shirts and Babies 17

Does Mamma Know? 18

Croesus and his Kitchen-maid 19

Adam and Eve 24

Fire 24

The Electric Light in its Infancy 25

New-laid Eggs 25

Snapshotting a Bishop 26

BYRON:

Apples 359

CALVERLEY, CHARLES:

Visions 99

The Schoolmaster Abroad with his Son 174

Motherhood 257

"Forever" 337

CARLYLE:

Richter 1

CARROLL, LEWIS:

The Author of "Alice" 378