

**A TALE OF TWO OLD
SONGS. 1. THE BRIDGE. 2.
THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH**

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A Tale of Two Old Songs. 1. The Bridge. 2. The Village Blacksmith by Mrs. Marion Clifford-Butler

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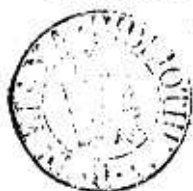
**A TALE OF TWO OLD
SONGS. 1. THE BRIDGE. 2.
THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH**

A TALE OF TWO
OLD SONGS.

BY THE
HON. MRS CLIFFORD-BUTLER,
AUTHOR OF "A SUNBEAM'S INFLUENCE."

1. *THE BRIDGE.*

2. *THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.*



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THE BRIDGE.

A TALE IN THREE PARTS.

PART I.

" I stood on the bridge at midnight,
As the clocks were striking the hour ;
And the moon rose o'er the city,
Behind the dark church tower.

" I saw her bright reflection
In the waters under me,
Like a golden goblet falling
And sinking into the sea.

" And far in the hazy distance
Of that lovely night in June,
The blaze of the flaming furnace
Gleam'd redder than the moon.

" Among the long black rafters
The wavering shadows lay,
And the current that came from the ocean
Seem'd to lift and bear them away:

" As sweeping and eddying through them,
Rose the belated tide ;
And streaming into the moonlight,
The seaweed floated wide."

THE old wooden bridge at Grayford, with its time-blackened rafters and tall irregular supports, with the silvery flood that flows past it in summer with calm gentle majesty, in winter, with a fierce eddying whirling rush, that

seems to threaten its old friend with sudden annihilation;—how many and many an old memory does it suggest!

How many voices of the past, hushed for evermore, come back and mingle with the river's never-ceasing murmur! How many lost footsteps seem once more to tread the wooden planks, as they pass onward, each to their appointed work!

It is less frequented now, my ancient friend, for not a quarter of a mile lower down the river stands a new and massive bridge of stone, the gift to themselves of the population of the brisk and stirring town of Grayford, and it is over this that most of the inhabitants prefer to wend their busy way; for even thirty years ago there were rumours that some of the piers of the old bridge were the worse for age, and unfit to bear the weight of heavy traffic passing to and fro. Yet let us imagine for the nonce that it *is* thirty years ago, and that you and I, reader, are standing on the old bridge, in the deep-hushed stillness of an early summer's night—standing there, not alone, but invisible, though a flood of moon-

light is falling on the group who are sharing our midnight saunter.

They are three in number: a man past middle age, on whose bent form and silvered head the weight of years seems to have pressed with no light hand, and two of those beings in whom life, like an early summer's blossom, seems just bursting forth in the glory and strength of its beauty. Unconsciously they have sought the moonlit side of the bridge, and are gazing from the silvery flood beneath far over the shining meadows, fragrant with the half-cut masses of dewy hay, into the distant haze, where the deep-red glow of many a ceaseless fire tells of the miners and their occupation.

"How lovely, and how still! Do let us stand here just a few minutes more. The splash of the water is so delicious, and the coolness so pleasant after that hot room. We shall hear the church clock strike in a few minutes; it was more than half-past eleven when we started, and I have a fancy to begin my birthday here, and have you and papa wish me many happy returns the very moment the 'witching

hour' has struck, and my eighteenth year begun."

And the speaker, a brown-haired fairy creature, who, like King Arthur's daughter, seemed, in spite of the age she so proudly vaunted—

"Less of the woman than the child"—

looked straight up with those confiding coaxing brown eyes of hers into the face of her tall companion, then let them travel onward to the big bright full summer moon, and then down again to its silver reflection in the depths below.

A bright joyous young life was hers,—little Effie Bramstone,—though it had been a motherless, and, in some respects, a lonely one, for her father, a busy rising doctor, with a large and ever-increasing practice in the Grayford town and neighbourhood, had not always the time he could have wished to bestow on his little daughter, though she was his only child, and the very darling of his heart.

He was, moreover, a gentle studious man, wont to bestow in scientific study the scanty

leisure he might snatch from hours of business ; and though loving to watch his child's gay spirits, as he might those of a bird or a kitten, he had little apparent sympathy with her, still less inclination to share her gambols. But Effie's was a nature that throve in the light of its own sunshine, and her life, if uneventful, had at least been shielded from care.

The dawning of her fair womanhood was a fact that had only lately made itself patent to her father's eyes, though there were others more sharp-sighted, who averred that, from bold Harold Leigh to gentle Laurence Grahame, the young men of Grayford thought no partner in the Grayford merry-meetings half so charming as the doctor's little daughter.

It was Harold Leigh who now stood beside her, looking down into the moonlit waters, and on whose stalwart arm Effie's little hand rested. Harold Leigh, her cousin and her father's ward, the handsomest, most reckless dare-devil among the youngsters for many miles round, but to whom Effie's lightest word was law.

"Harold the Dauntless" was his name among