

The Argosy eBook

The Argosy

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Argosy eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	13
Page 5.....	14
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	23
Page 12.....	24
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	27
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	30
Page 17.....	31
Page 18.....	32
Page 19.....	33
Page 20.....	34
Page 21.....	36
Page 22.....	38

Page 23.....	39
Page 24.....	41
Page 25.....	42
Page 26.....	44
Page 27.....	46
Page 28.....	48
Page 29.....	50
Page 30.....	52
Page 31.....	54
Page 32.....	56
Page 33.....	58
Page 34.....	60
Page 35.....	62
Page 36.....	64
Page 37.....	66
Page 38.....	68
Page 39.....	70
Page 40.....	72
Page 41.....	74
Page 42.....	76
Page 43.....	78
Page 44.....	80
Page 45.....	81
Page 46.....	82
Page 47.....	83
Page 48.....	84

Page 49.....	85
Page 50.....	87
Page 51.....	88
Page 52.....	89
Page 53.....	90
Page 54.....	92
Page 55.....	93
Page 56.....	95
Page 57.....	96
Page 58.....	97
Page 59.....	99
Page 60.....	101
Page 61.....	103
Page 62.....	105
Page 63.....	107
Page 64.....	109
Page 65.....	111
Page 66.....	113
Page 67.....	115
Page 68.....	117
Page 69.....	119
Page 70.....	121
Page 71.....	123
Page 72.....	125
Page 73.....	126
Page 74.....	128

[Page 75.....130](#)

[Page 76.....132](#)

[Page 77.....134](#)

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
THE ARGOSY.		1
THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.		1
CHAPTER V.		1
CHAPTER VI.		6
CHAPTER VII.		12
CHAPTER VIII.		17
SONNET.		23
MEDIUMS AND MYSTERIES.		23
ENLIGHTENMENT.		26
THE SILENT CHIMES.		26
II.		29
III.		34
WINTER IN ABSENCE.		43
AFTER TWENTY YEARS		59
A MEMORY.		64
AUNT PHOEBE'S HEIRLOOMS.		64
SAINT OR SATAN.		72
IN A BERNESE VALLEY.		76



Page 1

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1891.

THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

CHAPTER V.

At rose cottage.

On regaining my senses I found myself in a cozy little bed in a cozy little room, with an old gentleman sitting by my side gently chafing one of my hands—a gentleman with white hair and a white moustache, with a ruddy face and a smile that made me all in love with him at first sight.

“Did I not say that she would do famously in a little while?” he cried, in a cheery voice that it did one good to listen to. “I believe the Poppetina has only been hoaxing us all this time: pretending to be half-drowned just to find out whether anyone would make a fuss about her. Is not that the truth, little one?”

“If you please, sir, where am I? And are you a doctor?” I asked, faintly.

“I am not a doctor, either of medicine or law,” answered the white-haired gentleman. “I am Major Strickland, and this place is Rose Cottage—the magnificent mansion which I call my own. But you had better not talk, my dear—at least not just yet: not till the doctor himself has seen you.”

“But how did I get here?” I pleaded. “Do tell me that, please.”

“Simply thus. My nephew Geordie was out mooning on the bridge when he heard a cry for help. Next minute he saw you and your boat go over the weir. He rushed down to the quiet water at the foot of the falls, plunged in, and fished you out before you had time to get more than half-drowned. My housekeeper, Deborah, put you to bed, and here you are. But I am afraid that you have hurt yourself among those ugly stones that line the weir; so Geordie has gone off for the doctor, and we shall soon know how you really are. One question I must ask you, in order that I may send word to your friends. What is your name? and where do you live?”

Before I could reply, the village doctor came bounding up the stairs three at a time. Five minutes sufficed him for my case. A good night's rest and a bottle of his mixture were all that was required. A few hours would see me as well as ever. Then he went.

“And now for the name and address, Poppetina,” said the smiling Major. “We must send word to papa and mamma without a moment’s delay.”

“I have neither papa nor mamma,” I answered. “My name is Janet Hope, and I come from Deepley Walls.”

“From Deepley Walls!” exclaimed the Major. “I thought I knew everybody under Lady Chillington’s roof, but I never heard of you before to-night, my dear.”

Then I told him that I had been only two days with Lady Chillington, and that all of my previous life that I could remember had been spent at Park Hill Seminary.

Page 2

The Major was evidently puzzled by what I had told him. He mused for several moments without speaking. Hitherto my face had been in half-shadow, the candle having been placed behind the curtain that fell round the head of the bed, so as not to dazzle my eyes. This candle the Major now took, and held it about a yard above my head, so that its full light fell on my upturned face. I was swathed in a blanket, and while addressing the Major had raised myself on my elbow in bed. My long black hair, still damp, fell wildly round my shoulders.

The moment Major Strickland's eyes rested on my face, on which the full light of the candle was now shining, his ruddy cheek paled; he started back in amazement, and was obliged to replace the candlestick on the table.

"Great Heavens! what a marvellous resemblance!" he exclaimed. "It cannot arise from accident merely. There must be a hidden link somewhere."

Then taking the candle for the second time, he scanned my face again with eyes that seemed to pierce me through and through. "It is as if one had come to me suddenly from the dead," I heard him say in a low voice. Then with down-bent head and folded arms he took several turns across the room.

"Sir, of whom do I remind you?" I timidly asked.

"Of someone, child, whom I knew when I was young—of someone who died long years before you were born." There was a ring of pathos in his voice that seemed like the echo of some sorrowful story.

"Are you sure that you have no other name than Janet Hope?" he asked, presently.

"None, sir, that I know of. I have been called Janet Hope ever since I can remember."

"But about your parents? What were they called, and where did they live?"

"I know nothing whatever about them except what Sister Agnes told me yesterday."

"And she said—what?"

"That my father was drowned abroad several years ago, and that my mother died a year later."

"Poverina! But it is strange that Sister Agnes should have known your parents. Perhaps she can supply the missing link. The mention of her name reminds me that I have not yet sent word to Deepley Walls that you are safe and sound at Rose Cottage. Geordie must start without a moment's delay. I am an old friend of Lady Chillington, my dear, so that she will be quite satisfied when she learns that you are under my roof."

“But, sir, when shall I see the gentleman who got me out of the water?” I asked.

“What, Geordie? Oh, you’ll see Geordie in the morning, never fear! A good boy! a fine boy! though it’s his old uncle who says it.”

Then he rang the bell, and when Deborah, his only servant, came up, he committed me with many injunctions into her charge. Then taking my head gently between his hands, he kissed me tenderly on the forehead, and wished me “Good-night, and happy dreams.”

Deborah was very kind. She brought me up a delicious little supper, and decided that there was no need for me to take the doctor’s nauseous mixture. She took it herself instead, but merely as a sop to her conscience and my own; “for, after all, you know, there’s very little difference in physic—it’s all nasty; and I daresay this mixture will do my lumbago no harm.”

Page 3

The effects of the accident had almost entirely passed away by next morning, and I was dressed and downstairs by seven o'clock. I found the Major hard at work digging up the garden for his winter crops. "Ah, Poppetina, down so early!" he cried. "And how do we feel this morning, eh? None the worse for our ducking, I hope."

I assured him that I was quite well, and that I had never felt better in my life.

"That will be good news for her ladyship," he replied, "and will prove to her that Miss Hope has not fallen among Philistines. In any case, she cannot be more pleased than I am to find that you have sustained no harm from your accident. There is something, Poverina, in that face of yours that brings back the past to me strangely. But here comes Master Geordie."

I turned and saw a young man sauntering slowly down the pathway. He was very fair, and, to me, seemed very handsome. He had blue eyes, and his hair was a mass of short, crisp flaxen curls. From the way in which the Major regarded him as he came lounging up, I could see that the old soldier was very proud of his young Adonis of a nephew. The latter lifted his hat as he opened the wicket, and bade his uncle good-morning. Me he did not for the moment see.

"Miss Hope is not up yet, I suppose?" he said. "I trust she is none the worse for her tumble over the weir."

"Our little water-nymph is here to answer for herself," said the Major. "The roses in her cheeks seem all the brighter for their wetting."

George Strickland turned smilingly towards me, and held out his hand. "I am very glad to find that you have suffered so little from your accident," he said. "When I fished you out of the river last night you looked so death-like that I was afraid we should not be able to bring you round without difficulty."

Tears stood in my eyes as I took his hand. "Oh, sir, how brave, how noble it was of you to act as you did! You saved my life at the risk of your own; and how can I ever thank you enough?"

A bright colour came into his cheek as I spoke. "My dear child, you must not speak in that way," he said. "What I did was a very ordinary thing. Anyone else in my place would have done precisely the same. I must not claim more merit than is due for an action so simple."

"To you it may seem a simple thing to do, but I cannot forget that it was my life that you saved."

"What an old-fashioned princess it is!" said the Major. "Why, it must have been born a hundred years ago, and have had a fairy for its godmother. But here comes Deborah to

tell us that breakfast is ready. Toasted bacon is better than pretty speeches; so come along with you, and make believe that you have known each other for a twelvemonth at least."

Page 4

Rose Cottage was a tiny place, and there were not wanting proofs that the Major's income was commensurate with the scale of his establishment. A wise economy had to be a guiding rule in Major Strickland's life, otherwise Mr. George's college expenses would never have been met, and that young gentleman would not have had a proper start in life. Deborah was the only servant that the little household could afford; but then the Major himself was gardener, butler, valet and page in one. Thus—he cleaned the knives in a machine of his own invention; he brushed his own clothes; he lacquered his own boots, and at a pinch could mend them. He dug and planted his own garden, and grew enough potatoes and greenstuff to serve his little family the year round. In a little paddock behind his garden the Major kept a cow; in the garden itself he had half-a-dozen hives; while not far away was a fowl-house that supplied him with more eggs than he could dispose of, except by sale. The Major's maxim was, that the humblest offices of labour could be dignified by a gentleman, and by his own example he proved the rule. What few leisure hours he allowed himself were chiefly spent with rod and line on the banks of the Adair.

George Strickland was an orphan, and had been adopted and brought up by his uncle since he was six years old. So far, the uncle had been able to supply the means for having him educated in accordance with his wishes. For the last three years George had been at one of the public schools, and now he was at home for a few weeks' holiday previously to going to Cambridge.

It will of course be understood that but a very small portion of what is here set down respecting Rose Cottage and its inmates was patent to me at that first visit; much of it, indeed, did not come within my cognizance till several years afterwards.

When breakfast was over, the Major lighted an immense meerschaum, and then invited me to accompany him over his little demesne. To a girl whose life had been spent within the four bare walls of a school-room, everything was fresh and everything was delightful. First to the fowl-house, then to the hives, and after that to see the brindled calf in the paddock, whose gambols and general mode of conducting himself were so utterly absurd that I laughed more in ten minutes after seeing him than I had done in ten years previously.

When we got back to the cottage, George was ready to take me on the river. The Major went down with us and saw us safely on board the *Water Lily*, bade us good-bye for an hour, and then went about his morning's business. I was rather frightened at first, the *Water Lily* was such a tiny craft, so long and narrow that it seemed to me as if the least movement on one side must upset it. But George showed me exactly where to sit, and gave me the tiller-ropes, with instructions how to manage them, and was himself so full of quiet confidence that my fears quickly died a natural death, and a sweet sense of enjoyment took their place.

Page 5

We were on that part of the river which was below the weir, and as we put out from shore the scene of my last night's adventure was clearly visible. There, spanning the river just above the weir, was the open-work timber bridge on which George was standing when my cry for help struck his ears. There was the weir itself, a sheet of foaming, frothing water, that as it fell dashed itself in white-lipped passion against the rounded boulders that seemed striving in vain to turn it from its course. And here, a little way from the bottom of the weir, was the pool of quiet water over which our little boat was now cleaving its way, and out of which the handsome young man now sitting opposite to me had plucked me, bruised and senseless, only a few short hours ago. I shuddered and could feel myself turn pale as I looked. George seemed to read my thoughts; he smiled, but said nothing. Then bending all his strength to the oars, he sent the *Water Lily* spinning on her course. All my skill and attention were needed for the proper management of the tiller, and for a little while all morbid musings were banished from my mind.

Scarcely a word passed between us during the next half-hour, but I was too happy to care much for conversation. When we had gone a couple of miles or more, George pointed out a ruinous old house that stood on a dreary flat about a quarter of a mile from the river. Many years ago, he told me, that house had been the scene of a terrible murder, and was said to have been haunted ever since. Nobody would live in it; it was shunned as a place accursed, and was now falling slowly into decay and ruin. I listened to the story with breathless interest, and the telling of it seemed to make us quite old friends. After this there seemed no lack of subjects for conversation. George shipped his oars, and the boat was allowed to float lazily down the stream. He told about his schooldays, and I told about mine. The height of his ambition, he said, was to go into the army, and become a soldier like his dear old uncle. But Major Strickland wanted him to become a lawyer; and, owing everything to his uncle as he did, it was impossible for him not to accede to his wishes. "Besides which," added George, with a sigh, "a commission is an expensive thing to buy, and dear old uncle is anything but rich."

When we first set out that morning I think that George, from the summit of his eighteen years, had been inclined to look down upon me as a little school miss, whom he might patronise in a kindly sort of way, but whose conversation could not possibly interest a man of his sense and knowledge of the world. But whether it arose from that "old-fashioned" quality of which Major Strickland had made mention, which caused me to seem so much older than my years; or whether it arose from the genuine interest I showed in all he had to say; certain it is that long before we got back to Rose Cottage we were talking as equals in years

Page 6

and understanding; but that by no means prevented me from looking up to him in my own mind as to a being superior, not only to myself, but to the common run of humanity. I was sorry when we got back in sight of the weir, and as I stepped ashore I thought that this morning and the one I had spent with Sister Agnes in Charke Forest were the two happiest of my life. I had no prevision that the fair-haired young man with whom I had passed three such pleasant hours would, in after years, influence my life in a way that just now I was far too much a child even to dream of.

CHAPTER VI.

The growth of A mystery.

We started at five o'clock to walk back to Deepley Walls, the Major, and I, and George. It was only two miles away across the fields. I was quite proud to be seen in the company of so stately a gentleman as Major Strickland, who was dressed this afternoon as for a visit of ceremony. He had on a blue frock-coat, tightly buttoned, to which the builder had imparted an intangible something that smacked undeniably of the old soldier. He wore a hat rather wide in the brim; a high stiff checked cravat; a white vest; and lacquered military boots, over which his tightly-strapped trousers fell without a crease. He had white buckskin gloves, a stout silver-headed malacca cane, and carried a choice geranium in his button-hole.

There was not much conversation among us by the way. The Major's usual flow of talk seemed to have deserted him this afternoon, and his mood seemed unconsciously to influence both George and me. Lady Chillington's threat to send me to a French school weighed down my spirits. I had found dear friends—Sister Agnes, the kind-hearted Major, and his nephew, only to be torn from them—to be plunged back into the cold, cheerless monotony of school-girl life, where there would be no one to love me, but many to find fault.

We went back by way of the plantation. George would not go any farther than the wicket at its edge, and it was agreed that he should there await the Major's return from the Hall. "I hope, Miss Janet, that we shall see you at Rose Cottage again before many days are over," he said, as he took my hand to bid me farewell. "Uncle has promised to ask her ladyship to spare you for a few days."

"I shall be very, very glad to come, Mr. George. As long as I live I shall be in your debt, for I cannot forget that I owe you my life."

"The fairy godmother is whispering in her ear," said the Major in a loud aside. "She talks like a woman of forty."

While still some distance away we could see Lady Chillington sunning herself on the western terrace. With a pang of regret I saw that Sister Agnes was not with her. The Major quickened his pace; I clung to his hand, and felt without seeing that her ladyship's eyes were fixed upon me severely.

"I have brought back your wandering princess," said the Major, in his cheery way, as he lifted his hat. Then, as he took her proffered hand, "I hope your ladyship is in perfect health."

Page 7

"No princess, Major Strickland, but a base beggar brat," said Lady Chillington, without heeding his last words. "From the first moment of my seeing her I had a presentiment that she would cause me nothing but trouble and annoyance. That presentiment has been borne out by facts—by facts!" She nodded her head at the Major, and rubbed one lean hand viciously within the other.

"Your ladyship forgets that the child herself is here. Pray consider her feelings."

"Were my feelings considered by those who sent her to Deepley Walls? I ought to have been consulted in the matter—to have had time given me to make fresh arrangements. It was enough to be burdened with the cost of her maintenance, without the added nuisance of having her before me as a continual eyesore. But I have arranged. Next week she leaves Deepley Walls for the Continent, and if I never see her face again, so much the better for both of us."

"With all due respect to your ladyship, it seems to me that your tone is far more bitter than the occasion demands. What may be the relationship between Miss Hope and yourself it is quite impossible for me to say; but that there is a tie of some sort between you I cannot for a moment doubt."

"And pray, Major Strickland, what reason may you have for believing that a tie of any kind exists between this young person and the mistress of Deepley Walls?"

"I will take my stand on one point: on the extraordinary resemblance which this child bears to—"

"To whom, Major Strickland?"

"To one who lies buried in Elvedon churchyard. You know whom I mean. Such a likeness is far too remarkable to be the result of accident."

"I deny the existence of any such likeness," said Lady Chillington, vehemently. "I deny it utterly. You are the victim of your own disordered imagination. Likeness, forsooth!" She laughed a bitter, contemptuous laugh, and seemed to think that she had disposed of the question for ever.

"Come here, child," said the Major, taking me kindly by the hand, and leading me close up to her ladyship. "Look at her, Lady Chillington," he added; "scan her features thoroughly, and tell me then that the likeness of which I speak is nothing more than a figment of my own brain."

Lady Chillington drew herself up haughtily. "To please you in a whim, Major Strickland, which I cannot characterise as anything but ridiculous, I will try to discover this fancied resemblance." Speaking thus, her ladyship carried her glass to her eye, and favoured me with a cold, critical stare, under which I felt my blood boil with grief and indignation.

“Pshaw! Major Strickland, you are growing old and foolish. I cannot perceive the faintest trace of such a likeness as you mention. Besides, if it really did exist it would prove nothing. It would merely serve to show that there may be certain secrets within Deepley Walls which not even Major Strickland’s well-known acumen can fathom.”

Page 8

"After that, of course I can only bid your ladyship farewell," said the offended Major, with a ceremonious bow. Then turning to me: "Good-bye, my dear Miss Janet, for the present. Even at this, the eleventh hour, I must intercede with Lady Chillington to grant you permission to come and spend part of next week with us at Rose Cottage."

"Oh! take her, and welcome; I have no wish to keep her here. But you will stop to dinner, Major, when we will talk of these things further. And now, Miss Pest, you had better run away. You have heard too much already."

I was glad enough to get away; so after a hasty kiss to Major Strickland, I hurried indoors; and once in my own bed-room, I burst into an uncontrollable fit of crying. How cruel had been Lady Chillington's words! and her looks had been more cruel than they.

I was still weeping when Sister Agnes came into the room. She had but just returned from Eastbury. She knelt beside me, and took me in her arms and kissed me, and wiped away my tears. "Why was I crying?" she asked. I told her of all that Lady Chillington had said.

"Oh! cruel, cruel of her to treat you thus!" she said. "Can nothing move her—nothing melt that heart of adamant? But, Janet, dear, you must not let her sharp words wound you so deeply. Would that my love could shield you from such trials in future. But that cannot always be. You must strive to regard such things as part of that stern discipline of life which is designed to tutor our wayward hearts and rebellious spirits, and bring them into harmony with a will superior to our own. And now you must tell me all about your voyage down the Adair, and your rescue by that brave George Strickland. Ah! how grieved I was, when the news was brought to Deepley Walls, that I could not hasten to you, and see with my own eyes that you had come to no harm! But I was chained to my post, and could not stir."

Scarcely had Sister Agnes done speaking when the air was filled with a strain of music that seemed to be more sweet and solemn than anything I had ever heard before. All the soreness melted out of my heart as I listened; all my troubles seemed to take to themselves wings, and life to put on an altogether different aspect from any it had ever worn to me before. I saw clearly that I had not been so good a girl in many ways as I might have been. I would try my best not to be so inattentive at church in future, and I would never, no, not even on the coldest night in winter, neglect to say my prayers before getting into bed.

"What is it? Where does it come from?" I whispered into the ear of Sister Agnes.

"It is Father Spiridion playing the organ in the west gallery."

"And who is Father Spiridion?"

“A good man and my friend. Presently you shall be introduced to him.”

No word more was spoken till the playing ceased. Then Sister Agnes took me by the hand and we went towards the west gallery. Father Spiridion saw us, and paused on the top of the stairs.

Page 9

"This is the child, holy father, of whom I have spoken to you once or twice; the child, Janet Hope."

The father's shrewd blue eyes took me in from head to foot at a glance. He was a tall, thin and slightly cadaverous-looking man, with high aquiline features; and with an indefinable something about him that made me recognise him on the spot as a gentleman. He wore a coarse brown robe that reached nearly to his feet, the cowl of which was drawn over his head. When Sister Agnes had spoken he laid his hand gently on my head, and said something I could not understand. Then placing his hand under my chin, he said, "Look me straight in the face, child."

I lifted my eyes and looked him fairly in the face, till his blue eyes lighted up with a smile. Then patting me on the cheek, he said, addressing Sister Agnes, "Nothing shifty there, at any rate. It is a face full of candour, and of that innocent fearlessness which childhood should always have, but too often loses in an evil world. I dare be bound now, little Janet, that thou art fond of sweetmeats?"

"Oh, yes, sir, if you please."

"By some strange accident I find here in my *soutane* a tiny box of bonbons. They might have been put there expressly for a little sweet tooth of a Janet. Nothing could be more opportune. Take them, my child, with Father Spiridion's blessing; and sometimes remember his name in thy prayers."

I did not see Father Spiridion again before I was sent away to school, but in after years our threads of life crossed and re-crossed each other strangely, in a way that neither he nor I even dreamed of at that first interview.

My life at Deepley Walls lengthened out from day to day, and in many ways I was exceedingly happy. My chief happiness lay in the love of dear Sister Agnes, with whom I spent at least one or two hours every day. Then I was very fond of Major Strickland, who, I felt sure, liked me in return—liked me for myself, and liked me still more, perhaps, for the strange resemblance which he said I bore to some dear one whom he had lost many years before. Of George Strickland, too, I was very fond, but with a shy and diffident sort of liking. I held him as so superior to me in every way that I could only worship him from a distance. The Major fetched me over to Rose Cottage several times. Such events were for me holidays in the true sense of the word. Another source of happiness arose from the fact that I saw very little of Lady Chillington. The indifference with which she had at first regarded me seemed to have deepened into absolute dislike. I was forbidden to enter her apartments, and I took care not to be seen by her when she was walking or riding out. I was sorry for her dislike, and yet glad that she dispensed with my presence. I was far happier in the housekeeper's room, where I was treated like a little queen. Dance and I soon learned to love each other very heartily.

Page 10

Those who have accompanied me thus far may not have forgotten the account of my first night at Deepley Walls, nor how frightened I was by the sound of certain mysterious footsteps in the room over mine. The matter was explained simply enough by Dance next day as a whim of Lady Chillington, who, for some reason best known to herself, chose that room out of all the big old house as the scene of her midnight perambulations. When, therefore, on one or two subsequent occasions, I was disturbed in a similar way, I was no longer frightened, but only rendered sleepless and uncomfortable for the time being. I felt at such times, so profound was the surrounding silence, as if every living creature in the world, save Lady Chillington and myself, were asleep.

But before long that room over mine acquired for itself in my mind a new and dread significance. A consciousness gradually grew upon me that there was about it something quite out of the common way; that its four walls held within themselves some grim secret, the rites appertaining to which were gone through when I and the rest of the uninitiated were supposed to be in bed and asleep. I cannot tell what it was that first made me suspect the existence of this secret. Certainly not the midnight walks of Lady Chillington. Perhaps a certain impalpable atmosphere of mystery, which, striking keenly on the sensitive nerves of a child, strung by recent events to a higher pitch than usual, broke down the first fine barrier that separates things common and of the earth earthy, from those dim intuitions which even the dullest of us feel at times of things spiritual and unseen. But however that may be, it so fell out that I, who at school had been one of the soundest of sleepers, had now become one of the worst. It often happened that I would awake in the middle of the night, even when there was no Lady Chillington to disturb me, and would so lie, sleepless, with wide-staring eyes, for hours, while all sorts of weird pictures would paint themselves idly in the waste nooks and corners of my brain. One fancy I had, and for many nights I thought it nothing more than fancy, that I could hear soft and muffled footsteps passing up and down the staircase just outside my door; and that at times I could even faintly distinguish them in the room over mine, where, however, they never stayed for more than a few minutes at any one time.

In one of my daylight explorations about the old house I ventured up the flight of stairs that led from the landing outside my door to the upper rooms. At the top of these stairs I found a door that differed from every other door I had seen at Deepley Walls. In colour it was a dull dead black, and it was studded with large square-headed nails. It was without a handle of any kind, but was pierced by one tiny keyhole. To what strange chamber did this terrible door give access? and who was the mysterious visitor who came here night after night with hushed footsteps and alone? These were two questions that weighed heavily on my mind, that troubled me persistently when I lay awake in the dark, and even refused by day to be put entirely on one side.

Page 11

By-and-by the mystery deepened. In a recess close to the top of the flight of stairs that led to the black door was an old-fashioned case clock. When this clock struck the hour, two small mechanical figures dressed like German burghers of the sixteenth century came out of two little turrets, bowed gravely to each other, and then retired, like court functionaries, backwards. It was a source of great pleasure to me to watch these figures go through their hourly pantomime. But after a time it came into my head to wonder whether they did their duty by night as well as by day; whether they came out and bowed to each other in the dark, or waited quietly in their turrets till morning. In pursuance of this inquiry, I got out of bed one night after Dance had left me, and relighted my candle. I knew that it was just on the stroke of eleven, and here was a capital opportunity for studying the customs of my little burghers by night. I stole up the staircase with my candle, and waited for the clock to strike. It struck, and out came the little figures as usual.

"Perhaps they only came because they saw my light," I said to myself. I felt that the question as to their mode of procedure in the dark was still an unsettled one.

But scarcely had the clock finished striking when I was disturbed by the shutting of a door downstairs. Fearing that someone was coming, and that the light might betray me, I blew out my candle and waited to hear more. But all was silent in the house. I turned to go down, but as I did so, I saw with astonishment that a thin streak of light shone from under the black door. I stood like one petrified. Was there anyone inside the room? Listening intently, I waited for full five minutes without stirring a limb. Silence the most profound upstairs and down. Stepping on tiptoe, I went back to my room, shut myself in, and crept gladly into bed.

Next night my curiosity overmastered my fear. As soon as Dance was gone I crept upstairs in the dark. One peep was enough. As on the previous night, a thin streak of light shone from under the black door—evidence that it was lighted up inside. Next night, and for several nights afterwards, I put the same plan in operation with precisely the same result. The light was always there.

Having my attention thus concentrated as it were upon this one room, and lying awake so many hours when I ought to have been asleep, my suspicions gradually merged into certainty that it was visited every midnight by someone who came and went so lightly and quietly that only by intently listening could I distinguish the exact moment of their passing my door. Who was this visitor that came and went so mysteriously? To discover this, without being myself discovered, was a matter that required both tact and courage, but it was one on which I was almost as much a monomaniac as a child well can be. To have opened my door when the landing was perfectly dark would have been

Page 12

to see nothing. To have opened the door with a candle in my hand would have been to betray myself. I must wait for a moonlight night, which would light up the landing sufficiently for my purpose. I waited. My opportunity came. With my doorway in deep shadow, my door just sufficiently open for me to peer through, and with the staircase lighted up by rays of the moon, I saw and recognised the mysterious midnight visitor to the room over mine. I saw and recognised Sister Agnes.

CHAPTER VII.

Exit Janet hope.

The effect upon me of the discovery that Sister Agnes was the midnight visitor of the room over mine was at once to stifle that brood of morbid fancies with which of late both room and visitor had become associated in my mind. I loved her so thoroughly, she was to me so complete an embodiment of all that was noble and beautiful in womanhood, that however unsatisfying to my curiosity such visits might be, I could not doubt that she must have excellent reasons for making them. One thing was quite evident, that since she herself had said nothing respecting the room and her visits to it, it was impossible for me to question her on the matter. Such being the case, I felt that it would be a poor return for all her goodness to me to question Dance or any other person respecting what she herself wished to keep concealed. Besides, it was doubtful whether Dance would tell me anything, even if I were to ask her. She had warned me a few hours after my arrival at Deepley Walls that there were many things under that roof respecting which I must seek no explanation; and with no one of the other domestics was I in any way intimate.

Still my curiosity remained unsatisfied; still over the room itself hung a veil of mystery which I would fain have lifted. All my visits to the room to see whether the light shone under the door had hitherto been made previously to the midnight visits of Sister Agnes. The question that now arose in my mind was whether the mysterious thread of light was or was not visible after Sister Agnes's customary visit—whether, in fact, it shone there all the night through. In order to solve this doubt, I lay awake the night following that of my discovery of Sister Agnes. Listening intently, with my bed-room door ajar, I heard her go upstairs, and ten minutes later I could just distinguish her smothered footfall as she came down. I heard the door at the bottom of the corridor shut behind her, and then I knew that I was safe.

Slipping out of bed, I stole, barefooted as I was, out of my bed-room and up the flight of stairs which led to the black door. Of ghosts in the ordinary meaning of that word—in the meaning which it has for five children out of six—I had no fear; my fears, such as

they were, ran in quite another groove. I went upstairs slowly, with shut eyes, counting each stair as I put my feet on it from

Page 13

one up to ten. I knew that from the tenth stair the streak of light, if there, would be visible. On the tenth stair I opened my eyes. There was the thread of light shining clear and steady under the black door. For a minute I stood looking at it. In the intense silence the beating of my heart was painfully audible. Grasping the banister with one hand, I went downstairs backwards, step by step, and so regained the sanctuary of my own room.

I scarcely know in what terms to describe, or how to make sufficiently clear, the strange sort of fascination there was for me in those nightly rambles—in living perpetually on the edge of a mystery. While daylight lasted the feeling slumbered within me; I could even take myself to task for wanting to pry into a secret that evidently in nowise concerned me. But as soon as twilight set in, and night's shadows began to creep timidly out of their corners, so surely could I feel the spell working within me, the desire creeping over me to pluck out the heart of the mystery that lay hidden behind the black nail-studded door upstairs. Sometimes I climbed the staircase at one hour, sometimes at another; but there was no real sleep for me, nothing but fitful uneasy dozes, till the brief journey had been made. After climbing to the tenth stair, and satisfying myself that the light was there, I would creep back noiselessly to bed, and fall at once into a deep dreamless sleep that was often prolonged till late in the forenoon.

At length there came a night when the secret was laid bare, and the spell broken for ever. I had been in bed for two hours and a half, lying in that half-dreamy state in which facts and fancies are so inextricably jumbled together that it is too much labour to disintegrate the two, when the clock struck one. Next moment I was out of bed, standing with the handle of the half-opened door in my hand, listening to the silence. I had heard Sister Agnes come down some time ago, and I felt secure from interruption. To-night the moon shone brightly in through a narrow window in the gable, and all the way upstairs there was a track of white light as though a company of ghosts had lately passed that way. As I went upstairs I counted them up to the tenth, and then I stood still. Yes, the thread of light was there as it always was, only—only somehow it seemed broader to-night than I had ever noticed it as being before. It was broader. I could not be mistaken. While I was still pondering over this problem, and wondering what it might mean, my eye was taken by the dull gleam of some small white object about half way up the door. My eyes were taken by it, and would not leave it till I had ascertained what it really was. I approached it step by step, slowly, and then I saw that it was in reality that which I had imagined it to be. It was a small silver key—Sister Agnes's key—which she had forgotten to take away with her on leaving the room. Moreover the door was unlocked, having been simply pulled to by Sister Agnes on leaving, which explained why the streak of light showed larger than common.

Page 14

I felt as though I were walking in a dream, so unreal did the whole business seem to me by this time. I was in a moonlight glamour; the influence of the silver orb was upon me. Of self-volition I seemed to have little or none left. I was given over to unseen powers, viewless, that dwell in space, of which we have ordinarily no human cognition. At such moments as these, and I have gone through many of them, I am no longer the Janet Hope of everyday life. I am lifted up and beyond my ordinary self. I obey a law whose beginning and whose ending I am alike ignorant of: but I feel that it is a law and not an impulse. I am led blindly forward, but I go unresistingly, feeling that there is no power left in me save that of obeying.

Did I push open the door of the secret room, or was it opened for me by unseen hands? I know not. I only know that it closed noiselessly behind me of its own accord and left me standing there wondering, alone, with white face and staring eyes.

The chamber was a large one, or seemed so to me. It was draped entirely in black, hiding whatever windows there might be. The polished wood floor was bare. The ceiling was painted with a number of sprawling Cupids, some of them scattering flowers, others weaving leafy chaplets, presumably to crown the inane-looking goddess reclining in their midst on a bank of impossible cloud. But both Cupids and goddess were dingy with age, and seemed to have grown too old for such Arcadian revels.

The room was lighted with a dozen large wax candles placed in four silver tripods, each of them about six feet in height, and screwed to the floor to prevent their being overturned. All these preparations were not without an object. That object was visible in the middle of the room. It was a large black coffin studded with silver nails, placed on a black slab about four feet in height, and more than half covered with a large pall.

I felt no fear at sight of this grim object. I was lifted too far above my ordinary self to be afraid. I simply wondered—wondered who lay asleep inside the coffin, and how long he or she had been there.

The only article of furniture in the room was a *prie-dieu* of black oak. I knelt on this, and gazed on the coffin, and wondered. My curiosity urged me to go up to it, and turn down the pall, and ascertain whether the name of the occupant was engraved on the lid. But stronger than my curiosity was a certain repugnance to go near it which I could not overcome. That some person was shut up there who during life had been of importance in the world, I could not doubt. This, too, was the room in which Lady Chillington took her midnight perambulations, and that coffin was the object she came to contemplate. Perhaps the occupant of the coffin came out, and walked with my lady, and held ghostly converse with her on such occasions. I fancied that even now I could hear him breathing heavily, and turning over uneasily in his narrow bed. There seemed a rustling, too, among the folds of the sombre curtains as though someone were in hiding there; and that low faint sobbing sigh which quivered through the room, like an accent of

unutterable sorrow, whence did it come? Others than myself were surely there, though I might not be able to see them.

Page 15

I knelt on the *prie-dieu*, stirring neither hand nor foot; as immovable, in fact, except for my breathing, as a figure cut out of stone. Looking and wondering still, after a time it seemed to me that the lights were growing dimmer, that the room was growing colder; that some baleful presence was beside me with malicious intent to gradually numb and chill the life out of me, to freeze me, body and soul, till the two could no longer hold together; and that when morning came, if ever it did come to that accursed room, my husk would be there indeed, but Janet Hope herself would be gone for ever. A viewless horror stirred my hair, and caused my flesh to creep. The baneful influence that was upon me was deepening in intensity; every minute that passed seemed to render me more powerless to break the spell. Suddenly the clock struck two. At the same moment a light footfall sounded on the stairs outside. It was Sister Agnes coming back to lock the door, and to fetch the key which she had left behind two hours before. I heard her approach the door, and I saw the door itself pulled close to; then the key was turned, the bolt shot into its place, the key was withdrawn, and I was left locked up alone in that terrible room.

But the proximity of another human being sufficed to break the spell under which I had been powerless only a minute before. Better risk discovery, better risk everything, than be left to pass the night where I was. Should that horror settle down upon me again, I felt that I must succumb to it. It would crush the life out of me as infallibly as though I were in the folds of some huge python. Long before morning I should be dead.

I slid from off the *prie-dieu*, and walking backward, with my eyes glancing warily to right and left, I reached the door and struck it with my fists. "Sister Agnes!" I cried, "Sister Agnes! do not leave me. I am here alone."

Again the curtains rustled, stirred by invisible fingers; again that faint long-drawn sigh ran like an audible shiver through the room. I heard eager fingers busy outside the door; a mist swam up before my eyes, and next moment I fainted dead away in the arms of Sister Agnes.

For three weeks after that time I lay very ill—lay very close to the edge of the grave. But for the ceaseless attentions and tender assiduities of Sister Agnes and Dance I should have slipped out of life and all my troubles. To them I owe it that I am now alive to write these lines. One bright afternoon, as I was approaching convalescence, Sister Agnes and I, sitting alone, got into conversation respecting the room upstairs, and my visit to it.

"But whose coffin is that, Sister Agnes?" I asked. "And why is it left there unburied?"

Page 16

"It is the coffin of Sir John Chillington, her ladyship's late husband," answered Sister Agnes, very gravely. "He died thirteen years ago. By his will a large portion of the property left to his widow was contingent on his body being kept unburied and above ground for twenty years. Lady Chillington elected to have the body kept in that room which you were so foolish as to visit without permission; and there it will probably remain till the twenty years shall have expired. All these facts are well known to the household; indeed, to the country for miles around; but it was not thought necessary to mention them to a child like you, whose stay in the house would be of limited duration, and to whom such knowledge could be of no possible benefit."

"But why do you visit the room every midnight, Sister Agnes?"

"It is the wish of Lady Chillington that, day and night, twelve candles shall be kept burning round the coffin, and ever since I came to reside at Deepley Walls it has been part of my duty to renew the candles once every twenty-four hours. Midnight is the hour appointed for the performance of that duty."

"Do you not feel afraid to go there alone at such a time?"

"Dear Janet, what is there to be afraid of? The dead have no power to harm us. We shall be as they are in a very little while. They are but travellers who have gone before us into a far country, leaving behind them a few poor relics, and a memory that, if we have loved them, ought to make us look forward with desire to the time when we shall see them again."

Three weeks later I left Deepley Walls. Madame Delclos was in London for a week, and it was arranged that I should return to France with her. Major Strickland took me up to town and saw me safely into her hands. My heart was very sad at leaving all my dear new-found friends, but Sister Agnes had exhorted me to fortitude before I parted from her, and I knew that neither by her, nor the Major, nor George, nor Dance, should I be forgotten. I saw Lady Chillington for a moment before leaving. She gave me two frigid fingers, and said that she hoped I should be a good girl, and attend assiduously to my lessons, for that in after life I should have to depend upon my own industry for a living. I felt at the moment that I would much rather do that than have to depend through life on her ladyship's bounty.

A few tears would come when the moment arrived for me to say farewell to the Major. He tried his best, in his hearty, affectionate way, to cheer me up. I flung my arms round his neck and kissed him tenderly. He turned abruptly, seized his hat, and rushed from the room. Whereupon Madame Delclos, who had been trying to look *sympathique*, drew herself up, frowned, and pinched one of my ears viciously. Forty-eight hours later I was safely shut up in the Pension Clissot.

* * * * *

Page 17

Here my personal narrative ends. From this point the story of which the preceding pages form a part will be recorded by another pen. It was deemed advisable by those to whose opinion in such matters I bow without hesitation, that this narrative of certain events in the life of a child—a necessary introduction to the narrative yet to come—should be written by the person whom it most concerned. Now that her task is done, she abnegates at once (and thankfully) the first person singular in favour of the third, and whatever is told of her in the following pages, is told, not by herself, but by that other pen, of which mention is made above.

Between the time when this curtain falls and the next one draws up, there is a lapse of seven years.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE SCOTCH EXPRESS.

Among other passengers, on a certain fine spring morning, by the 10 a.m. Scotch express, was one who had been so far able to propitiate the guard as to secure a whole compartment to himself. He was enjoying himself in a quiet way—smoking, and skimming his papers, and taking a bird's-eye view now and again at the landscape that was flying past him at the rate of forty miles an hour. Few people who cared to speculate as to his profession would have hesitated to set him down as a military man, even had not the words, "Captain Ducie," painted in white letters on a black portmanteau which protruded half-way from under his seat, rendered any such speculation needless. He must have been three or four-and-forty years old, judging from the lines about his mouth and eyes, but in some other respects he looked considerably younger. He wore neither beard nor whiskers, but his short hair, and his thick, drooping moustache were both jet black, and betrayed as yet, thanks either to Nature or Art, none of those straggling streaks of silver which tell so plainly of the advance of years. He had a clear olive complexion, a large aquiline nose and deep-set eyes, piercing and full of fire, under a grand sweep of eyebrow. In person he was tall and thin; broad-chested, but lean in the flank, with hands and feet that looked almost effeminate, so small were they in comparison with his size. A black frock-coat, tightly buttoned, set off to advantage a figure of which he might still be reasonably proud. The remainder of his costume was in quiet keeping with the first fashion of the period.

Captain Ducie smoked and read and stared out of the window much as eleven out of twelve of us would do under similar circumstances, while milepost after milepost flashed out for an instant and was gone. After a time he took a letter out of his breast-pocket, opened it, and read it. It was brief, and ran as under:—

"Stapleton, Scotland, March 31st.

Page 18

"MY DEAR NED,—Since you wish it, come down here for a few weeks; whether to recruit your health or your finances matters not. Mountain air and plain living are good for both. However, I warn you beforehand that you will find us very dull. Lady B.'s health is hardly what it ought to be, and we are seeing no company just now. If you like to take us as we are, I say again—come." As for the last paragraph of your letter, I scarcely know in what terms to answer it. You have already bled me so often the same way, that I have grown heartily sick of the process. This must be the last time of asking, my boy; I wish you clearly to understand that. This place has cost me a great deal of money of late, and I cannot spring you more than a hundred. For that amount I enclose you a cheque. Finis coronat opus. Bear those words in mind, and believe me when I say that you have had your last cheque

"From your affectionate cousin,
"BARNSTAKE."

"Consummate little prig!" murmured Captain Ducie to himself as he refolded the letter and put it away. "I can fancy the smirk on his face as he penned that precious effusion, and how, when he had finished it, he would trot off to his clothes-prop of a wife and ask her whether she did not think it at once amusing and severe. That letter shall cost your lordship fifty guineas, I don't allow people to write to me in that style with impunity."

He lighted another cigar frowningly. "I wonder if I was ever so really hard up as I am now?" he continued to himself. "I don't think I ever was quite. I have been in Queer Street many a time, but I've always found a friend round the corner, or have pulled myself through by the skin of the teeth somehow. But this time I see no lift in the cloud. My insolvency has become chronic; it is attacking the very citadel of life. I have not a single uncle or aunt to fall back upon. The poor creatures are all dead and buried, and their money all spent. Well!—Outlaw is an ugly word, but it is one that I shall have to learn how to spell before long. I shall have to leave my country for my country's good."

He puffed away fiercely for a little while, and then he resumed.

"It would not be a bad thing for a fellow like me to become a chief among the Red Skins—if they would have me. With them my lack of pence would be no bar to success. I can swim and shoot and ride: although I cannot paint a picture, I daresay that I could paint myself; and I know several fellows whose scalps I should have much pleasure in taking. As for the so-called amenities of civilized life, what are they worth to one who, like me, has no longer the means of enjoying them? After all, it is a question whether freedom and the prairie would not be preferable to Pall-Mall and a limited income of, say—twelve hundred a year—the sort of income that is just enough to make one the slave of society, but is not sufficient to pay for gilding its fetters. A station, by Jove! and with it the possibility of getting a drop of cognac."

Page 19

As soon as the train came to a stand, Captain Ducie vacated his seat and went in search of the refreshment-room. On coming back five minutes later, he was considerably disgusted to find that he was no longer to have his compartment to himself. The seat opposite to that on which he had been sitting was already occupied by a gentleman who was wrapped up to the nose in rugs and furs.

"Any objection to smoking?" asked the Captain presently as the train began to move. He was pricking the end of a fresh cigar as he asked the question. The words might be civil, but the tone was offensive; it seemed to convey—"I don't care whether you object or not: I intend to enjoy my weed all the same."

The stranger, however, seemed in nowise offended. He smirked and quavered two yellow-gloved fingers out of his furs. "Oh, no, certainly not," he said. "I, too, am a smoker and shall join you presently."

He spoke with the slightest possible foreign accent, just sufficient to tell an educated ear that he was not an Englishman. If Captain Ducie's features were aquiline, those of the stranger might be termed vulturine—long, lean, narrow, with a thin, high-ridged nose, and a chin that was pointed with a tuft of thick, black hair. Except for this tuft he was clean shaven. His black hair, cropped close at back and sides, was trained into an elaborate curl on the top of the forehead and there fixed with *cosmetique*. Both hair and chin-tuft were of that uncompromising blue-black which tells unmistakably of the dye-pot. His skin was yellow and parchment-like, and stretched tightly over his forehead and high cheek-bones, but puckering into a perfect net-work of lines about a mouth whose predominant expression was one of mingled cynicism and suspicion. There was suspicion, too, in his small black eyes, as well as a sort of lurking fierceness which not even his most urbane and elaborate smile could altogether eliminate. In person he was very thin and somewhat under the middle height, and had all the air of a confirmed valetudinarian. He was dressed as no English gentleman would care to be seen dressed in public. A long brown velvet coat trimmed with fur; lavender-coloured trousers tightly strapped over patent leather boots; two or three vests of different colours under one made of the skin of some animal and fastened with gold buttons; a profusion of jewellery; an embroidered shirt-front and deep turn-down collar: such were the chief items of his attire. A hat with a very curly brim hung from the carriage roof, while for present head-gear he wore a sealskin travelling cap with huge lappets that came below his ears. In this cap, and wrapped to the chin in his bear-skin rug, he looked like some newly-discovered species of animal—a sort of cross between a vulture and a monkey, were such a thing possible, combining the deep-seated fierceness of the one with the fantastic cunning, and the impossibility of doing the most serious things without a grimace, of the other.

Page 20

No sooner had Captain Ducie lighted his cigar than with an impatient movement he put down the window close to which he was sitting. It had been carefully put up by the stranger while Ducie was in the refreshment room; but the latter was a man who always studied his own comfort before that of anyone else, except when self whispered to him that such a course was opposed to his own interests, which was more than he could see in the present case.

The stranger gave a little sniggering laugh as the window fell noisily; then he shivered and drew his furs more closely around him. "It is strange how fond you English people are of what you call fresh air," he said. "In Italy fresh air may be a luxury, but it cannot be had in your hang-dog climate without one takes a catarrh at the same time."

Captain Ducie surveyed him coolly from head to foot for a moment or two. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him. "I must really ask you to pardon my rudeness," he said, lifting his Glengarry. "If the open window is the least annoyance to you, by all means let it be shut. To me it is a matter of perfect indifference." As he spoke he pulled the window up, and then he turned on the stranger with a look that seemed to imply: "Although I seemed so truculent a few minutes ago, you see what a good-natured fellow I am at heart." In most of Captain Ducie's actions there was some ulterior motive at work, however trivial many of his actions might appear to an outsider, and in the present case it was not likely that he acted out of mere complaisance to a man whom he had never seen nor heard of ten minutes previously.

"You are too good—really far too good," said the stranger. "Suppose we compromise the matter?" With that his lean hands, encased in lemon-coloured gloves, let down the window a couple of inches, and fixed it there with the strap.

"Now really, you know, do just as you like about it," said the Captain, with that slow amused smile which became his face so well. "As I said before, I am altogether indifferent in the matter."

"As it is now, it will suit both of us, I think. And now to join you in your smoke."

From the net over his head he reached down a small mahogany case. This he opened, and from it extracted a large meerschaum pipe elaborately mounted with gold filigree work. Having charged the pipe from an embroidered pouch filled with choice Turkish tobacco, he struck an allumette and began to smoke.

"Decidedly an acquaintance worth cultivating," murmured the Captain under his breath. "But what country does the beggar belong to?" A question more easily asked than answered: at all events, it was one which the Captain found himself unable to solve to his own satisfaction. For a few minutes they smoked in silence.

“Do you travel far, to-day?” asked the stranger at length. “Are you going across the Border?”

“The end of my journey is Stapleton, Lord Barnstake’s place, and not a great way from Edinburgh. Shall I have the pleasure of your company as far as I go by rail?”

Page 21

“Ah, no, sir, not so far as that. Only to—. There I must leave you, and take the train for Windermere. I live on the banks of your beautiful lake. Permettez-moi, monsieur,” and with a movement that was a combination of a shrug, a grimace and a bow, the stranger drew a card-case from one of his pockets, and, extracting a card therefrom, handed it to Ducie.

The Captain took it with a bow, and, sticking his glass in his eye, read:—

M. PAUL PLATZOFF.	
Bon Repos,	
Windermere.	

The Captain in return handed over his pasteboard credential, and, this solemn rite being accomplished, conversation was resumed on more easy and agreeable terms.

“I daresay you are puzzling your brains as to my nationality,” said Platzoff, with a smile. “I am not an Englishman; that you can tell from my accent. I am not a Frenchman, although I write ‘monsieur’ before my name. Still less am I either a German or an Italian. Neither am I a genuine Russian, although I look to Russia as my native country. In brief, my father was a Russian, my mother was a Frenchwoman, and I was born on board a merchantman during a gale of wind in the Baltic.”

“Then I should call you a true cosmopolitan—a genuine citizen of the world,” remarked Ducie, who was amused with his new friend’s frankness.

“In ideas I strive to be such, but it is difficult at all times to overcome the prejudices of education and early training,” answered Platzoff. “You, sir, are, I presume, in the army?”

“Formerly I was in the army, but I sold out nearly a dozen years ago,” answered Ducie, drily. “Does this fellow expect me to imitate his candour?” thought the Captain. “Would he like to know all about my grandfather and grandmother, and that I have a cousin who is an earl? If so, I am afraid he will be disappointed.”

“Did you see much service while you were in the army?” asked Platzoff.

"I saw a good deal of hard fighting in the East, although not on any large scale." Ducie was beginning to get restive. He was not the sort of man to quietly allow himself to be catechised by a stranger.

"I, too, know something of the East," said Platzoff. "Three of the happiest years of my life were spent in India. While out there I became acquainted with several gentlemen of your profession. With Colonel Leslie I was particularly intimate. I had been stopping with the poor fellow only a few days before that gallant affair at Ruckapore, in which he came by his death."

"I remember the affair you speak of," said Ducie. "I was in one of the other Presidencies at the time it happened."

"There was another officer in poor Leslie's regiment with whom I was also on very intimate terms. He died of cholera a little later on, and I attended him in his last moments. I allude to a Captain Charles Chillington. Did you ever meet with him in your travels?"

Page 22

Captain Ducie's swarthy cheek deepened its hue. He paused to blow a speck of cigar ash off his sleeve before he spoke. "I did not know your Captain Charles Chillington," he said, in slow, deliberate accents. "Till the present moment I never heard of his existence."

Captain Ducie pulled his Glengarry over his brows, folded his arms, and shut his eyes. He had evidently made up his mind for a quiet snooze. Platzoff regarded him with a silent snigger. "Something I have said has pricked the gallant Captain under his armour," he muttered to himself. "Is it possible that he and Chillington were acquainted with each other in India? But what matters it to me if they were?"

When M. Platzoff had smoked his meerschaum to the last whiff, he put it carefully away, and disposed himself to follow Ducie's example in the matter of sleep. He rearranged his wraps, folded the arms, shut his eyes, and pressed his head resolutely against his cushion; but at the end of five minutes he opened his eyes, and seemed just as wakeful as before. "These beef-fed Englishmen seem as if they can sleep whenever and wherever they choose. Envious faculty! I daresay the heifers on which they gorge possess it in almost as great perfection."

Hidden away among his furs was a small morocco-covered despatch-box. This he now proceeded to unlock, and to draw from it a folded paper which, on being opened, displayed a closely-written array of figures, as though it were the working out of some formidable problem in arithmetic. Platzoff smiled, and his smile was very different from his cynical snigger, as his eyes ran over the long array of figures. "I must try and get this finished as soon as I am back at Bon Repos," he muttered to himself. "I am frightened when I think what would happen if I were to die before its completion. My great secret would die with me, and perhaps hundreds of years would pass away before it would be brought to light. What a discovery it would be! To those concerned it would seem as though they had found the key-note of some lost religion—as though they had penetrated into some temple dedicated to the gods of eld."

His soliloquy was suddenly interrupted by three piercing shrieks from the engine, followed by a terrible jolting and swaying of the carriage, which made it almost impossible for those inside to keep their seats. Captain Ducie was alive to the danger in a moment. One glance out of the window was enough. "We are off the line? Hold fast!" he shouted to Platzoff, drawing up his legs, and setting his teeth, and looking very fierce and determined. M. Platzoff tried to follow his English friend's example. His yellow complexion faded to a sickly green. With eyes in which there was no room now for anything save anguish and terror unspeakable, he yet snarled at the mouth and showed his teeth like a wolf brought hopelessly to bay.

Page 23

The swaying and jolting grew worse. There was a grinding and crunching under the wheels of the carriage as though a thousand huge coffee-mills were at work. Suddenly the train parted in the middle, and while the forepart, with the engine, went ploughing through the ballast till brought up in safety a few hundred yards further on, the carriage in which were Ducie and Platzoff, together with the hinder part of the train, went toppling over a high embankment, and crashing down the side, and rolling over and over, came to a dead stand at the bottom, one huge mass of wreck and disaster.

(To be continued.)

SONNET.

Yes, I have heard it oft: a few brief years
True life comprise. The rest is but a dream:
What though to thee like life it vainly seem.
Fool, trust it not; 'tis not what it appears.
We live but once. We die before the shears
Of Atropos the thread have clipped. True life
Is when with ardent youth's and passion's strife
We suffer and we feel. 'Tis when wild tears
Can flow and hearts can break, or 'neath the gaze
Of loved eyes beat. 'Tis when on eager wing
Of Hope we soar, and Past and Future bring
Within the Present's grasp. Ay, we live then,
But when that cup is quaffed what doth remain?
The dregs of days that follow upon days!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

MEDIUMS AND MYSTERIES.

BY NARISSA ROSAVO.

So long as the world lasts, no doubt a large portion of its inhabitants will run after that which the Scotch expressively term "uncanny." The absence of accurate knowledge and the impossibility of thorough scientific investigation, of separating the chaff from the wheat, the true from the counterfeit, becomes at one and the same time the charm and the counterblast to diligent searchers.

For the most part, these are persons of inferior mental calibre, of somewhat unrefined instincts; but, on the other hand, I have known mighty intellects lose themselves in this maze, where no firm clue can be seized by which to go forward safely, to advance at all,

while the return journey must be made with *certain* loss. Persistent endeavour brings weakened faith in God, in place of that certainty spiritualists talk of when they say their arts are beneficial, proving a hereafter—a spiritual world.

It is not thus we get on firm footing. We but advance into sloughs of despond, led by wills of the wisp; and the girl mediums, the so-called clairvoyantes, invariably lose mental health and physical strength. It is but a matter of time, and they become hysteria patients or inhabitants of lunatic asylums. I have known a clever clergyman of the Church of England determine to find out the truth, if any, on this path. He made use of his own daughter in the search. The coil of delusion led him on until it became a choice of death or madness for the tender instrument with which he felt his way into the unseen world.

Page 24

There is *something* along this road, call it odic force, or what you will. Science has not, perhaps cannot, ever get firm footing here; but the result of long and careful observation as yet only enables us to strike a sort of average. Experiments pursued for years with table-turning, planchettes, mediums, clairvoyantes, come to this. You do get answers, strange messages, unaccountable communications; but nothing is ever told, in any seance, which does not lie perdu in the breast of someone of the company. There is often no willing deception; peradventure, no fooling at all: but as you cannot draw water from a dry well, neither can you get a message except the germ of it broods within some soul with which you have some present contact.

And then, things being so, what advance can we make?

Many people seem to be unaware that to search after necromancers and soothsayers is forbidden by the English law. Consequently—let us say—a great number of cultivated ladies and gentlemen do, even in this intelligent age, resort to the homes of such folk; aye, and consult them, too, eagerly, at the most critical junctures in their lives.

I know of a London washerwoman by trade who makes vastly more money by falling into trances than by her legitimate calling, to which she adds the letting of lodgings.

On one occasion she was commissioned to comment, in her swoon, on the truth or constancy of a girl's lover; an unopened letter from him being placed in her hands as she slept. She did comment on him, and truly. She said he was not true: that he did not love the girl really, that it was all a sham. Well, the power by which that clairvoyante spoke was the lurking distrust within the mind of the girl who stood by with an aching heart, listening to her doom. Also, perhaps, some virtue we know not of transfused itself subtly from the paper upon which that perfidious one had breathed and written. Who can tell? But in any case the thing is all a snare and a delusion, and after much observation I can honestly say—I repeat this—that he or she who dabbles in these mysteries loses faith in God, and is apt to become a prey to the power of Evil.

And then the delusions, collusions, and hopeless entanglement of deceit mixed up with Spiritualism! How many tales I could tell—an I would!

There was a certain rich old gentleman in a great centre of trade and finance. The mediums had hope and every prospect he would make a will, or had made one, in their favour—endowing them and theirs with splendid and perpetual grants. This credulous searcher had advanced to the stage when doubt was terrible. He was ardent to convert others, and thereby strengthen his own fortress. He prevailed upon two clear-headed business men, brothers, to attend his seances. With reluctance, to do him a favour, they, after much difficulty, were induced to yield. Their host only wanted them, he said, to give the matter the unprejudiced attention they bestowed on—say—pig-iron.

Page 25

There was no result whatever at the first sitting. The spirits were out of temper, obstinate, would not work. The disappointment was great, even to the novices, who had expected some fun at least. However, it was only an adjournment. The fun came next night.

All present sat round a table in a dark room, touching hands, with extended finger points. When the gas was turned up it was discovered that one of the unbelievers actually had a large bangle on his wrist. It had not been there before. Of course the spirits had slipped it on. He let this pass then. He had not the discourtesy to explain that a very pretty girl at his side had gently manoeuvred it into its place. Her taper fingers were very soft and worked as spirits might.

This had gone off well, and better followed. Again the lights were lowered to the faintest glimmer. Soft music played. Forms floated through the air, now here, now there, plucking at a tambourine—touching a sweet chord on the open piano. At last, in evil moment, the most angelic, sylph-like form came all too near our friend who wore the bangle. The temptation was too great for mortal man. He extended his arms and took firm, substantial, desperate hold of the nymph, at the same instant shouting wildly to his brother, “Turn up the gas, Jim.”

The vulgar light revealed that the panting figure struggling from his grasp was that of his pretty neighbour who had slipped the bangle on his wrist. Strange to say, the giver of this spiritual feast never forgave those two brothers for their discourtesy.

But there are, as Hamlet says, real mysteries in this dull, prosaic life of ours. One or two true tales may not come amiss. I am quite ready to give any member of the Psychical Society chapter and verse and authorities, and every available data, if desired.

A certain barrister lost his wife a few years since. He was left with two little children to care for alone. London was no longer what it had been to him. He wished to make a home in the suburbs for his little boy and girl, and at last found one to his mind. He bought a villa near the river, in a pretty, country-like locality. The house was in bad repair, and he set workmen at it without delay. One day he took his children down with him while affairs were still in progress. They played about, while he sat writing in what was to be the library. Presently they ran to him. “Oh, papa! Mamma is out here!”

“Oh, no, my dears! Mamma is not there,” he replied.

“But she is; indeed she is,” they persisted. “She is at the end of the long passage. We saw her; but she would not let us go on. She waved us back.”

To satisfy the children he must go with them. They led him to a long, dark corridor leading to back premises. "Ah, she is gone!" they cried in great disappointment. "Quite gone! But she was there, papa. She would not let us go on. Come, let us look for her."

Page 26

"No, children; you wait here," he cried, moved by some sudden, cautious instinct. He went into the dusky passage, and, after a few steps, discovered that a trap-door leading to a deep cellar had been left open. Had the children run along here their destruction would have been almost certain.

Again, a tale of the late Bishop Wilberforce. So many tales of him have been current, but I do not believe that this has ever before gone abroad.

In early days he had a close friend, a school chum, a college companion; but about the time young Wilberforce took orders these two had a bitter and hopeless falling out. They never got over the disunion, and fell utterly apart. The chum became an extensive landowner, and was master of a charming house in the South of England.

Time passed on, and he grew elderly. He thought of making his will. Being a great man, not only his solicitor but the solicitor's son arrived on the scene for the event. All three gentlemen were assembled in the library, a long room, with many windows running down almost to the ground. Suddenly the young man present saw a gentleman go by the first of these windows. The elder lawyer raised his head as the figure went by the second opening. Last of all the master of the house looked up.

"Why, that is Wilberforce," he exclaimed. "How many years it is since we fell out, and I dared him ever again to seek me out."

So saying, he ran to the hall-door to welcome his guest, towards whom no bitter feeling now remained in his mind. Strange to say, the Bishop was not at the door, nor could he be found within the grounds. At the moment of his appearance he had fallen from his horse in this neighbourhood and had been instantly killed.

ENLIGHTENMENT.

It was not in the lovely morning time
When dew lies bright on silent meadow-ways;
It was not in the splendid noon's high prime,
When all the lawns with sunlight are ablaze;
But in the tender twilight—ere the light
Of the broad moon made beautiful the night.

It was not in the freshness of my youth,
Nor when my manhood laughed in perfect power,
That first I tasted of immortal truth
And plucked the buds of the immortal flower.
But when my life had passed its noon, I found
The path that leads to the enchanted ground.



It was not love nor passion that made dear
That hour now memorable to us two;
Nothing was said the whole world might not hear,
Only—our souls touched, and for me and you,
Trees, flowers and sunshine, and the hearts of men,
Are better to be understood since then.

E. NESBIT.

THE SILENT CHIMES.

PLAYING AGAIN.

Page 27

It could not be said the Church Leet chimes brought good when they rang out that night at midnight, as the old year was giving place to the new. Mrs. Carradyne, in her superstition, thought they brought evil. Certainly evil set in at the same time, and Captain Monk, with all his scoffing obstinacy, could not fail to see it. That fine young lad, his son, fell through the window listening to them; and in the self-same hour the knowledge reached him that Katherine, his eldest and dearest child, had flown from his roof in defiant disobedience, to set up a home of her own.

Hubert was soon well of his bruises; but not of the cold induced by lying in the snow, clad only in his white nightshirt. In spite of all Mr. Speck's efforts, rheumatic fever set in, and for some time Hubert hovered between life and death. He recovered; but would never again be the strong, hearty lad he had been—though indeed he had never been very physically strong. The doctor privately hoped that the heart would be found all right in future, but he would not have answered for it.

The blow that told most on Captain Monk was that inflicted by Katherine. And surely never was disobedient marriage carried out with the impudent boldness of hers. Church Leet called it "cheek." Church Leet (disbelieving the facts when they first oozed out) could talk of nothing else for weeks. For Katherine had been married in the church hard by, that same night.

Special licenses were very uncommon things in those days; they cost too much; but the Reverend Thomas Dancox had procured one. With Katherine's money: everybody guessed that. She had four hundred a-year of her own, inherited from her dead mother, and full control over it. So the special license was secured, and their crafty plans were laid. The stranger who had presented himself at the Hall that night (by arrangement), asking for Mr. Dancox, thus affording an excuse for his quitting the banquet-room, was a young clergyman of Worcester, come over especially to marry them. When tackled with his deed afterwards, he protested that he had not been told the marriage was to be clandestine. Tom Dancox went out to him from the banquet; Katherine, slipping on a bonnet and shawl, joined them outside; they hastened to the rectory and thence into the church. And while the unconscious master of Leet Hall was entertaining his guests with his good cheer and his stories and his hip, hip, hurrah, his Vicar and Katherine Monk were made one until death should them part. And death, as it proved, intended to do that speedily.

At first Captain Monk, in his unbounded rage, was for saying that a marriage celebrated at ten o'clock at night by the light of a solitary tallow candle, borrowed from the vestry, could not hold good. Re-assured upon this point, he strove to devise other means to part them. Foiled again, he laid the case before the Bishop of Worcester, and begged his lordship to unfrock Thomas Dancox. The Bishop did not do as much as that; though he sent for Tom Dancox and severely reprimanded him. But that, as Church Leet remarked, did not break bones. Tom had striven to make the best of his own cause to

the Bishop, and the worst of Captain Monk's obdurate will; moreover, stolen marriages were not thought much of in those days.

Page 28

An uncomfortable state of things was maintained all the year, Hall Leet and the Parsonage standing at daggers drawn. Never once did Captain Monk appear at church. If he by cross-luck met his daughter or her husband abroad, he struck into a good fit of swearing aloud; which perhaps relieved his mind. The chimes had never played again; they pertained to the church, and the church was in ill-favour with the Captain. As the end of the year approached, Church Leet wondered whether he would hold the annual banquet; but Captain Monk was not likely to forego that. Why should he? The invitations went out for it; and they contained an intimation that the chimes would again play.

The banquet took place, a neighbouring parson saying grace at it in the place of Tom Dancox. While the enjoyment was progressing and Captain Monk was expressing his marvel for the tenth time as to what could have become of Speck, who had not made his appearance, a note was brought in by Rimmer—just as he had brought in one last year. This also was from Mrs. Carradyne.

"Please come out to me for one moment, dear Godfrey. I must say a word to you."

Captain Monk's first impulse on reading this was to send Rimmer back to say she might go and be hanged. But to call him from the table was so very extreme a measure, that on second thoughts he decided to go to her. Mrs. Carradyne was standing just outside the door, looking as white as a sheet.

"Well, this is pretty bold of you, Madam Emma," he began angrily. "Are you out of your senses?"

"Hush, Godfrey! Katherine is dying."

"What?" cried the Captain, the words confusing him.

"Katherine is dying," repeated his sister, her teeth chattering with emotion.

In spite of Katherine's rebellion, Godfrey Monk loved her still as the apple of his eye; and it was only his obstinate temper which had kept him from reconciliation. His face took a hue of terror, and his voice a softer tone.

"What have you heard?"

"Her baby's born; something has gone wrong, I suppose, and she is dying. Sally ran up with the news, sent by Mr. Speck. Katherine is crying out for you, saying she cannot die without your forgiveness. Oh, Godfrey, you will go, you will surely go!" pleaded Mrs. Carradyne, breaking down with a burst of tears. "Poor Katherine!"



Never another word spoke he. He went out at the hall-door there and then, putting on his hat as he leaped down the steps. It was a wretched night; not white, clear, and cold as the last New Year's Eve had been, or mild and genial as the one before it; but damp, raw, misty.

"You think I have remained hard and defiant, father," Katherine whispered to him, "but I have many a time asked God's forgiveness on my bended knees; and I longed—oh, how I longed!—to ask yours. What should we all do with the weight of sin that lies on us when it comes to such an hour as this, but for Jesus Christ—for God's wonderful mercy!"

Page 29

And, with one hand in her father's and the other in her husband's, both their hearts aching to pain, and their eyes wet with bitter tears, poor Katherine's soul passed away.

After quitting the parsonage, Captain Monk was softly closing the garden gate behind him—for when in sorrow we don't do things with a rush and a bang—when a whirring sound overhead caused him to start. Strong, hardened man though he was, his nerves were unstrung to-night in company with his heartstrings. It was the church clock preparing to strike twelve. The little doctor, Speck, who had left the house but a minute before, was standing at the churchyard fence close by, his arms leaning on the rails, probably ruminating sadly on what had just occurred. Captain Monk halted beside him in silence, while the clock struck.

As the last stroke vibrated on the air, telling the knell of the old year, the dawn of the new, another sound began.

Ring, ring, ring! Ring, ring, ring!

The chimes! The sweet, soothing, melodious chimes, carolling forth the Bay of Biscay. Very pleasant were they in themselves to the ear. But—did they fall pleasantly on Captain Monk's? It may be, not. It may be, a wish came over him that he had never thought of instituting them. But for doing that, the ills of his recent life had never had place. George West's death would not have lain at his door, or room been made by it for Tom Dancox, and Katherine would not be lying as he had now left her—cold and lifeless.

"Could *nothing* have been done to save her, Speck?" he whispered to the doctor, whose arms were still on the churchyard railings, listening to the chimes in silence—though indeed he had asked the same question indoors before.

"Nothing; or you may be sure, sir, it would have been," answered Mr. Speck. "Had all the medical men in Worcestershire been about her, they could not have saved her any more than I could. These unfortunate cases happen now and then," sighed he, "showing us how powerless we really are."

Well, it was grievous news wherewith to startle the parish. And Mrs. Carradyne, a martyr to belief in ghosts and omens, grew to dread the chimes with a nervous and nameless dread.

II.

It was but the first of February, yet the weather might have served for May-day: one of those superb days that come once in a while out of their season, serving to remind the world that the dark, depressing, dreary winter will not last for ever; though we may have

half feared it means to, forgetting the reassuring promise of the Divine Ruler of all things, given after the Flood:

“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.”

The warm and glorious sunbeams lay on Church Leet, as if to woo the bare hedges into verdant life, the cold fields to smiling plains. Even the mounds of the graveyard, interspersed amidst the old tombstones, looked green and cheerful to-day in the golden light.

Page 30

Turning slowly out of the Vicarage gate came a good-looking clergyman of seven-or-eight-and-twenty. A slender man of middle height, with a sweet expression on his pale, thoughtful face, and dark earnest eyes. It was the new Vicar of Church Leet, the Reverend Robert Grame.

For a goodish many years have gone on since that tragedy of poor Katherine's death, and this is the second appointed Vicar since that inauspicious time.

Mr. Grame walked across the churchyard, glancing at the inscriptions on the tombs. Inside the church porch stood the clerk, old John Cale, keys in hand. Mr. Grame saw him and quickened his pace.

"Have I kept you waiting, Cale?" he cried in his pleasant, considerate tones. "I am sorry for that."

"Not at all, your reverence; I came afore the time. This here church is but a step or two off my home, yonder, and I'm as often out here as I be indoors," continued John Cale, a fresh-coloured little man with pale grey eyes and white hair. "I've been clerk here, sir, for seven-and-thirty years."

"You've seen more than one parson out then, I reckon."

"More than one! Ay, sir, more than—more than six times one, I was going to say; but that's too much, maybe. Let's see: there was Mr. Cartright, he had held the living I hardly know how many years when I came, and he held it for many after that. Mr. West succeeded him—the Reverend George West; then came Thomas Dancox; then Mr. Atterley: four in all. And now you've come, sir, to make the fifth."

"Did they all die? or take other livings?"

"Some the one thing, sir, and some the other. Mr. Cartright died, he was old; and Mr. West, he—he—" John Cale hesitated before he went on—"he died; Mr. Dancox got appointed to a chaplaincy somewhere over the seas; he was here but about eighteen months, hardly that; and Mr. Atterley, who has just left, has had a big church with a big income, they say, given to him over in Oxfordshire."

"Which makes room for me," smiled Robert Grame.

They were inside the church now; a small and very old-fashioned church, with high pews, dark and sombre. Over the large pew of the Monks, standing sideways to the pulpit, sundry slabs were on the wall, their inscriptions testifying to the virtues and ages of the Monk family dead and gone. Mr. Grame stood to read them. One slab of white marble, its black letters fresh and clear, caught especially his eye.

“Katherine, eldest child of Godfrey Monk, gentleman, and wife of the Reverend Thomas Dancox,” he read out aloud. “Was that he who was Vicar here?”

“Ay, ’twas. She married him again her father’s wish, and died, poor thing, just a year after it,” replied the clerk. “And only twenty-three, as you see, sir! The Captain came down and forgave her on her dying bed, and ’twas he that had the stone put up there. Her baby-girl was taken to the Hall, and is there still: ten years old she must be now; ’twas but an hour or two old when the mother died.”

Page 31

"It seems a sad history," observed Mr. Grame as he turned away to enter the vestry.

John Cale did the honours of its mysteries; showing him the chest for the surplices; the cupboard let into the wall for the register-book; the place where candles and such-like stores were kept. Mr. Grame opened a door at one end of the room and saw a square flagged place, containing grave-digging tools and the hanging ropes of the bell which called people to church. Shutting the door again, he crossed to a door on the opposite side. But that he could not open.

"What does this lead to?" he asked. "It is locked."

"It's always kept locked, that door is, sir; and it's a'most as much as my post is worth to open it," said the clerk, his voice sinking to a mysterious whisper. "It leads up to the chimes."

"The chimes!" echoed the new parson in surprise. "Do you mean to say this little country church can boast of chimes?"

John Cale nodded. "Lovely, pleasant things they be to listen to, sir, but we've not heard 'em since the midnight when Miss Katherine died. They play a tune called 'The Bay of Biscay.'"

Selecting a key from the bunch that he carried in his hand, he opened the door, displaying a narrow staircase, unprotected as a ladder and nearly perpendicular. At its top was another small door, evidently locked.

"Captain Monk had all this done when he put the chimes up," remarked he. "I sweep the dust off these stairs, once in three months or so, but otherwise the door's not opened. And that one," nodding to the door above, "never."

"But why?" asked the clergyman. "If the chimes are there, and are, as you say, melodious, why do they not play?"

"Well, sir, I b'lieve there's a bit of superstition at the bottom of it," returned the clerk, not caring to explain too fully lest he should have to tell about Mr. West's death, which might not be the thing to frighten a new Vicar with. "A feeling has somehow got abroad in the parish (leastways with a many of its folk) that the putting-up of its bells brought ill-luck, and that whenever the chimes ring out some dreadful evil falls on the Monk family."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed the Vicar, hardly knowing whether to laugh or lecture. "The parish cannot be so ignorant as that! How can the putting-up of chimes bring ill-luck?"

“Well, your reverence, I don’t know; the thing’s beyond me. They were heard but three times, ringing in the new year at midnight, three years, one on top of t’other—and each time some ill fell.”

“My good man—and I am sure you are good—you should know better,” remonstrated Mr. Grame. “Captain Monk cannot, surely, give credence to this?”

“No, sir; but his sister up at the Hall does—Mrs. Carradyne. It’s said the Captain used to ridicule her finely for it; he’d fly into a passion whenever ’twas alluded to. Captain Monk, as a brave seaman, is too bold to tolerate anything of the sort. But he has never let the chimes play since his daughter died. He was coming out from the death-scene at midnight, when the chimes broke forth the third year, and it’s said he can’t abear the sound of ’em since.”

Page 32

"That may well be," assented Mr. Grame.

"And finding, sir, year after year, year after year, as one year gives place to another, that they are never heard, we have got to call 'em amid ourselves, the Silent Chimes," spoke the clerk, as they turned to leave the church. "The Silent Chimes, sir."

Clinking his keys, the clerk walked away to his home, an ivy-covered cottage not a stone's-throw off; the clergyman lingered in the churchyard, reading the memorials on the tombstones. He was smiling at the quaintness of some of them, when the sound of hasty footsteps caused him to turn. A little girl was climbing over the churchyard-railings (as being nearer to her than the entrance-gate), and came dashing towards him across the gravestones.

"Are you grandpapa's new parson?" asked the young lady; a pretty child of ten, with a dark skin, and dusky-violet eyes staring at him freely out of a saucy face.

"Yes, I am," said he. "What is your name?"

"What is yours?" boldly questioned she. "They've talked about you at home, but I forgot it."

"Mine is Robert Grame. Won't you tell me yours?"

"Oh, it's Kate.—Here's that wicked Lucy coming! She's going to groan at me for jumping here. She says it's not reverent."

A charming young lady of some twenty years was coming up the path. She wore a scarlet cloak, its hood lined with white silk; a straw hat shaded her fair face, blushing very much just now; in her dark-grey eyes might be read vexation, as she addressed Mr. Grame.

"I hope Kate has not been rude? I hope you will excuse her heedlessness in this place. She is but a little girl."

"It's only the new parson, Lucy," broke in Kate without ceremony. "He says his name's Robert Grame."

"Oh, Kate, don't! How shall we ever teach you manners?" reprimanded the young lady in much distress. "She has been greatly indulged, sir," turning to the clergyman.

"I can well understand that," he said, with a bright smile. "I presume that I have the honour of speaking to the daughter of my patron—Captain Monk?"

"No; Captain Monk is my uncle: I am Lucy Carradyne."

As the young clergyman stood, hat in hand, a feeling came over him that he had never seen so sweet a face as the one he was looking at. Miss Lucy Carradyne was saying to herself, "What a nice countenance he has! What kindly, earnest eyes!"

"This little lady tells me her name is Kate."

"Kate Dancox," said Lucy, as the child danced away. "Her mamma was Captain Monk's eldest daughter; she died when Kate was born. My uncle is very fond of Kate; he will hardly have her controlled at all."

"I have been in to see my church! John Cale has been doing its honours for me," smiled Mr. Grame. "It is a pretty little edifice."

"Yes, and I hope you will like it; I hope you will like the parish," frankly returned Lucy.

Page 33

"I shall be sure to do that, I think. As soon, at least, as I can feel convinced that it is to be really mine," he added, with a quaint expression. "When I heard, a week ago, that Captain Monk had presented me—an entire stranger to him—with the living of Church Leet, I could not believe it. It is not often that a nameless curate, without influence, is spontaneously remembered."

"It is not much of a living," said Lucy, meeting the words half jestingly. "Worth, I believe, but about a hundred and sixty pounds a-year."

"But that is a great rise for me—and I have a house to myself large and beautiful—and am a Vicar and no longer a curate," he returned, laughingly. "I cannot *imagine*, though, how Captain Monk came to give it me. Have you any idea how it was, Miss Carradyne?"

Lucy's face flushed. She could not tell this gentleman the truth: that another clergyman had been fixed upon, one who would have been especially welcome to the parishioners; that Captain Monk had all but nominated him to the living. But it chanced to reach the Captain's ears that this clergyman had expressed his intention of holding the Communion Service monthly, instead of quarterly as heretofore, so he put the question to him. Finding it to be true, he withdrew his promise; he would not have old customs broken in upon by modern innovation, he said; and forthwith he appointed the Reverend Robert Grame.

"I do not even know how Captain Monk heard of me," continued Mr. Grame, marking Lucy's hesitation.

"I believe you were recommended to him by one of the clergy attached to Worcester Cathedral," said Lucy.—"And I think I must wish you good-morning now."

But there came an interruption. A tall, stately, haughty young woman, with an angry look upon her dark and handsome face, had entered the churchyard, and was calling out as she advanced:

"That monkey broken loose again, I suppose, and at her pranks here! What are you good for, Lucy, if you cannot keep her in better order? You know I told you to go straight on to Mrs. Speck, and—"

The words died away. Mr. Grame, who had been hidden by a large upright tombstone, emerged into view. Lucy, with another blush, spoke to cover the awkwardness.

"This is Miss Monk," she said to him. "Eliza, it is the new clergyman, Mr. Grame."

Miss Monk recovered her equanimity. A winning smile supplanted the anger on her face; she held out her hand, grandly gracious. For she liked the stranger's look: he was beyond doubt a gentleman—and an attractive man.

“Allow me to welcome you to Church Leet, Mr. Grame. My father chances to be absent to-day; he is gone to Evesham.”

“So the clerk told me, or I should have called this morning to pay my respects to him, and to thank him for his generous and most unexpected patronage of me. I got here last night,” concluded Mr. Grame, standing uncovered as when he had saluted Lucy. Eliza Monk liked his pleasant voice, his taking manners: her fancy went out to him there and then.

Page 34

"But though papa is absent, you will walk up with me now to the Hall to make acquaintance with my aunt, Mrs. Carradyne," said Eliza, in those tones that, gracious though they were, sounded in the light of a command—just as poor Katherine's had always sounded. And Mr. Grame went with her.

But now—handsome though she was, gracious though she meant to be—there was something about Eliza Monk that seemed to repulse Robert Grame, rather than attract him. Lucy had fascinated him; she repelled. Other people had experienced the same kind of repulsion, but knew not where it lay.

Hubert, the heir, about twenty-five now, came forward to greet the stranger as they entered the Hall. No repulsion about *him*. Robert Grame's hand met his with a warm clasp. A young man of gentle manners and a face of rare beauty—but oh, so suspiciously delicate! Perhaps it was the extreme slenderness of the frame, the wan look in the refined features and their bright hectic that drew forth the clergyman's sympathy. An impression came over him that this young man was not long for earth.

"Is Mr. Monk strong?" he presently asked of Mrs. Carradyne, when Hubert had temporarily quitted the room.

"Indeed, no. He had rheumatic fever some years ago," she added, "and has never been strong since."

"Has he heart disease?" questioned the clergyman. He thought the young man had just that look.

"We fear his heart is weak," replied Mrs. Carradyne.

"But that may be only your fancy, you know, Aunt Emma," spoke Miss Monk reproachfully. She and her father were both passionately attached to Hubert; they resented any doubt cast upon his health.

"Oh, of course," assented Mrs. Carradyne, who never resented anything.

"We shall be good friends, I trust," said Eliza, with a beaming smile, as her hand lay in Mr. Grame's when he was leaving.

"Indeed I hope so," he answered. "Why not?"

III.

Summer lay upon the land. The landscape stretched out before Leet Hall was fair to look upon. A fine expanse of wood and dale, of trees in their luxuriant beauty; of emerald-green plains, of meandering streams, of patches of growing corn already

putting on its yellow hue, and of the golden sunlight, soon to set and gladden other worlds, that shone from the deep-blue sky. Birds sang in their leafy shelters, bees were drowsily humming as they gathered the last of the day's honey, and butterflies flitted from flower to flower with a good-night kiss.

At one of the windows stood, in her haughty beauty, Eliza Monk. Not, surely, of the lovely scene before her was she thinking, or her face might have worn a more pleasing expression. Rather did she seem to gaze, and with displeasure, at two or three people who were walking in the distance: Lucy Carradyne side by side with the clergyman, and Miss Kate Dancox pulling at his coat-tails.

Page 35

“Shameful flirt!”

The acidity of the tone was so pronounced that Mrs. Carradyne, seated near and busy at her netting, lifted her head in surprise. “Why, Eliza, what’s the matter? Who is a flirt?”

“Lucy,” curtly replied Eliza, pointing with her finger.

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Carradyne, after glancing outwards.

“Why does she persistently lay herself out to attract that man?” was the passionate rejoinder.

“Be silent, Eliza. How can you conjure up so unjust a charge? Lucy is not capable of *laying herself out* to attract anyone. It lies but in your imagination.”

“Day after day, when she is out with Kate, you may see him join her—allured to her side.”

“The ‘allurer’ is Kate, then. I am surprised at you, Eliza: you might be talking of a servant-maid. Kate has taken a liking for Mr. Grame, and she runs after him at all times and seasons.”

“She ought to be stopped, then.”

“Stopped! Will you undertake to do it? Could her mother be stopped in anything she pleased to do? And the child has the same rebellious will.”

“I say that Robert Grame’s attraction is Lucy.”

“It may be so,” acknowledged Mrs. Carradyne. “But the attraction must lie in Lucy herself; not in anything she does. Some suspicion of the sort has, at times, crossed me.”

She looked at them again as she spoke. They were sauntering onwards slowly; Mr. Grame bending towards Lucy, and talking earnestly. Kate, dancing about, pulling at his arm or his coat, appeared to get but little attention. Mrs. Carradyne quietly went on with her work.

And that composed manner, combined with her last sentence, brought gall and wormwood to Eliza Monk.

Throwing a summer scarf upon her shoulders, Eliza passed out at the French window, crossed the terrace, and set out to confront the conspirators. But she was not in time. Seeing her coming, or not seeing her—who knew?—Mr. Grame turned off with a fleet

foot towards his home. So nobody remained for Miss Monk to waste her angry breath upon but Lucy. The breath was keenly sharp, and Lucy fell to weeping.

* * * * *

"I am here, Grame. Don't go in."

The words fell on the clergyman's ears as he closed the Vicarage gate behind him, and was passing up the path to his door. Turning his head, he saw Hubert Monk seated on the bench under the May tree, pink and lovely yet. "How long have you been here?" he asked, sitting down beside him.

"Ever so long; waiting for you," replied Hubert.

"I was but strolling about."

"I saw you: with Lucy and the child."

They had become fast and firm friends, these two young men; and the minister was insensibly exercising a wonderful influence over Hubert for good. Believing—as he did believe—that Hubert's days were numbered, that any sharp extra exertion might entail fatal consequences, he gently strove, as opportunity offered, to lead his thoughts to the Better Land.

Page 36

"What an evening it is!" rapturously exclaimed Hubert.

"Ay: so calm and peaceful."

The rays of the setting sun touched Hubert's face, lighting up its extreme delicacy; the scent of the closing flowers filled the still air with its sweetness; the birds were chanting their evening song of praise. Hubert, his elbow on the arm of the bench, his hand supporting his chin, looked out with dreamy eyes.

"What book have you there?" asked Mr. Grame, noticing one in his other hand.

"Herbert," answered the young man, showing it. "I filched it from your table through the open window, Grame."

The clergyman took it. It chanced to open at a passage he was very fond of. Or perhaps he knew the place, and opened it purposely.

"Do you know these verses, Hubert? They are appropriate enough just now, while those birds are carolling."

"I can't tell. What verses? Read them."

"Hark, how the birds do sing,
And woods do ring!
All creatures have their joy, and man hath his,
Yet, if we rightly measure,
Man's joy and pleasure
Rather hereafter than in present is.

Not that we may not here
Taste of the cheer;
But as birds drink and straight lift up the head,
So must he sip and think
Of better drink
He may attain to after he is dead."

"Ay," said Hubert, breaking the silence after a time, "it's very true, I suppose. But this world—oh, it's worth living for. Will anything in the next, Grame, be more beautiful than *that*?"

He was pointing to the sunset. It was marvellously and unusually beautiful. Lovely pink and crimson clouds flecked the west; in their midst shone a golden light of dazzling refulgence, too glorious to look upon.



“One might fancy it the portals of heaven,” said the clergyman; “the golden gate of entrance, leading to the pearly gates within, and to the glittering walls of precious stones.”

“And—why! it seems to take the form of an entrance-gate!” exclaimed Hubert in excitement. For it really did. “Look at it! Oh, Grame, surely, surely the very gate of Heaven cannot be more dazzlingly beautiful than that!”

“And if the gate of entrance is so unspeakably beautiful, what will the City itself be?” murmured Mr. Grame. “The Heavenly City! the New Jerusalem!”

“It is beginning to fade,” said Hubert presently, as they sat watching; “the brightness is going. What a pity!”

“All that’s bright must fade in this world, you know; and fade very quickly. Hubert! it will not in the next.”

* * * * *

Church Leet, watching its neighbours’ doings sharply, began to whisper that the new clergyman, Mr. Grame, was likely to cause unpleasantness to the Monk family, just as some of his predecessors had caused it. For no man having eyes in his head (still less any woman) could fail to see that the Captain’s imperious daughter had fallen desperately in love with him. Would there be a second elopement, as in the days of Tom Dancox? Would Eliza Monk set her father at defiance, as Katherine did?

Page 37

One of the last to see signs and tokens, though they took place under her open eyes, was Mrs. Carradyne. But she saw at last. The clergyman could not walk across a new-mown field, or down a shady lane, or be hastening along the dusty turnpike road, but by some inexplicable coincidence he would be met by Miss Monk; and when he came to the Hall to pass an hour with Hubert, she generally made a third at the interview. It had pleased her latterly to take to practising on the old church organ; and if Mr. Grame was not wiled into the church with her and her attendant, the ancient clerk, who blew the bellows, she was sure to alight upon him in going or returning.

One fine evening, dinner over, when the last beams of the sun were slanting into the drawing-room, Eliza Monk was sitting back on a sofa, reading; Kate romped about the room, and Mrs. Carradyne had just rung the bell for tea. Lucy had been spending the afternoon with Mrs. Speck, and Hubert had now gone to fetch her home.

“Good gracious, Kate, can’t you be quiet!” exclaimed Miss Monk, as the child in her gambols sprung upon the sofa, upsetting the book and its reader’s temper. “Go away: you are treading on my flounces. Aunt Emma, why do you persist in having this tiresome little reptile with us after dinner?”

“Because your father will not let her be sent to the nursery,” said Mrs. Carradyne.

“Did you ever know a child like her?”

“She is but as her mother was; as you were, Eliza—always rebellious. Kate, sit down to the piano and play one of your pretty tunes.”

“I won’t,” responded Kate. “Play yourself, Aunt Emma.”

Dashing through the open glass doors, Kate began tossing a ball on the broad gravel walk below the terrace. Mrs. Carradyne cautioned her not to break the windows, and turned to the tea-table.

“Don’t make the tea yet, Aunt Emma,” interrupted Miss Monk, in a tone that was quite like a command. “Mr. Grame is coming, and he won’t care for cold tea.”

Mrs. Carradyne returned to her seat. She thought the opportunity had come to say something to her niece which she had been wanting to say.

“You invited Mr. Grame, Eliza?”

“I did,” said Eliza, looking defiance.

“My dear,” resumed Mrs. Carradyne with some hesitation, “forgive me if I offer you a word of advice. You have no mother; I pray you to listen to me in her stead. You must change your line of behaviour to Mr. Grame.”

Eliza's dark face turned red and haughty. "I do not understand you, Aunt Emma."

"Nay, I think you do understand me, my dear. You have incautiously allowed yourself to fall into—into an undesirable liking for Mr. Grame. An *unseemly* liking, Eliza."

"Unseemly!"

"Yes; because it has not been sought. Cannot you see, Eliza, how he instinctively recedes from it? how he would repel it were he less the gentleman than he is? Child, I shrink from saying these things to you, but it is needful. You have good sense, Eliza, keen discernment, and you might see for yourself that it is not to you Mr. Grame's love is given—or ever will be."

Page 38

For once in her life Eliza Monk allowed herself to betray agitation. She opened her trembling lips to speak, but closed them again.

“A moment yet, Eliza. Let us suppose, for argument’s sake, that Mr. Grame loved you; that he wished to marry you; you know, my dear, how utterly useless it would be. Your father would not suffer it.”

“Mr. Grame is of gentle descent; my father is attached to him,” disputed Eliza.

“But Mr. Grame has nothing but his living—a hundred and sixty pounds a-year; *you* must make a match in accordance with your own position. It would be Katherine’s trouble, Katherine’s rebellion over again. But this was mentioned for argument’s sake only; Mr. Grame will never sue for anything of the kind; and I must beg of you, my dear, to put all idea of it away, and to change your manner towards him.”

“Perhaps you fancy he may wish to sue for Lucy!” cried Eliza, in fierce resentment.

“That is a great deal more likely than the other. And the difficulties in her case would not be so great.”

“And pray why, Aunt Emma?”

“Because, my dear, I should not resent it as your father would. I am not so ambitious for her as he is for you.”

“A fine settlement for her—Robert Grame and his hundred—”

“Who is taking my name in vain?” cried out a pleasant voice from the open window; and Robert Grame entered.

“I was,” said Eliza readily; her tone changing like magic to sweet suavity, her face putting on its best charm—“About to remark that the Reverend Robert Grame has a hundred faults. Aunt Emma agrees with me.”

He laughed lightly, regarding it as pleasantry, and inquired for Hubert.

Eliza stepped out on the terrace when tea was over, talking to Mr. Grame; they began to pace it slowly together. Kate and her ball sported on the gravel walk beneath. It was a warm, serene evening, the silver moon shining, the evening star just appearing in the clear blue sky.

“Lucy being away, you cannot enjoy your usual flirtation with her,” remarked Miss Monk, in a light tone.

But he did not take it lightly. Rarely had his voice been more serious than when he answered: "I beg your pardon. I do not flirt—I have never flirted with Miss Carradyne."

"No! It has looked like it."

Mr. Grame remained silent. "I hope not," he said at last. "I did not intend—I did not think. However, I must mend my manners," he added more gaily. "To flirt at all would ill become my sacred calling. And Lucy Carradyne is superior to any such trifling."

Her pulses were coursing on to fever heat. With her whole heart she loved Robert Grame: and the secret preference he had unconsciously betrayed for Lucy had served to turn her later days to bitterness.

"Possibly you mean something more serious," said Eliza, compressing her lips.

"If I mean anything, I should certainly mean it seriously," replied the young clergyman, his face blushing as he made the avowal. "But I may not. I have been reflecting much latterly, and I see I may not. If my income were good it might be a different matter. But it is not; and marriage for me must be out of the question."

Page 39

"With a portionless girl, yes. Robert Grame," she went on rapidly with impassioned earnestness, "when you marry, it must be with someone who can help you; whose income will compensate for the deficiency of yours. Look around you well: there may be some young ladies rich in the world's wealth, even in Church Leet, who will forget your want of fortune for your own sake."

Did he misunderstand her? It was hardly possible. She had a large fortune; Lucy none. But he answered as though he comprehended not. It may be that he deemed it best to set her ill-regulated hopes at rest for ever.

"One can hardly suppose a temptation of that kind would fall in the way of an obscure individual like myself. If it did, I could but reject it. I should not marry for money. I shall never marry where I do not love."

They had halted near one of the terrace seats. On it lay a toy of Kate's, a little wooden "box of bells." Mechanically, her mind far away, Eliza took it up and began, still mechanically, turning the wire which set the bells to play with a soft but not unpleasant jingle.

"You love Lucy Carradyne!" she whispered.

"I fear I do," he answered. "Though I have struggled against the conviction."

A sudden crash startled them; shivers of glass fell before their feet; fit accompaniment to the shattered hopes of one who stood there. Kate Dancox, aiming at Mr. Grame's hat, had sent her ball through the window. He leaped away to catch the culprit, and Eliza Monk sat down on the bench, all gladness gone out of her. Her love-dream had turned out to be a snare and a delusion.

"Who did that?"

Captain Monk, frightened from his after-dinner nap by the crash, came forth in anger. Kate got a box on the ear, and was sent to bed howling.

"You should send her to school, papa."

"And I will," declared the Captain. "She startled me out of my sleep. Out of a dream, too. And it is not often I dream. I thought I was hearing the chimes."

"Chimes which I have not yet been fortunate enough to hear," said Mr. Grame with a smile. Eliza recalled the sound of the bells she had set in motion, and thought it must have penetrated to her father in his sleep.

"By George, no! You shall, though, Grame. They shall ring the new year in when it comes."

"Aunt Emma won't like that," laughingly commented Eliza. She was trying to be gay and careless before Robert Grame.

"Aunt Emma may *dislike* it!" retorted the Captain. "She has picked up some ridiculously absurd notion, Grame, that the bells bring ill-luck when they are heard. Women are so foolishly superstitious."

"That must be a very far-fetched superstition," said the parson.

"One might as well believe in witches," mocked the Captain. "I have given in to her fancies for some years, not to cross her, and let the bells be silent: she's a good woman on the whole; but be hanged if I will any longer. On the last day of this year, Grame, you shall hear the chimes."

Page 40

* * * * *

How it came about nobody exactly knew, unless it was through Hubert, but matters were smoothed for the parson and Lucy.

Mrs. Carradyne knew his worth, and she saw that they were as much in love with one another as ever could be Hodge and Joan. She liked the idea of Lucy being settled near her—and the vicarage, large and handsome, could have its unused rooms opened and furnished. Mr. Grame honestly avowed that he should have asked for Lucy before, but for his poverty; he supposed that Lucy was poor also.

“That is so; Lucy has nothing of her own,” said Mrs. Carradyne to this. “But I am not in that condition.”

“Of course not. But—pardon me—I thought your property went to your son.”

Mrs. Carradyne laughed. “A small estate of his father’s, close by here, became my son’s at his father’s death,” she said. “My own money is at my disposal; the half of it will eventually be Lucy’s. When she marries, I shall allow her two hundred a-year: and upon that, and your stipend, you will have to get along together.”

“It will be like riches to me,” said the young parson all in a glow.

“Ah! Wait until you realise the outlets for money that a wife entails,” nodded Mrs. Carradyne in her superior wisdom. “Not but that I’m sure it’s good for young people, setting-up together, to be straitened at the beginning. It teaches them economy and the value of money.”

Altogether it seemed a wonderful prospect to Robert Grame. Miss Lucy thought it would be Paradise. But a stern wave of opposition set in from Captain Monk.

Hubert broke the news to him as they were sitting together after dinner. To begin with, the Captain, as a matter of course, flew into a passion.

“Another of those beggarly parsons! What possessed them, that they should fix upon *his* family to play off their machinations upon! Lucy Carradyne was his niece: she should never be grabbed up by one of them while he was alive to stop it.”

“Wait a minute, father,” whispered Hubert. “You like Robert Grame; I know that: you would rather see him carry off Lucy than Eliza.”

“What the dickens do you mean by that?”

Hubert said a few cautious words—hinting that, but for Lucy’s being in the way, poor Katherine’s escapade might have been enacted over again. Captain Monk relieved his

mind by some strong language, sailor fashion; and for once in his life saw he must give in to necessity.

So the wedding was fixed for the month of February, just one year after they had met: that sweet time of early spring, when spring comes in genially, when the birds would be singing, and the green buds peeping and the sunlight dancing.

But the present year was not over yet. Lucy was sewing at her wedding things. Eliza Monk, smarting at their sight as with an adder's sting, ran away from it to visit a family who lived near Oddingly, an insignificant little place, lying, as everybody knows, on the other side of Worcester, famous only for its dulness and for the strange murders committed there in 1806—which have since passed into history. But she returned home for Christmas.

Page 41

Once more it was old-fashioned Christmas weather; Jack Frost freezing the snow and sporting his icicles. The hearty tenants, wending their way to the annual feast in the winter twilight, said how unusually sharp the air was, enough to bite off their ears and noses.

The Reverend Robert Grame made one at the table for the first time, and said grace at the Captain's elbow. He had heard about the freedom obtaining at these dinners; but he knew he was utterly powerless to suppress it, and he hoped his presence might prove some little restraint, just as poor George West had hoped in the days gone by: not that it was as bad now as it used to be. A rumour had gone abroad that the chimes were to play again, but it died away unconfirmed, for Captain Monk kept his own counsel.

The first to quit the table was Hubert. Captain Monk looked up angrily. He was proud of his son, of his tall and graceful form, of his handsome features, proud even of his bright complexion; ay, and of his estimable qualities. While inwardly fearing Hubert's signs of fading strength, he defiantly refused to recognise it or to admit it openly.

"What now?" he said in a loud whisper. "Are *you* turning renegade?"

The young man bent over his father's shoulder. "I don't feel well; better let me go quietly, father; I have felt oppressed here all day"—touching his left side. And he escaped.

There was present at table an elderly gentleman named Peveril. He had recently come with his wife into the neighbourhood and taken on lease a small estate, called by the odd name of Peacock's Range, which belonged to Hubert and lay between Church Dykely and Church Leet. Mr. Peveril put an inopportune question.

"What is the story, Captain, about some chimes which were put up in the church here and are never allowed to ring because they caused the death of the Vicar? I was told of it to-day."

Captain Monk looked at Mr. Peveril, but did not speak.

"One George West, I think. Was he parson here?"

"Yes, he was parson here," said Farmer Winter, finding nobody else answered Mr. Peveril, next to whom he sat. He was a very old man now, but hale and hearty still, and a steadfast ally of his landlord. "Given that parson his way and we should never have had the chimes put up. Sweet sounding bells they are."

"But how could the chimes kill him?" went on Mr. Peveril. "Did they kill him?"

“George West was a quarrelsome, mischief-making meddler, good for nothing but to set the parish together by the ears; and I must beg of you to drop his name when at my table, Peveril. As to the chimes, you will hear them to-night.”

Captain Monk spoke in his sternest tones, and Mr. Peveril bowed. Robert Grame had listened in surprise. He wondered what it all meant—for nobody had ever told him of this phase of the past. The table clapped its unsteady hands and gave a cheer for the chimes, now to be heard again.

Page 42

"Yes, gentlemen," said the Captain, not a whit more steady than his guests. "They shall ring for us to-night, though it brought the parson out of his grave."

A few minutes before twelve the butler, who had his orders, came into the dining-room and set the windows open. His master gave him another order and the man withdrew. Entering the drawing-room, he proceeded to open those windows also. Mr. Peveril, and one or two more guests, sat with the family; Hubert lay back in an easy-chair.

"What are you about, Rimmer?" hastily cried out Mrs. Carradyne in surprise. "Opening the windows!"

"It is by the master's orders, ma'am," replied the butler; "he bade me open them, that you and the ladies might get a better hearing of the chimes."

Mrs. Carradyne, superstitious ever, grew white as death. "*The chimes!*" she breathed in a dread whisper. "Surely, surely, Rimmer, you must be mistaken. The chimes cannot be going to ring again!"

"They are to ring the New Year in," said the man. "I have known it this day or two, but was not allowed to tell, as Madam may guess"—glancing at his mistress. "John Cale has got his orders, and he'll set 'em going when the clock has struck twelve."

"Oh, is there no one who will run to stop it?" bewailed Mrs. Carradyne, wringing her hands in all the terror of a nameless fear. "There may yet be time. Rimmer! can you go?"

Hubert came out of his chair laughing. Rimmer was round and fat now, and could not run if he tried. "I'll go, aunt," he said. "Why, walking slowly, I should get there before Rimmer."

The words, "walking slowly," may have misled Mrs. Carradyne; or, in the moment's tribulation, perhaps she forgot that Hubert ought not to be the one to use much exertion; but she made no objection. No one else made way, and Hubert hastened out, putting on his overcoat as he went towards the church.

It was the loveliest night; the air was still and clear, the landscape white and glistening, the moon bright as gold. Hubert, striding along at a quick walk, had traversed half the short distance, when the church clock struck out the first note of midnight. And he knew he should not be in time—unless—

He set off to run: it was such a very little way! Flying along without heed to self, he reached the churchyard gate. And there he was forced—forced—to stop to gather up his laboured breath.

Ring, ring, ring! broke forth the chimes melodiously upon Hubert's ear. "Stop!" he shouted, panting; "stop! stop!"—just as if John Cale could hear the warning: and he began leaping over all the gravestones in his path, after the irreverent fashion of Miss Kate Dancox.

"Stop!" he faintly cried in his exhaustion, dashing through the vestry, as the strains of "The Bay of Biscay" pursued their harmonious course overhead, sounding louder here than in the open air. "Sto—"

He could not finish the word. Pulling the little door open, he put his foot on the first step of the narrow ladder of a staircase: and then fell prone upon it. John Cale and young Mr. Threpp, the churchwarden's son, who had been the clerk's companion, were descending the stairs, after the chimes had chimed themselves out, and they had locked them up again to (perhaps) another year, when they found some impediment below.

Page 43

"What is it?" exclaimed young Mr. Threpp. The clerk turned on his lantern.

It was Hubert, Captain Monk's son and heir. He lay there with a face of deadly whiteness, a blue shade encircling his lips.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

WINTER IN ABSENCE.

The earth is clothed with fog and mist,
The shrivelled ferns are white with rime,
The trees are fairy-frosted round
The portion of enchanted ground
Where, in the woods, we lovers kissed
Last summer, in the happy time.

They say that summer comes again;
In winter who believes it true?
Can I have faith through days like this—
Days with no rose, no sun, no kiss,
Faith in the long gold summer when
There will be sunshine, flowers and you?

Keep faith and me alive, I pray;
Feed me with loving letters, dear;
Speak of the summer and the sun;
Lest, when the winter-time be done,
Your summer shall have fled away
With me—who had no heart to stay
The slow, sick turning of the year.

THE BRETONS AT HOME.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC. ETC.

Morlaix awoke to a new day. The sunshine was pouring upon it from a cloudless sky—a somewhat rare vision in Brittany, where the skies are more often grey, rain frequently falls, and the land is overshadowed by mist.

[Illustration: GATEWAY, DINAN.]

So far the climate of Brittany resembles very much that of England: and many other points of comparison exist between Greater Britain and Lesser Brittany besides its

similarity of name. For even its name it derives from us; from the fact that in the fifth and sixth centuries the Saxons, as they choose to call them, went over in great numbers and settled there. No wonder, then, that the Bretons possess many of our characteristics, even in exaggeration, for they are direct descendants of the ancient Britons.

They have, for instance, all the gravity of the English temperament, to which is added a gloom or sombreness of disposition that is born of repression and poverty and a long struggle with the ways and means of existence; to which may yet farther be added the influence of climate. Hope and ambition, the two great levers of the world, with them are not largely developed; there has been no opportunity for their growth. Ambitions cannot exist without an aim, nor hope without an object. Just as in certain dark caves of the world, where daylight never penetrates, the fish found there have no eyes, because, from long disuse of the organ, it has gradually lessened and died out; so hope and ambition amongst the moral faculties must equally disappear without an object in life.

It is therefore tolerably certain that where, according to phrenologists, the organ of Hope is situated, there the Breton head will be found undeveloped.

Page 44

Now without hope no one can be constitutionally happy, and the Bretons would be amongst the unhappiest on earth, just as they are amongst the most slow-moving, if it were not for a counterbalancing quality which they own in large excess. This virtue is veneration; and it is this which saves them.

They are the most earnest and devoted, almost superstitiously religious of people. They observe their Sabbaths, their fasts and feasts with a severity and punctuality beyond all praise. With few exceptions, their churches are very inferior to those of Normandy, but each returning Sunday finds the Breton churches full of an earnest crowd, evidently assembled for the purpose of worshipping with their whole heart and soul. The rapt expression of many of the faces makes them for the moment simply beautiful, and if an artist could only transfer their fervency to canvas, he would produce a picture worthy of the masters of the Middle Ages, and read a lesson to the world far greater than that of an *Angelus* or a *Magdalene*.

It is a sight worth going very far to see, these earnest worshippers, with whom the head is never turned and the eye never wanders. The further you pass into the interior of Brittany—into the remote districts of the Morbihan, for instance—where the outer world, with its advancement and civilization, scarcely seems to have penetrated, there fervency and devotion are still full of the element of superstition; there you will find that faith becomes almost synonymous with a strict observance of prayers, penances and the commands of the Church. When the *Angelus* rings out in the evening, you will see the labourer, wending his way homeward, suddenly arrest his steps in the ploughed field, and with bent head, pass in silent prayer the dying moments of *crepuscule*.

There will scarcely be an exception to the rule, either in men or women. The reverence has grown with their growth, having first been born with them of inheritance: the heritage and the growth of centuries. All over the country you will find Calvaries erected: huge stone crosses and images of the Crucifixion, many of them crumbling and beautiful with the lapse of ages, the stone steps at their base worn with the devotion of pilgrims: crosses that stand out so solemnly and picturesquely in the gloaming against the background of the grey, cold Breton skies, and give a religious tone to the whole country.

The Bretons have ever remained a race apart, possessing their own language, their own habits, manners and customs; not becoming absorbed with other nations, nor absorbing in themselves any foreign element. Separated from Normandy by no visible boundary line, divided by no broad Channel, the Bretons are as different from the Normans as the Normans are distinct from the English. They have a high standard of integrity, of right and wrong, there is the distinct feeling of *Noblesse oblige* amongst them; their *noblesse* consisting in the fact that, being Breton, *il faut agir loyalement*. If they pass you their word, you may be sure they will not go from it: it is as good as their bond. They are a hundred years behind the rest of mankind, but there is a great charm and a great compensation in their simplicity.

Page 45

Normandy may be called the country of beautiful churches, Brittany of beautiful towns.

This is eminently true of Morlaix, for, in spite of the removal of many an ancient landmark, it is still wonderfully interesting. In situation it is singularly favoured and romantic, placed as it is on the sides of three deep ravines. Hills rise on all sides, shutting in the houses; hills fertile and well-wooded; in many places cultivated and laid out in gardens, where flowers grow and flourish all the year round, and orchards that in spring-time are one blaze, one wealth of blossoming fruit trees.

We looked out upon all this that first morning. Not a wealth of blossoming trees, for the blossoms were over. But before us stretched the high hills, and surrounding us were all the houses of Morlaix, old and new. The sun we have said shone upon all, and we needed all this brightness to make up for the discomforts of the past night. H.C. declared that his dreams had been of tread-mills, monastic penances, and the rack; but he had survived the affliction, and this morning was eager for action.

It was market-day, and the market-place lay just to the right of us. The stalls were in full force; the butter and poultry women in strong evidence, and all the other stalls indigenous to the ceremony. There was already a fair gathering of people, many of them *paysans*, armed with umbrellas as stout and clumsy as themselves. For the Bretons know and mistrust their own climate, and are too well aware that the day of a brilliant morning too often ends in weeping skies. Many wore costumes which, though quaint, were not by any means beautiful. They were heavy and ungraceful, like the people themselves: broad-brimmed hats and loose trunk hose that hung about them like sacks, something after the fashion of Turkish pantaloons; and the men wore their hair in huge manes, hanging down their backs, ugly and untidy; habits, costumes and people all indicative of la Bretagne Bretonnante—la Basse Bretagne.

It was a lively scene, in which we longed to take a part; listen to the strange language, watch the ways and manners of this distinctive race, who certainly are too aboriginal to win upon you at first sight.

The hotel was wide awake this morning, full of life and movement. All who had had to do with us last night gave us a special greeting. They seemed to look upon us almost as *enfants de la maison*; had taken us in and done for us under special circumstances, and so had special claims upon us. Moreover, we were English, and the English are much considered in Morlaix.

We looked upon last night's adventures as the events of a dream, though at the time they had been very painful realities. The first object in the hotel to meet our gaze was Andre, his face still tied up like a mummy, still looking the Image of Misery, as if he and repose had known nothing of each other since we had parted from him. He was, however, very anxious for our welfare, and hoped we had slept well on our impromptu couches.

Page 46

Next, on descending, we caught sight of Madame, taking the air and contemplating the world at large at the door of her bureau. The moment we appeared the air became too strong for her, and she rapidly passed through her bureau to a sanctum sanctorum beyond, into which, of course, we could not penetrate. We looked upon this as a tacit confession of a guilty conscience, and agreed magnanimously to make no further allusion to her lapsed memory. So when we at length met face to face, she, like Andre, was full of amiable inquiries for our health and welfare.

We sallied forth, and whatever we thought of Morlaix last night, we thought no less of it to-day.

It is a strange mixture of ancient and modern, as we were prepared to find it. On all sides rose the steep hills, within the shelter of which the town reposes. The situation is exceedingly striking. Stretching across one end of the town with most imposing effect is the enormous viaduct, over which the train rolls towards the station. It possesses also a footway for pedestrians, from which point the whole town lies mapped at your feet, and you may trace the faraway windings of the river. The viaduct is nearly two hundred feet high, and nearly four hundred yards long, and from its position it looks even more gigantic than it is. It divides the town into two portions, as it were, the outer portion consisting of the port and harbour: and from this footway far down you may see the picturesque shipping at repose: a very modest amount to-day moored to the river side, consisting of a few barges, a vessel or two laden with coal or wood, and a steamer in which you might take passage for Havre, or perhaps some nearer port on the Brittany Coast.

It is a charming picture, especially if the skies overhead are blue and the sun is shining. Then the town is lying in alternate light and shade; the pavements are chequered with gabled outlines, long drawn out or foreshortened according to their position. The canal bordering the old market-place is lined with a long row of women, alternately beating linen upon boards and rinsing it in the water. We know that they are laughing and chattering, though we cannot hear them; for a group of even sober Breton women could not be together and keep silence. They take life very seriously and earnestly; with them it is not all froth and evaporation; but this is their individual view of existence; collectively there comes the reaction, forming the lights and shadows of life, just as we have the lights and shadows in nature. That reaction must come is the inevitable law; and possibly explains why there are so many apparent contradictions in people.

Morlaix has had an eventful history in the annals of Brittany. It takes its name from *Mons Relaxus*, the hill that was crowned by the ancient castle; a castle which existed at the time of the Roman occupation, if the large number of medals and pieces of Roman money discovered in its foundations may be taken as indicating its epoch. Many of these remains may be seen in the small museum of the town. They date from the third century.

Page 47

The progress of Morlaix was slow. Very little is recorded of its earlier history. Though the Romans occupied it, we know not what they did there. Nearly all traces of Roman architecture have disappeared. The town has been frequently sacked and pillaged and burnt, sacrilege in which the English have had many a hand; and even Roman bricks and mortar will yield in time to destructive agencies.

Even in the eleventh century it was still nothing more than a small fishing town, a few houses nestling in the ravine, and sheltered by a huge rampart on the south-west. Upon the *Mons Relaxus*, the hill giving its name to the town, stood the lordly castle, the two rivers flowing, one on either side, which further down unite and form one stream. To-day all traces of the castle have disappeared and the site is planted with trees, and quiet citizens walk to and fro beneath their shade, where centuries ago there echoed the clash of arms and the shouts of warriors going forth conquering and to conquer. For in those days the Romans were the masters of the world, and seemed born only for victory.

In the twelfth century, Morlaix began a long series of vicissitudes. In 1187 Henry II. of England laid siege to it, and it gave in after a resistance of nine weeks. It was then in possession of the Dukes of Brittany, who built the ancient walls of the town, traces of which yet exist, and are amongst the town's most interesting remains.

The occupation of the English being distasteful to the Bretons, they continually rebelled against it; though, as far as can be known, the English were no hard task-masters, forcing them, as the Egyptians did the Israelites, to make bricks without straw.

In 1372 the English were turned out of their occupation, and the Dukes of Brittany once more reigned. It was an unhappy change for the discontented people, as they soon found. John IV., Duke of Brittany, was guilty of every species of tyranny and cruelty, and many of the inhabitants were sacrificed.

Time went on and Morlaix had no periods of great repose. Every now and then the English attacked it, and in the reign of Francis I. they pillaged and burnt it, destroying antiquities that perhaps to-day would have been worth many a king's ransom. This was in the year 1532.

[Illustration: GATEWAY OF THE OLD MONASTERY, MORLAIX.]

In 1548, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, a child of five years only, disembarked at the wonderfully quaint little town of Roscoff to marry the Dauphin of France, who afterwards reigned as Francis II. She made a triumphal entry into Morlaix, was lodged at the Jacobin convent, and took part in the Te Deum that was celebrated in her honour in Notre Dame du Mur. This gives an additional interest to Morlaix, for every place visited by the beautiful and unfortunate Queen of Scots, every record preserved of her, possesses a romantic charm that time has been unable to weaken.

Page 48

As she was returning to the convent after the celebration of the Te Deum, and they were passing what was called the Gate of the Prison, the drawbridge gave way and fell into the river. It was fortunately low water, and no lives were lost. But the Scots Guards, separated from the young Queen by the accident, took alarm, thought the whole thing had been planned, and called out: "Treason! Treason!" Upon which the Chevalier de Rohan, who rode near the Queen, quickly turned his horse and shouted: "Never was Breton guilty of treason!"

And this exclamation may be considered a key-note to their character. The Bretons, amongst their virtues, may count that of loyalty. All is fair in love and war, it is said; but the Bretons would betray neither friend nor foe under any circumstance whatever.

For two hundred years Morlaix has known peace and repose, as far as the outer world is concerned. She has given herself up to religious institutions, and has grown and prospered. So it comes to pass that she is a strange mixture of new and old, and that side by side with a quaint and wonderful structure of the Middle Ages, we find a house of the present day flourishing like a green bay tree—a testimony to prosperity, and an eyesore to the lover of antiquity. But these wonders of the Middle Ages must gradually disappear. As time rolls on, and those past centuries become more and more remote, the old must give place to the new; ancient buildings must fall away in obedience to the inevitable laws of time, progress and destruction.

This is especially true of Morlaix. Much that was old-world and lovely has gone for ever, and day by day something more is disappearing.

We sallied forth, but unaccompanied by Misery, who was hard at work in the hotel, preparing us rooms wherein, as he expressed it, we should that night lodge as Christians. Whether, last night, he had put us down as Mahometans, Fire Worshippers, or heathens of some other denomination, he did not say.

The town had lost the sense of weirdness and mystery thrown over it by the darkness. The solemn midnight silence had given place to the activity of work and daylight; all shops were open, all houses unclosed; people were hurrying to and fro. Our strange little procession of three was no more, and Andre carrying a flaring candle would have been anything but a picturesque object in the sunshine.

But what was lost of weirdness and mystery was more than made up by the general effect of the town, by the minute details everywhere visible, by the sense of life and movement. Usually the little town is quiet and somewhat sleepy; to-day the inhabitants were roused out of their Breton lethargy by the presence of so many strangers amongst them, and by the fact of its being market day.

Page 49

More than even last night, we were impressed by the wonderful outlines of the Grand' Rue, where the lattice had been lighted up and the mysterious vision had received a revelation in gazing upon H.C. To-day behind the lattice there was comparative darkness, and the vision had descended to a lower region, and the unromantic occupation of opening a roll of calico and displaying its advantages to a market woman who was evidently bent upon driving a bargain. The vision caught sight of H.C., and for the moment calico and everything else was forgotten; the market woman no doubt had her calico at her own price.

The street itself is one of the most wonderful in France. As you stand at the end and look down towards *Les Halles*, you have a picturesque group, an assemblage of outlines scarcely to be equalled in the world. The street is narrow, and the houses, more and more overhanging as they ascend floor by floor, approach each other very closely towards the summit. The roofs are, some of them, gabled; others, slanting backwards, give room for picturesque dormer windows. Wide lattices stretch across some of the houses from end to end; in others the windows are smaller and open outwards like ordinary French windows, but always latticed, always picturesque.

Below, on the ground floor, many of the houses are given up to shops, but, fortunately, they have not been modernised.

The whole length of the front is unglazed, and you gaze into an interior full of mysterious gloom, in which you can scarcely see the wares offered for sale. The rooms go far back. They are black with age: a dark panelling that you would give much to be able to transport to other scenes. The ceilings are low, and great beams run across them. The doors admitting you to these wonderful old-world places match well their surroundings. They are wide and substantial, with beams that would effectually guard a prison, and wonderful old locks and keys and pieces of ironwork that set you wild with longings to turn housebreaker and carry away these ancient and artistic relics.

You feel that nothing in the lives of the people who live in these wonderful tenements can be commonplace. However unconscious they may be of the refining influence, it is there, and it must leave its mark upon them.

At least, you think so. You know what the effect would be upon yourself. You know that if you could transport this street bodily to some quiet nook in England and surround it by velvety lawns and ancient trees that have grown and spread with the lapse of ages, your existence would become a long and romantic daydream, and you would be in danger of living the life of a recluse and never separating yourself from these influences. Custom would never stale their infinite variety; familiarity would never breed contempt. Who tires of wandering through a gallery of the old masters? who can endure the modern in comparison? It is not the mere antiquity of all these things that charm; it is that they are beautiful in themselves, and belong to an age when the Spirit

of Beauty was poured out upon the world from full vials held in the hands of unseen angels, and what men touched and created they perfected.

Page 50

But the vials have long been exhausted and the angels have fled back to heaven.

The houses all bear a strong family resemblance to each other, which adds to their charm and harmony. Most of them possess two doors, one giving access to the shop we have just described, the other admitting to a hall or vestibule, panelled, and often richly sculptured. Above the *rez-de-chaussee*, two or three stories rise, supported by enormous beams richly moulded and sculptured, again supported in their turn by other beams equally massive, whose massiveness is disguised by rich sculpture and ornamentation: a profusion of boughs, of foliage, so beautifully wrought that you may trace the veins in the leaves of niches, pinnacles and statues: corner posts ornamented with figures of kings, priests, saints, monsters, and bagpipers. The windows seem to multiply themselves as they ascend, with their small panes crossed and criss-crossed by leaden lines: the fronts of many are slated with slates cut into lozenge shapes; and many possess the "slate apron" found in fifteenth century houses, with the slates curved outwardly to protect the beam.

By the second door you pass down a long passage into what originally was probably a small yard, but has now been turned into a living-room or kitchen covered over at the very top of the house by a skylight. This is an arrangement now peculiar to Brittany. The staircase occupies one side of the space, and you may trace the windings to the very summit, curiously arranged at the angles. These singularly-constructed rooms have given to the houses the name of *lanternes*. Every room has an enormous fireplace, in which you might almost roast an ox, built partly of wood and stone, richly carved and ornamented. But let the eye rest where it will, it is charmed by rich carvings and mouldings, beams wonderfully sculptured, statues, ancient niches and grotesques.

In one of these houses is to be found a wonderful staircase of carved oak and great antiquity, that in itself would make Morlaix worth visiting. It is in the Flamboyant style, and was probably erected about the year 1500. For Brittany is behind the age in its carvings as much as in everything else, and this staircase in any other country might safely be put down to the year 1450. It is of wonderful beauty, and almost matchless in the world: a marvel of skill and refinement. It possesses also a *lavoir*, the only known example in existence, with doors to close when it is not in use; the whole thing a dream of beautiful sculpture.

[Illustration: OLD STAIRCASE IN THE GRAND' RUE, MORLAIX, SHOWING LAVOIR.]

One other house in Morlaix has also a very wonderful staircase; still more wonderful, perhaps, than that in the Grand' Rue; but it is not in such good preservation. The house is in the Rue des Nobles, facing the covered market-place. It is called the house of the Duchesse Anne, and here in her day and generation she must have lived or lodged.

Page 51

The house is amongst the most curious and interesting and ancient in Morlaix, but it is doomed. The whole interior is going to rack and ruin, and it was at the peril of our lives that we scrambled up the staircase and over the broken floors, where a false step might have brought us much too rapidly back to terra firma. Morlaix is not enterprising enough to restore and save this relic of antiquity.

The staircase, built on the same lines as the wonderful staircase in the Grand' Rue, is, if possible, more refined and beautiful; but it has been allowed to fall into decay, and much of it is in a hopelessly worm-eaten condition. H.C. was in ecstasies, and almost went down on his knees before the image of an angel that had lost a leg and an arm, part of a wing, and the whole of its nose; but very lovely were the outlines that remained.

"Like the Venus of Milo in the Louvre," said H.C., "what remains of it is all the more precious for what is not."

It was not so very long since we had visited the Louvre together, and he had remained rapt before the famous Venus for a whole hour, contemplating her from every point of view, and declaring that now he should never marry: he had seen perfection once, and should never see it again. This I knew to be nothing but the enthusiasm of the moment. The very next pretty face and form he encountered, animated with the breath of life, would banish from his mind all allegiance to the cold though faultless marble image.

The exterior of the house of the Duchesse Anne was as remarkable as the interior for its wonderful antiquity, its carvings, its statues and grotesques, its carved pilasters between the windows, each of different design and all beautiful, its gabled roofs and its latticed panes that had long fallen out of the perpendicular. Both this and the next house were closed; and it was heartbreaking to think that perhaps on our next visit to Morlaix empty space would here meet our gaze, or, still worse, a barbarous modern aggression.

Few towns now, comparatively speaking, possess fifteenth century remains, and those few towns should preserve them as amongst their most cherished treasures.

Morlaix is still amongst the most favoured towns in this respect. Go which way you will, and amongst much that is modern, you will see ancient houses and nooks and corners that delight you and take you back to the Middle Ages. Now it will be an old house in the market-place that has escaped destruction; now a whole court up some narrow turning, too out-of-the-way to have been worthy of demolition; and now it will be a whole street, like the Grand' Rue, which has been preserved, no doubt of deliberate intent, as being one of the most typical fifteenth century streets in the whole of France, an ornament and an attraction to the town, raising Morlaix out of the commonplace, and causing antiquarians and many others to visit it.

Page 52

For if all the houses of the Grand' Rue are not actually fifteenth century—and they are not—they all look of an age; they all belong to the same school of architecture, and the harmony of the whole street is perfect. Looking upwards, the eye is delighted at the outlines of the gabled roofs that stand out so clearly and sharply against the background of the sky; and you return to it over and over again during your sojourn in Morlaix, and each time you gaze longer and think it more beautiful than before.

These old-world towns and streets are very refreshing to the spirit. We grow weary of our modern towns, with their endless monotony and their utter absence of all taste and beauty. Just as when sojourning in a country devoid of monuments and ruins, the mind at length absolutely hungers for some grand, ecclesiastical building, some glorious vestige of early ages; so when we have once grown familiar with mediaeval towns and outlines, it becomes an absolute necessity occasionally to run away from our prosy nineteenth century habitations, and refresh our spirit, and absorb into our inmost nature all these refining old-world charms. It is an influence more easily felt than described; also, it does not appeal to all natures. We can only understand Shakespeare by the Shakespeare that is within us—an oft quoted saying but a very true one; and Pan might pipe for ever to one who has no music in his soul; and the rainbow might arch itself in vain to one who is colour-blind.

Morlaix also, as we have said, owes much to its situation.

Lying between three ravines, it is most romantically placed. Its people are sheltered from many of the cruel winds of winter, and even the sturdy Bretons cannot be quite indifferent to the stern blast that comes from the East laden with ice and snow.

Not that the people of Morlaix look particularly robust, though we found them very civil and often very interesting. We must pay for our privileges, and if a town is built in a hollow, and is sheltered from the east wind, the chances are that its climate will be enervating. This, of course, has its drawbacks, and sets the seal of consumption on many a victim that might have escaped in higher latitudes.

One charming type we found in Morlaix, consisting of a family that ought to have lived in the middle ages, and been painted by Raphael, or have served as models for Fra Angelico's angels. Three generations.

We were climbing the Jacob's ladder leading to the station one day, when we chanced upon an old man who sold antiquities. We were first taken with his countenance. It had honesty and integrity written upon it. Had he been a German, living in Ober-Ammergau, he would certainly have been chosen for the chief character in the play—a play, by the way, that has always seemed questionable, since the greatest and most momentous Drama creation ever witnessed appears too sacred a theme to be theatrically represented, even in a spirit of devotion.

Page 53

Our antiquarian was growing old. His face was pale, beautiful and refined, with a very spiritual expression. The eyes were of a pure blue, in which dwelt almost the innocence of childhood. He was slightly deformed in the back. There was a pathetic tone in the voice, a resigned expression in the face, which told of a long life of struggle, and possibly much hardship and trouble—the latter undoubtedly.

We soon found that he had in him the true artistic temperament. His own work was beautiful, his carvings were full of poetical feeling. If not a genius himself, he was one whose offspring should possess the “sacred fire,” which must be born with its possessor, can never after be kindled. In one or two instances we pointed to something superlatively good. “Ah, that is my son’s work,” he said; “it is not mine.” And there was an inflection in the voice which told of pride and affection, and perhaps was the one bright spot in the old man’s pilgrimage, perhaps his one sorrow and trouble—who could tell? We had not seen the son; we felt we must do so.

The old man’s most treasured possession was a crucifix, to which he pointed with a reverential devotion.

“I have had it nearly thirty years,” he said, “and I never would sell it. It is so beautiful that it must be by a great master—one of the old masters. People have come to see it from far and near. Many have tempted me with a good offer, but I would never part with it. Now I want the money and I wish to sell it. Will you not buy it?”

It was certainly exquisitely beautiful; carved in ivory deeply browned with age. We had never seen anything to equal the position of the Figure upon the Cross; the wonderful beauty of the head; the sorrow and sacredness of the expression; the perfect anatomy of the body. But in our strictly Protestant prejudices we hesitated. As an object of religion of course we could have nothing to do with it; the Roman Catholic creed, with its outward signs and symbols, was not ours; who even in our own Church mourned the almost lost beauty and simplicity of our ancient ritual; that substitution of the ceremonial for the spiritual, the creature for the Creator, which seems to threaten the downfall of the Establishment. Would it be right to purchase and possess this beautiful thing merely as an object of refined and wonderful art? I looked at H.C. In his face at least there was no hesitation. Such a prize was not to be lost if it could be obtained within reasonable limits. It must take a place amongst his old china, his headless Saints and Madonnas!

[Illustration: OLD HOUSES, MORLAIX.]

The first time we came across the old man—it was quite by accident that we found him out—we felt that we had discovered a prize in human nature: one of those rare exceptions that exist still in out-of-the-way nooks and corners, but are seldom found. It is so difficult to go through the world and remain unspoiled by it; especially for those who, having to work for their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, have to come into daily contact with that harder, coarser element in human nature, that, for ever over-

reaching its neighbour, tries to believe that the race *is* to the swift and the battle to the strong.

Page 54

The son was away from the town on the occasion of our first visit. The father seemed proud of him in a quiet, gentle sort of way, and gentleness was evidently the key-note to his character. He said his son had carried off all the prizes in a Paris School of Art, and one prize that was especially difficult to obtain. Would we come again and see him, and see his work?

We went again. At the door-sill a little child greeted us; the most beautiful little face we had ever seen. Nothing in any picture of an old master ever equalled it. At the first moment we almost thought it the face of an angel, as it looked up into our faces with all the confidence and innocence of infancy. The child might have been eighteen months old, just at the age when the eyes begin to take that inquiring look upon everything, as if they had just awakened to the fact that they had arrived upon a scene where all was new and strange. The eyes of this child were large and of a celestial blue; fair curls fell over his shoulders; his cheeks were round like a cherub's, and had the hue of the damask rose. The strangest part about the face was its refinement, as if the little fellow, instead of being born of the people, had come of a long line of noble ancestors.

We went into the workshop, and there found the father of the child at work, the son of the old man.

We no longer wondered at the child's beauty; it was a counterpart of the father's, but to the latter was added all the grace and maturity of manhood. Unlike the old man, the face was round and flushed with the hue of health. Large dark blue eyes looked out earnestly at you from under long dark lashes. The head was running over with dark crisp curls. The face was also singularly refined, had an exceedingly pure and modest expression. No Apollo, real or imagined, was ever more perfect in form and feature. To look upon that face was to love its owner.

He was hard at work, carving, his wonderfully-drawn plans about him. It was certainly the best modern work we had ever seen; and here, we felt, was a genius. Probably it had been hampered for want of means, as so many other geniuses have been since the foundation of the world. He ought to have been known and celebrated; the master of a great and famous *atelier* in the chief of gay cities; appreciated by the world—and perhaps spoilt by flattery. Instead of which, he was working for his daily bread in a small town, unknown, unappreciated; toiling in a small, retired workshop, where people seldom penetrated, and a good deal of his work depended upon chance. Yet, if his face bespoke one thing more than another, it was happiness and contentment. Ambition seemed to have no part in his life. That he loved his art was evident from the tenderness with which he handled his drawings and looked upon his carvings. It may be that this love was all-sufficient for him, and that as long as he had health to work, and fancy to create, and daily bread to eat, he cared for nothing more.

Page 55

The little rift within the lute? Ah, who is without it? What household has not its skeleton? Where shall we find perfect happiness—or anything perfect? In this instance it was soon apparent to us; and again we marvelled at the inconsistency of human nature; the incongruity of things; the way men spoil their lives and make crooked things that ought to be, and might have been, so straight.

We could not help wondering what sort of help-meet this Apollo had chosen for himself; what angelic mother had given to the world this little blue-eyed cherub, whose fitting place seemed not earth but heaven.

Even as we wondered we were answered. A voice called to the child from above, and the child turned its lovely head, but moved not. Then the owner of the voice was heard descending, and the mother appeared. We were dismayed. Never had we seen a woman more abandoned and neglected. Everything about her was slovenly. Her hair fell about her face and shoulders in tangled masses; her clothing was torn and neglected. We had seen such exhibitions in the dens of London, never in a decent household. It made us feel inexpressibly sad and sorrowful. Here was a great mystery; two people terribly ill-matched. We glanced at the husband, expecting to see a flush mantling his brow. But he quietly went on with what he was about, as though he saw not, and mother and child disappeared upstairs.

Here, then, whether he knew it or not, was the little rift within the lute. An ill-assorted marriage, a life-long mistake. Had he looked and chosen above him, his help-meet might have assisted him to rise in the world and to become famous. As it was, he had been caught by a pretty face—for, with due care and attention and a settled expression, the face would have been undoubtedly pretty—and had sealed his fate. With such a wife no man could rise.

We left him to his art and went our way, very sorrowful. It was a lovely morning, and we started back for the hotel, having arranged to take a drive at a certain hour along the river banks to the sea.

We found the conveyance ready for us. Monsieur, by special attentions, was making up for the lapses of that one terrible night.

Above us, as we went, stretched the gigantic viaduct, so singular a contrast with the ancient houses and remains of this old town; forming a comparison that certainly makes Morlaix one of the most remarkable towns in France. Beneath it rose the houses on the rocky slopes, one above another, so that from the back you may almost enter them from the roof, as you do some of the Tyrolese chalets. In Morlaix it has given rise to a proverb: “Du jardin au grenier, comme on dit a Morlaix.”

[Illustration: MORLAIX.]



Beneath the viaduct, far down, was the river and the little port, where vessels of considerable tonnage may anchor, and which has added much to the prosperity of the town, that trades largely in corn, vegetables, butter, honey, wax, oil-seeds, and—as we have seen—horses. There is also a large tobacco manufactory here, which gives employment to an immense number of hands.

Page 56

We passed all this and went our way down the right bank of the river. The scenery is very picturesque; the heights are well wooded, broken and undulating. Some of the richer inhabitants of Morlaix have built themselves houses on the heights; charming chateaux where they spend their summers, and luxuriate in the fresh breezes that blow up from the sea. Across there on the left bank of the river, rises the convent of St. Francois, a large building, where the *religieux* retire from the world, yet are not too isolated.

And on this side, on the *Cours Beaumont*, a lovely walk planted with trees, we come to the Fontaine des Anglais, so called because here, in 1522, six hundred English were surprised asleep by the people of Morlaix, and slain. They had, however, courted their own doom. Henry VIII. had picked a quarrel with Francis I. for seizing the ships of English merchants in French ports. The English king had escorted with his fleet the Emperor Charles V., of Spain, under command of the Earl of Surrey, and in returning, it entered the river, surprised Morlaix, burnt and sacked the town, and murdered many of its inhabitants. They left it loaded with spoil; and when the inhabitants surprised these six hundred English they revenged themselves upon them without mercy.

To-day, we had no sooner reached the spot than suddenly the clouds gathered, the sky was overcast, a squall rose shrieking and whistling amidst the trees, and there was every appearance of a downpour. We were not prepared for it, but we rashly continued our way. At last, just before we reached a small road-side cabaret, down it came, as if the whole reservoir of cloudland had been let loose.

We hastily stopped at the auberge, already half-drenched, and H.C. crying out "Any port in a storm," we entered it. It was humble enough, yet might every benighted traveller in every storm find as good a refuge!

The good woman of the house was standing at her poele, preparing the mysteries of the mid-day dinner. Her husband, she said, had gone into Morlaix, with fish to sell—it was one of their chief means of livelihood. He bought the fish from the fishermen who came up the river, and sold it again to the hotels. One of his best customers was the Hotel d'Europe, and M. Hellard was a brave monsieur, who never beat them down in their prices, and had always a pleasant word for them. Madame was very amiable too, for the matter of that.

It was rather a hard life, but what with that and the little profit of the auberge, they managed to make both ends meet.

She had three children. The eldest was a girl, and had her wits about her. She had been to Paris with her father, and had seen the Exhibition, and talked about it like a grown-up person. But her father had taken her one night to the Theatre des Varietes in the Champs Elysees, and the girl had been mad ever since to become a *chanteuse* and an actress.

Page 57

The ambitious child—a girl of fourteen—at this moment came down stairs, and a more forbidding young damsel we had seldom seen. Her mother had evidently no control over her; she was mistress of the situation; ordered her mother about, slapped a younger brother, a little fellow who was playing at a table with some leaden soldiers, and finally, to our relief, disappeared into an inner room. We saw her no more.

“It is always like that,” sighed the poor mother, who seemed by no means a woman to be lightly sat upon: “always like that ever since she went that *malheureux* voyage to Paris. It has changed her character; made her dissatisfied with her lot; I fear she will one day leave us and go back to Paris for good—or rather for evil; for she will have no one to look after her; and, I am told, it is a sink of iniquity. I was never there, and know very little about the ways of large towns. Morlaix is quite enough for me. But she is afraid of her father, that is one *bonheur*.”

All this time she had been brewing us coffee, and now she brought it to us in her best china, with some of the spirit of the country which does duty for cognac and robs so many of the Bretons of their health and senses. But it was not a time to be fastidious. To counteract the effects of the elements and drenched clothes, we helped ourselves liberally to a decoction that we thought excellent, but under other conditions should have considered poisonous.

The while our hostess, glad of an appreciative audience, poured into our ears tales and stories of herself, her life and the neighbourhood. How she had originally belonged to the Morbihan, and when a girl dressed in the costume of her country, with the short petticoats and the picturesque kerchief crossed upon the breast. How her father had been a well-to-do *bazvalan* and made the Sunday clothes for the whole village. And how she had met her fate when her bonhomme came that way on a visit to an old uncle in the village, and in six months they were married, and she had come to Morlaix. She had never regretted her marriage. She had a good husband, who worked hard; and if they were poor, they were far from being in want. She had really only one trouble in the world, and that was that she could do nothing with her eldest girl. She would obey no one but her father; and even he was losing control over her.

“Is her father much away?” we asked, thinking that the young damsel looked as if she were under no very stern discipline.

“Not on long voyages, such as going to Paris or the Morbihan,” replied the woman; “but he is often away for half-a-day or so, selling his fish in Morlaix and doing commissions for their little auberge. And then,” she added with a condoning smile, “of course he sometimes met with a camarade who enticed him to drink a glass too much, though that was a rare occurrence. Mais que voulez-vous? Human nature was weak; and for her part she really thought that men were weaker than women. Certainly they were more self-indulgent.”

Page 58

"It is because they have more temptations," said H.C., pleading the cause of his own sex. "Women had more to do with home and the pot-au-feu."

At this moment our hostess's pot-au-feu began to boil over, and she darted across the room, took it off the fire and returned, laughing.

"Even the pot-au-feu we cannot always manage, it seems," she remarked; "and so there are faults on all sides. Sometimes on a Sunday her husband went and spent the day at Roscoff, where he had a cousin living. Did messieurs know Roscoff—a deadly-lively little place, with a quaint harbour, where there was a chapel to commemorate the landing of Marie Stuart?"

We said we did not know it, but purposed visiting it on the morrow if the skies ceased their deluge.

"Why does your husband not turn fisherman," we asked, "instead of buying his fish from others, and so selling it second-hand at a smaller profit? You are so close to the sea."

"Dame," replied the woman, "it is not his trade. He was never brought up to the sea; always hated it. And for the rest," she added, with a shudder, "Heaven forbid that he should turn fisherman! She had once dreamed three times running that he was drowned at sea; and she had feared the water ever since. She had almost made her husband take a vow that he would never go upon the sea. He generally took part once a year in the regatta; of course, there could be no danger; but she trembled the whole time until she saw him returning safe and sound. No, no! Chacun a son metier."

Here we interrupted the flow of eloquence, though the woman was really interesting with her straightforward confidences, her rather picturesque patois, and her numerous gestures.

We went to the door and surveyed the elements. The skies were cowering; the rain came down like a revengeful cataract; the road was flooded, and the water was beginning to flood the room. In front the river looked cold and threatening; it flowed towards the sea with an angry rush; our vehicle was refreshing itself before the door, and the horse and driver had taken refuge in the stable. The tops of the surrounding hills were hidden in mist; everywhere the rain roared. The scene was dreary and desolate in the extreme.

At this moment the driver appeared. "Was it of any use waiting? He knew the climate pretty well; the rain would never cease till sundown. Had we not better make the best of it and get back to Morlaix?"

We thought so, and gave the signal for departure. Our patience was exhausted—and so was our coffee. Our hostess was distressed. At least we would borrow an umbrella,

and her husband's thick coat, and perhaps her shawl for our knees. She was too good; genuinely kind hearted; and in despair when we accepted nothing. We bade her farewell, settled her modest demands, and set out for Morlaix.

Page 59

Arrived at the hotel like drowned rats, Madame was all anxiety and motherly solicitude, begged us to get between blankets and have tisane administered or some eau sucree with a spoonful of rum in it. She bemoaned the uncertainty of the climate, and hoped we were not going to have bad weather for our visit. And when we declined all her polite attentions, assuring her that a change of clothing was all we needed, and all we should do, she declared that she was amazed at our temerity, but that she had the greatest admiration for the constitution and courage of the people of Greater Britain.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

BY ADA M. TROTTER.

“May you come in and rest, you ask? Why of course you may. Take this rocking-chair—but there, some men don’t like rockers. Well, if so be you prefer it, stay as you be, right in the shadder of the vines. It’s a pretty look-out from there, I know, all down the valley over them meadow lands—and that rushing bit of river.

“You ask me if I know’d one Kitty Larkins, the prettiest gal in the county, the prettiest gal anywheres, you say. Yes, sir! I know’d her well. Dead? Yes, sir, Kitty—the bright, gay creature folks knew as Kitty Larkins died this day twenty years ago.

“Do I know how she died and the story of her life? I do well; I do; p’raps better nor most. You want to hear about her; maybe you would find it kind of prosing; but there, the afternoon sun *is* pretty hot, and the haymakers out there in the meadows have got a hard time of it.

“What’s that! Don’t I go and lend a hand in the press of the season? Well, I don’t. Not for twenty year. There’s them as calls it folly, but the smell of the hay brings it all back and turns me sick. You say you can’t believe such a fine woman as me would be subject to fancies; you think I look too young, do you, to be talkin’ this way of twenty years ago. Wall, there’s more than one way of counting age. Some goes by grey hairs, some by happenings. But this that came so long ago is all as clear—clear as God’s light upon the meadows there.

“But if you will have the whole story, let’s begin at the beginnin’, and that brings you to the old school-house where them three, neighbours’ children they was, went to school together. There was Kitty of course, and Elihu Grant and Joel Barton, them was the three that my story’s about.

“Lihu was always a big, over-grown lad, with a steadfast, kind heart, not what folks called brilliant; he warn’t going to be extraordinary when he grow’d up, didn’t want to be, so fur as I know; he aimed to be as good a man’s his father, nothing more, nothing less.

Good and true was 'Lihu; all knew that, yet his name was never mentioned without a 'but,' not even by the school marm, though she said he was the best boy in her school.

"Kitty looked down some on 'Lihu, made him fetch and carry, and always accustomed herself to the 'but,' as if the good qualities wasn't of much account since they could not command general admiration. Yes, this had something to do with what follered; I can see that plain enough. Still, I know she loved 'Lihu from babyhood deep down in her heart of hearts—

Page 60

"Anything wrong, sir? you give me a turn moving so sudden like. Let me see, where was I? Oh, talkin' about them boys. Well, let's get on.

"I've given you some idea of what 'Lihu was like, but seems to me harder to tell about that Barton boy, that gay, handsome, charming Joel, that kept the whole country alive with his doings and sayings from the time he could trot about alone.

"Wall! he was bright was Joel, and 'twas no wonder that his parents see it so plain and talk Joel day in and day out whenever they got a soul to listen to 'em. Kitty grew up admiring him; there warn't no 'but' in speaking of Joel. He done everything first class, from farm work to his lessons, so no wonder his folks acted proud of him and sent him to college to prepare for a profession.

"Wall, his success at college added some to his notoriety, and his doings was talked back and forth more'n ever.

"Then every term kind of altered him. He come back with a finer air, better language and a knowledge of the ways of society folks, that put him ahead of anyone else in the valley; while poor 'Lihu was just the same in speech and manner, and more retiring and modest than ever; and, though he was faithfuller, truer and stronger hearted than he'd ever given promise of being, folks never took to him as they did to young Joel.

"But I must go on, for young folks grow up and the signs of mischief come gradual like and was not seen by foolish Kitty, but increasing every time Joel come home for his vacations. Of course Kitty was to blame, but the Lord made her what she was.

"Yes, I can speak freely of her now, because, as I said before, this careless, pretty Kitty died twenty long years ago.

"Not before she married Joel, you ask? Well, of all impatient men! really I can't get on no quicker than I be doin', and if you're tired of it, why take your hat and go. Events don't fly as quick as words and I'm taking you over the course at race-horse speed, skipping where I can, so as to give you just the gist of the story.

"Wall then, Kitty loved life; not but what it meant work early and late to keep things as they oughter be on the old homestead. Her folks warn't as notable as they might ha' been till Kitty took hold; and then I tell you, sir, she made things spin. 'Twarn't only her pretty face that brought men like bees about the place; there was many as would ha' asked for her, if she'd been as homely as a door nail. But she sent 'em all away with the same story—all but her old sweethearts 'Lihu and Joel, and they was as much rivals when they grow'd up as they'd been at the old school-house, when Kitty treated 'Lihu like a yaller dog and showed favour to young Joel.



"But 'Lihu hung on. He come of a race never known to give up what they caught on to. Some way he gained ground too, for, with that shiftless dad at the head of things at the homestead, there was need of a wise counsellor to back up Kitty in the way she took hold.

Page 61

“Lihu was wise, and Kitty got to leaning on his word, and by the time that I be talkin’ of, I s’pose there warn’t no one that could have filled the place in Kitty’s life that ’Lihu had made for himself—only he did not guess at that, and the more she realised it, the backwarder that silly young creature would have been to confess to it, even to herself.

“Sir, I ain’t used to folks that give such sudden turns. Don’t you s’pose you could set down and be comfortable somewheres while I be talkin’, instead of twisting and snerling yourself up in my poor vines?

“You’d rather stand where you be; well, then, I’ll get on with my story.

“I was coming to Joel. It’s more interesting to strangers, that part about Joel, for he was, as I said before, everything ’Lihu lacked—bright and gay, handsome and refined. Ay, and he was a manly looking feller too, and had took lessons in fighting and worked through a gymnasium course, while ’Lihu knew no better exercises than sawing wood and pitching hay and such farm work. ’Lihu was clumsy in moving, but Joel graceful and light; you’d as soon have thought of the old church tower taking to dancing as of ’Lihu trying his hand at it; but Joel, of course, he were the finest dancer anyone had ever see’d in our neighbourhood.

“So it naturally come about that when Kitty wanted to have a gay time—and what young girl does not like fun sometimes?—she took to Joel and left ’Lihu to his fierce jealousy out in the cold.

“Joel had nothing to do but philander after Kitty, come vacations, and there he’d be lounging round the garden, reading poetry to her, when she’d a minute to set down, and telling her about the doings of gay society folks in cities.

“Kitty liked it all, why shouldn’t she? and the more ’Lihu looked like a funeral the more she turned her back on him and favoured t’other. You see, sir, I give it you fair. There was faults all round; and if you want my candid opinion, that Joel was more to blame than Kitty, for, being a man of the world, he knew better than she what the end of it all was bound to be; that the day would come when she would have to make her choice between them and that to one of them that day would mean a broken heart, a spoiled life.

“Ah, well! It was hayin’ time just twenty years ago, and a spell of weather just like this, perhaps a mite warmer, but much the same.

“Well, it threatened a thunderstorm, and all hands was pressed into the fields. Even Kitty was there, with her rake, for, to tell the truth, she was child enough to love a few hours in the sweet-smelling meadows. Joel, he was there, he’d took off his store clothes, and was handsomer than ever in his flannels, and, with his deftness and muscle, was worth any two hired men in the field.

“He and 'Lihu, who had come over to lend a hand, was nigh to one another that afternoon; and there was things said between 'em, as they worked, as had to lay by for a settlin'. Kitty made things worse—silly girl that she was—by coming round in her gay way with her rake, and smiling at them both, so that it would have beat the Angel Gabriel to know which of them it were she had a leaning to.

Page 62

"Truth was, Kitty was back into childhood, out there in the hay—merry and sweet as a rosebud she looked in her old faded bonnet. I see her just as plain, this poor child—that did so much mischief without meaning to hurt anybody. How was she to know that fierce fires of jealous, passionate hatred were at work, kindled by her to flame that sunshiny afternoon, as she danced along the meadow with her rake, happy as the June day seemed long?

"No, sir, you need not be impatient, for the story is about done.

"The last load of hay was pitched as the glowing sun went down. The thunderstorm had passed to the hills beyond, and on the horizon clouds lay piled, purple black. The men come in to supper, and then went out again. Kitty was busy with her dishes in the kitchen till dark; then there come a flash of lightning, and a growlin' of thunder. The last dish was put away, and so the girl went sauntering out, down to the bush of cluster roses by the garden gate, where she could look over into the barn-yard and call to the men still at work with the hay.

"Something took her farther—'twas as if a hand led her—and she crossed the yard, and down the lane she went till she got to the meadow gate that stood open as the men had left it after bringing that last heavy wain through.

"The moon was up—a moon that drifted serenely through the banks of clouds, ever upwards to the zenith.

"Sir, did you ever think—and being a stranger, sir, you must excuse the question—did you ever think of the wicked deeds that moon has looked upon since the creation of mortal man? Oh, yes, I know it, I know it well; in God's sunlight, that sin would never have been committed; but in the moonlight—the calm, still moonlight—passions rise to fever heat, the blow is struck, and man turns away with the curse of Cain written on his brow.

"Kitty, standing with her back against the gate, her eyes following the flitting light across the meadow to the mill-race by the path beyond, all at once felt her heart leap with nameless horror. Yet all she could see was shadows, for the figures was out of sight. All she could see was shadows—shadows cast upon the moonlit meadowland where she had gaily danced with her rake in hand only a few hours before. Two giant forms (so the moonbeams made it) swayed back and forth, gripped together like one, scarcely moving from one spot as they wrestled, as though 'twould take force to uproot them—force like that of the whirlwind in the spring, that tore the old oak like a sapling from its foundations laid centuries ago.

"Kitty, struck dumb like one in nightmare, fled across the meadow towards the mill-race.

“As she went, the shadows lifted and changed with a cruel uprising that told her the end was near. If she could have cried out then, and if they had heard! But as she fled on unheeding, the moon was suddenly obscured. It was pitch dark, and the muttering thunder broke into a roar that shook the earth under Kitty’s feet. How long was it before the moon drifted from out that cloud-bank, where lightning played with zig-zag flames? How long?

Page 63

“When the moonbeams fell again upon the meadow-lands the shadows were gone and Kitty stood alone upon the banks of the mill-race, looking at the rushing dark waters. When she turned homewards she met Joel face to face. He was pale, but a triumphant light shone in his eyes. He came forward with open arms—‘Kitty, my Kitty!’ he cried.

“Kitty stood one moment, with eyes that seemed to pierce to his very heart, then she turned to the splashing waters and pointed solemnly.

“‘Elihu, where is Elihu?’ she asked; and in that moment, when Joel hung his head before her without a word of answer, Kitty fell down like a dead thing at his feet.

“And I, who knew her so well, I tell you that Kitty died there on that meadow by the race, just twenty year ago to-day.

“Joel, you ask? What come to Joel? Well, p’raps he felt bad just at first, for he went away for two, three year, I believe. But he come back, did Joel, and Kitty never molested him by word or deed. You can see his house there below the mill; he’s married long since and his house is full of children. But never, since that June night twenty year ago, has he dared set foot at the old homestead. Folks talked—of course they talked—but Kitty, the staid, sad woman they called Kitty, heeded nothing that was said. Joel, he tried to right himself and writ her many a long letter at the first.

“‘It was a fair wrestle,’ said he, ‘and him as was beaten was to leave the place and not come back for months or years. Elihu was beat on the wrestle and he’s gone that’s all there is to it.’

“Kitty, she never answered them letters; she remembered that uplifted arm as the vast shadows swayed towards her on the meadow, and Joel, he give it up.”

* * * * *

By this time the heavy hay-waggon began to move across the meadows. It was drawing near supper-time and the speaker rose and briskly set aside her knitting.

“I believe that’s all,” she said. “It’s a tragic story for a country place like this. But now set down, won’t you, and wait till the men come up for supper? Mebbe you’ll be glad of a cup of tea before you go any further.”

The stranger, well within the shade of the clustering vines, made no reply.

“Say,” cried she, from the porch door; “set down and wait for supper, won’t you?”

Surprised at the silence, accustomed as she was to the garrulity of country neighbours, she stepped out into the piazza. A beautiful woman she, of forty years, whose fine face seemed now set in an aureole of sunbeams. The stranger took off his hat and stooped

somewhat towards her; there was something familiar in the gesture, which set the wild blood throbbing at her heart-strings as though the past twenty years had been a dream.

“Kitty, my dear love, Kitty.”

The farm men came singing up the lane, the heavy waggons grinding slowly along in the sunshine. All this, the everyday life, was now the dream, and they, Kitty and Elihu, had met in the meadow lands of the earthly Paradise.



Page 64

A MEMORY.

How much of precious joy, that leaves no pain,
Lives in the simple memory of a face
Once seen, and only for a little space,
And never after to be seen again:
A face as fair as, on an altar pane,
A pictured window in some holy place—
The glowing lineaments of immortal grace,
In many a vague ideal sought in vain.
Such face was yours, and such the joy to me,
Who saw you once, once only, and by chance,
And cherished evermore in memory
The noble beauty of your countenance—
The poet's natural language in your looks,
Sweet as the wondrous sweetness of your books.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

AUNT PHOEBE'S HEIRLOOMS.

An Experience in Hypnotism.

We do not take to new ideas readily in Bishopsthorpe. Our fashions are always at least one season behind the times; it is only by a late innovation in Post Office regulations that we are now enabled to get our London papers on the day of their publication; and a craze, social or scientific, has almost been forgotten by the fashionable world before it manages to establish any kind of footing in our midst.

It therefore came upon us with more or less of a shock one morning a short time ago to find the walls of our sleepy little country town placarded with naming posters announcing that Professor Dmitri Sclamowsky intended to visit Bishopsthorpe on the following Friday, for the purpose of exhibiting in the Town Hall some of his marvellous powers in Thought Reading, Mesmerism, and Hypnotism.

Stray rumours from time to time, and especially of late, had visited us of strange experiments in connection with these outlandish sciences, if sciences they can be called; but we had received these with incredulity, mingled with compassion for such weak-minded persons as could be easily duped by the clever conjuring of paid charlatans.

This, at least, was very much the mental attitude of my aunt Phoebe, and it was only under strong pressure from me and one or two others of her younger and more

enterprising section of Bishopsthorpe society that she at last reluctantly consented to patronise the Professor's performance in person.

Even at the last moment she almost failed us.

"I am getting too old a woman, my dear Elizabeth," she said to me as I was helping her to dress, "to leave my comfortable fireside after dinner for the sake of seeing second-rate conjuring."

"Indeed, it is good of you," I said, as I disposed a piece of soft old point lace in graceful folds round the neck of her black velvet dress; "but virtue will be its own reward, for I am sure you will enjoy it as much as any of us, and as for being too old, that is all nonsense! Just look in the glass, and then say if you have a heart to cheat Bishopsthorpe of a sight of you in all your glory."

Page 65

"You are a silly girl, Elizabeth!" said my aunt, and yet she did as I suggested, and, walking up to the long pier-glass, looked at her reflection with a well pleased smile. "Indeed," she continued, turning back to me to where I stood by the dressing-table, "I think I am as silly as you are, to rig myself out like this," and she pointed to the double row of large single diamonds I had clasped round her neck, and the stars of the same precious stones which twinkled and flashed in the lace of her cap.

"Come, Aunt Phoebe," I said, drawing down her hands, which had made a movement as though she would have taken off the glittering gauds, "you don't often give the good Bishopsthorpe folk a chance of admiring the Anstruther heirlooms. They look so lovely! Don't take them off, *please*. What is the use of having beautiful things if they are always to be hidden away in a jewellery case? There now," I went on; "I hear the carriage at the door; here is your fur cloak: you must wrap yourself up well for it is a cold night," and so saying I muffled her up, and hustled her downstairs before she could remonstrate, even had she wished to do so.

The little Town Hall was already crowded when we arrived, but seats had been reserved for us in one of the front rows of benches. Many eyes were turned on us as we made our way to our places, for Aunt Phoebe was looked up to as one of the cornerstones of aristocracy in Bishopsthorpe, and I fancied that I caught an expression of relief on the faces of some of those present, who, until the entertainment had been sanctioned by her presence, had probably felt doubtful as to its complete orthodoxy. But of course I may have been wrong. Aunt Phoebe is always telling me I am too imaginative.

It seemed as though the Professor had awaited our arrival to begin the performance, for we had hardly taken our seats than the curtain, which had hitherto hidden the stage from our view, rolled up and discovered the Professor standing with his hand resting upon an easel, on which was placed a large blackboard.

I think the general feeling in the room was that of disappointment. I know that I, for one, had hoped to see something more interesting than the usual paraphernalia of a lecture on astronomy or geology.

Professor Sclamowsky, too, was not at all as impressive a person as his name had led me to expect. He was short and thick-set. His close-cropped hair was of the undecided colour which fair hair assumes when it is beginning to turn grey, and a heavy moustache of the same uninteresting hue hid his mouth. His jaw was heavy and slightly underhung, and his neck was thick and coarse.

Altogether his appearance was remarkably unprepossessing and commonplace.

In a short speech, spoken with a slight foreign accent, which some way or other struck me as being assumed, he begged to disclaim all intention of *conjuring*. His performance was solely and entirely a series of experiments in and illustrative of the

wonderful science of Hypnotism; a science still in its infancy, but destined to take its place among the most marvellous of modern discoveries.

Page 66

As he spoke, his heavy, uninteresting face lit up as with a hidden enthusiasm, and my attention was attracted to his eyes, which I had not before noticed. They were of a curious bright metallic blue and are the only eyes I have ever seen, though one reads and hears so perpetually of them, which really seemed to flash as he warmed to his subject.

As he finished, I looked at Aunt Phoebe, who shrugged her shoulders and smiled incredulously. It was clear that she was not going to be imposed upon by his specious phrases.

It would be unnecessary to weary my readers by describing at length how the usual preliminary of choosing an unbiassed committee was gone through; nor how, after the doctor, the rector, Mr. Melton (the principal draper in Bishopsthorpe) and several other of the town magnates, all men of irreproachable honesty, had been induced to act in this capacity, the Professor proceeded, with eyes blindfolded and holding the doctor's hand in his, to find a carefully hidden pin, to read the number of a bank-note and to write the figures one by one on the blackboard, and to perform other experiments of the same kind amid the breathless interest of the audience.

I frankly admit that I was astonished and bewildered by what I saw, and I had a little uneasy feeling that if it were not all a piece of gigantic humbug, it was not quite canny—not quite right.

What struck me most, I think, was the unfussy, untheatrical way in which it was all done. Every one of the Professor's movements was marked by an air of calm certainty. He threaded his way through the crowded benches with such an unhesitating step that, only that I had seen the bandage fastened over his eyes by the rector and afterwards carefully examined by the doctor, neither of whom could be suspected of complicity, I should have said he must have had some little peep-hole arranged to enable him to guide his course so unfalteringly.

There were, of course, thunders of applause from the sixpenny seats when the Thought Reading part of the entertainment came to an end.

"Well, Aunt Phoebe," I said, turning to her as the Professor bowed his thanks, "what do you think?"

"Think, my dear?" she repeated. "I think the man is a very fair conjurer."

"But," I protested, "how could he know where the pin was; and you know Mr. Danby himself fastened the handkerchief?"

"My dear Elizabeth, I have seen Houdin do far more wonderful things, when I was a girl; but he had the honesty to call it by its right name—conjuring."

I had not time to carry on the discussion, for the Professor now reappeared and informed us that by far the most interesting part of the performance was still to come. Thought Reading and Mesmerism, or, as some people preferred to call it—Hypnotism—were, he believed, different parts of the same wonderful and but very partially-understood power. A power so little understood as not even to possess a distinctive name; a power which he believed to be latent in everybody, but which was capable of being brought to more or less perfection, according to the amount of care and attention bestowed upon it. “I,” said the Professor, “have given my life to it.” And again I fancied I saw the curious blue eyes flash with a sudden unexpected fire.

Page 67

"In the experiments which I am about to show you," he went on, "I am assisted by my daughter, Anna Sclamowsky," and, drawing back a curtain at the back of the stage, he led forward a girl who looked to be between sixteen and eighteen years old.

There was no sort of family resemblance between father and daughter. She was tall and slight, with a small dark head prettily poised on a long, slender neck. Her face was pale, and her large dark eyes had a startled, frightened look as she gazed at the sea of strange faces below her. Her father placed her in a chair facing us all; and turning once more to the audience said:

"I shall now, with your kind permission, put my daughter into a mesmeric or hypnotic trance; and while she is in it, I hope to show you some particularly interesting experiments. Look at me, Anna—so—"

He placed his fingers for a moment on her eyelids, and then stood aside. Except that the girl was now perfectly motionless, and that her gaze was unnaturally fixed, I could see nothing different in her appearance from what it had been a few moments before.

The Professor now turned to Mr. Danby, who was seated beside me, and said, "If this gentleman will oblige me by stepping up on the stage, he can assure himself by any means he may choose to use, that my daughter is in a perfectly unconscious state at this moment; and if it will give the audience and himself any more confidence in the sincerity of this experiment, he is perfectly at liberty to blindfold her. Then if he will be kind enough to go through the room and touch here and there any person he may fancy, my daughter, at a word from me, will in the same order and in the same manner touch each of those already touched. I myself will, during the whole of the time, stand at the far end of the hall, so that there can be no sort of communication between us."

So saying, Sclamowsky left the stage, and walking down the room, placed himself with his back against the wall, and fixed his gaze upon the motionless form of his daughter.

As I looked back at him, even though separated from him by the length of the hall, I could see the strange glitter and flash of his eyes. It gave me an uncomfortable, uneasy feeling; and I turned my face again towards the stage, where the good-natured rector was following out the directions he had received.

He lifted Anna Sclamowsky's arm, which, on his relaxing his hold, fell limp and lifeless by her side; he snapped his fingers suddenly close before her wide-open eyes without producing even a quiver of a muscle in her set face. He shouted in her ear; shook her by the shoulders; but all without succeeding in making her show any sign of consciousness. He then tied a handkerchief over her eyes; and, leaving the stage, went about through the room, touching people here and there as he went, pursuing a most tortuous course, and ended at last by placing his hand upon Aunt Phoebe's diamond

necklace. He then bowed to the Professor to intimate that we were ready to see the conclusion of the experiment.

Page 68

Sclamowsky moved forward about a pace, beckoned with his hand, and called, not loudly but distinctly, “Anna!”

Without a moment’s hesitation the girl, still blindfolded, rose, walked swiftly down the steps which led from the stage to the floor of the hall, and with startling exactness reproduced Mr. Danby’s actions. In and out through the benches she passed amid a silence of breathless interest, touching each person in exactly the same spot as Mr. Danby had done a few minutes previously.

I saw Aunt Phoebe drawing herself up rigidly as Anna Sclamowsky came towards our bench and, amid deafening applause, laid her finger upon the Anstruther diamonds. The clapping and noise produced no effect upon the girl. She stood motionless as though she had been a statue, her hand still upon the necklace.

Whether Aunt Phoebe was aggravated by the complete success of the experiment or annoyed at having been obliged to take so prominent a part in it, I do not know, but she certainly was a good deal out of temper; for when Sclamowsky made his way to where his daughter was standing, she said, in tones of icy disapproval, which must have been audible for a long way down the room—

“A very clever piece of imposture, sir.”

The mesmerist’s face flushed and his eyes flashed angrily. He, however, bowed low.

“There’s nothing so hard,” he said, “to overcome, madam, as prejudice. I fear you have been inconvenienced by my daughter’s hand. I will now release her—and you.”

So saying, he placed his own hand for a moment over his daughter’s and breathed lightly on the girl’s face. Instantly the muscles relaxed, her hand fell to her side, and I could hear her give a little shuddering sigh, apparently of relief.

I noticed, too, that, whether by design or accident Sclamowsky kept his hand for a moment longer on my aunt’s necklace, and as he took his finger away, I fancied that he looked at her fixedly for a second, and muttered something either to himself or her, the meaning of which I could not catch.

“What did he say to you?” I asked, as Sclamowsky, after removing the bandage from his daughter’s eyes, assisted her to remount the stage.

Aunt Phoebe looked a little confused and dazed, and her hand went up to her necklace, as though to reassure herself of its safety.

“Say to me?” she repeated, rousing herself as though by an effort; “he said nothing to me. But I think, Elizabeth, if it is the same to you, we will go home; the heat of the room has made me feel a little dizzy.”

We heard next day that we had missed the best part of the entertainment by leaving when we did, and that many and far more wonderful experiments were successfully attempted; but I had no time to waste in vain regrets for not having been present, for I was much taken up with Aunt Phoebe.

I was really anxious about her; she was so strangely unlike her calm, equable self. All Saturday she was restless and irritable, wandering half way upstairs, and then as though she had forgotten what she wanted, returning to the drawing-room, where she set to work opening old cabinet drawers, looking under chairs and sofas, tumbling everything out of her work-box as if in search of something, and snubbing me for my pains when I offered to help her.

Page 69

This went on all day, and I had almost made up my mind to send for Dr. Perkins, when, after late dinner, she suddenly sank into an arm-chair with a look of relief.

"I know what it is," she said; "it is my diamonds!"

"Your diamonds, Aunt Phoebe!" I exclaimed. "Why, I locked them up for you myself in your dressing-box when we came home last night!"

"Are you sure, Elizabeth?" she asked with an anxious, worried expression.

"Quite sure," I answered; "but if it will satisfy you, I will bring down your dressing-box now and let you see."

"Do, there's a dear child! I declare I feel too tired to move another step."

I was not surprised at this, considering how she had been fussing about all day, and I ran up to her bed-room, brought down her rosewood dressing-box and placed it on the table in front of her.

I was greatly struck by the nervous trembling of her fingers as she chose out the right key from amongst the others in her bunch, and the shaky way in which she fitted it into the lock. Even when she had turned the key she seemed half afraid to raise the lid, so I did it for her, and, taking out the first tray, lifted out the morocco case which contained the heirlooms and laid it in her lap.

Aunt Phoebe tremblingly touched the spring, the case flew open and disclosed the diamonds lying snugly on their bed of blue velvet. She took them out and looked at them lovingly, held them up so that they might catch the light from the lamp, and then with a sigh replaced them in their case and shut it with a snap.

I waited for a few minutes, then, as she did not speak, I put out my hand for the case, intending to replace it in the dressing-box and take it upstairs. But Aunt Phoebe clutched it tightly, staggered to her feet and said in a husky, unnatural voice, "No, I must take it myself."

"Why, you said you were too tired!" I began, but before I could finish my sentence she had left the room, and I heard her going upstairs and opening the door of her bed-room.

Some few minutes afterwards I heard her steps once more on the stairs, and I waited, expecting her every moment to open the drawing-room door and walk in; but to my astonishment I heard her pass by, and a moment afterwards the clang of the front door as it was hastily shut told me that Aunt Phoebe had left the house.

“She must be mad!” I exclaimed to myself as I rushed to the hall, seized up the first hat I could see, flung a shawl over my shoulders, and tore off in pursuit of my runaway relative.

It was quite dark, but I caught sight of her as she passed by a lamp-post. She was walking quickly, quicker than I had ever seen her walk before, and with evidently some set purpose in her mind. I ran after her as fast as I could, and came up with her as she was turning down a small dark lane leading, as I knew, to a little court, the home of a very poor but respectable section of the inhabitants of Bishopsthorpe.

Page 70

"Aunt Phoebe," I gasped as I touched her arm, "where are you going? You must be making a mistake!"

"No, no!" she cried, with a feverish impatience in her voice. "I am right! quite right! You must not stop me!" and she quickened her pace into a halting run.

I saw clearly that there was nothing to be done but to follow her and try to keep her out of actual harm's way, for there now seemed to be no manner of doubt that my poor aunt was, for the time at any rate, insane. So I fell back a pace, and, never appearing even to notice that I had left her side, she pursued her course.

Suddenly she stopped short, crossed the street and stumbled up the uneven stone steps of a shabby-looking house, whose front door was wide open. Without a moment's hesitation she entered the dark hall, and I followed closely at her heels. Up the squalid, dirty stairs she hurried, and, without knocking, opened a door on the left-hand side of the first landing and went in.

I was a few steps behind, but as I gained the threshold I saw her take a parcel from beneath her cloak and hold it out to a man who came to meet her from the far end of the badly-lighted room.

"I have brought them," I heard my aunt say in the same curious husky voice I had noticed before.

As the man came nearer and stood where the light of the evil-smelling little paraffin lamp fell upon his features, I recognised in the heavy jaw, the bull-neck and the close-cropped head, the Professor Dmitri Sclamowsky of the previous evening. Our eyes met, and I thought I detected a start of not altogether pleased surprise; but if this were so he recovered himself quickly and bowing low, said:

"I had not expected the pleasure of *your* company, madam, but as you have done me the honour of coming, I am glad that you should be here to witness the conclusion of last night's experiment. This lady," he continued, pointing to my aunt, who still stood with fixed, apparently unseeing eyes, holding out the parcel towards him—"this lady, you will remember, considered the hypnotic phenomena exhibited at last night's entertainment as a clever imposture—those were the words, I think. To one who, like myself, is an enthusiast on the subject, such words were hard, nay, impossible to bear. It was necessary to prove to her that the power I possess"—here his blue eyes gleamed with the same metallic light I had before noticed—"is something more than *conjuring*; something more than a 'clever imposture'. You will see now."

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and took the parcel from my aunt, and as he did so, I recognised with horror the morocco case which I knew contained the heirlooms.

“Who are these for?” he said, addressing Aunt Phoebe.

“For you,” came from my aunt’s lips, but her eyes were fixed and her voice seemed to come with difficulty.

“She is mad!” I exclaimed. “She does not know what she is saying!”

Page 71

Sclamowsky smiled.

“And who am I?” he continued, still addressing my aunt.

“The Professor Dmitri Sclamowsky.”

“And what is this?” indicating the morocco case.

“My diamonds.”

“You make them a present to me?”

“Yes.”

Sclamowsky opened the case and took out the jewels.

“A handsome present, certainly!” he said, turning to me with a smile.

I was speechless. There was something so horrible in my dear Aunt Phoebe’s set face and wide open, stony eyes, something so weird in the dim room, with its one miserable lamp; something so mockingly fiendish in Sclamowsky’s glittering eyes as he stood with the diamonds flashing and twinkling in his hands, that though I strove for utterance, I could not succeed in articulating a single word.

“Enough!” at last he said, replacing the diamonds in their case and closing it sharply—“the experiment is concluded,” and so saying he stepped up close to Aunt Phoebe and made two or three passes with his hands in front of her face. A quiver ran all over my aunt’s figure. She swayed and would have fallen if I had not rushed forward and caught her in my arms.

She looked round at me with terror and bewilderment in every feature.

“Where am I, Elizabeth?” she stammered, and then looking round she caught sight of Sclamowsky. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Never mind, Aunt Phoebe,” I said. “Come home, and I will tell you all about it.”

Aunt Phoebe passed her hand over her eyes, and as she did so I glanced inquiringly from Sclamowsky’s face to the jewellery case in his hands. What was to be the end of it all? I had certainly heard my aunt distinctly give this man her diamonds as a present, but could a gift made under such circumstances hold good for a moment? He evidently saw the query in my face.

“You judge me even more hastily than did your aunt,” he said. “She called me an impostor; you think me a rogue and a swindler. Here are your jewels, madam,” he said,

turning to Aunt Phoebe. “I shall be more than satisfied if the result of this evening's experiment prove to you that, as your poet says, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'”

“I don't understand it all,” said Aunt Phoebe piteously, as she mechanically took the morocco case into her hands.

“Don't try to do so now,” I said. “You must come home with me as quickly as you can;” for I was feverishly anxious to escape from this house—from this man with this horrible, terrifying power.

He bowed silently to us as I hurried Aunt Phoebe out of the room; but as I was going down the stairs an irresistible impulse came over me to look back.

Page 72

He was standing on the landing, politely holding the little lamp so that we might see our way down the uneven, irregular stairs, and the light fell upon his face. Was the expression I saw upon it one of triumph, or one of defeated dishonesty? I could not say. Even now, though I have thought it all over and over till my head has got dazed and confused, I cannot make up my mind whether he had hoped, by means of his strange mesmeric power, to obtain possession of the Anstruther diamonds—a design only frustrated by my unlooked-for appearance—or whether his action was altogether prompted by a determination to demonstrate and vindicate the truth of the phenomena connected with his science.

Sometimes I lean to one view, sometimes to the other. I have now told the facts of the case simply and without exaggeration just as they occurred, and my readers must judge for themselves whether Dmitri Sclamowsky was, in the matter of Aunt Phoebe's heirlooms, a disappointed swindler or a triumphant enthusiast.

SAINT OR SATAN.

A story, strange as true—a story to the truth of which half the inhabitants of the good city of Turin can bear testimony.

Have you ever been to Turin, by the way? To that city which reminds one of nothing so much as a gigantic chess-board set down upon the banks of the yellow river—that city with never-ending, straight streets, all running at right angles to each other, and whose extremities frame in delicious pictures of wooded hill or snow-capped Alp; whose inhabitants recall the grace and courtesy of the Parisians, joined to a good spicing of their wit and humour; whose dialect is three-parts French pronounced as it is written; and whose force and frankness strike you with a special charm after the ha-haing of the Florentines, the sonorousness of the Romans and the sing-song of the Neapolitans; to say nothing of the hideousness of the Genoese and the chaos of the Sicilians; that city of kindly greetings and hearty welcome?

Well, if you have given Turin a fair trial, you will know what a pleasant place it is; if you have not, I advise you to do so upon the first occasion that may present itself.

The climate is described by some emulator of Thomson to consist of “Tre mesi d’Inferno, nove d’inverno.” But then you must remember that Turin houses are provided with chimneys, and Turin floors with carpets, and that no one who does not wish it is forced—as so many of us have been—to shiver upon marble pavement and be half suffocated by a charcoal-brazier. No refuge from the cold save that, one's bed, or sitting in a church. And one can neither lie for ever in bed, nor sit the day through in a church, however fine it may be.

Page 73

It is extremely healthy, however, and altogether one of the pleasantest towns in Italy to live in. It has, too, one of the fairest gardens in Europe: the Valentino, with its old red-brick palace, its elms, its lawns, its river and setting, on one side, of lovely hills. Lady Mary W. Montagu speaks of the beauty of this garden in her day. I think she would scarcely recognise it at the present. Modern art has done its best, and over the whole yet lingers the mysterious charm of the Past; the dark historical legends connected with the palace and its quondam frail, fair, and, I regret to add, ferocious mistress, its—But what has all this to do with “Saint or Satan,” you will ask? Where is your promised story?

Well, Satan enters somewhat largely into the story of the Valentino which I will relate you at some future time; and, as to the part, if any, his dark Majesty had in what I am going to tell you to-day, you yourself must judge, reader. I am inclined to think *he had* a claw in the matter, rather than Saint Antonio to whom the miracle is ascribed. The miracle! Yes, the miracle. And if you could see her, you would certainly say that a miracle of some kind there certainly was.

I have, after long consideration and study, come to the conclusion that “Old Maids” are, generally speaking, a very pleasant, kind-hearted portion of society. They may be a little irritable and restive while standing upon the border-land that divides the marriageable from the un-marriageable age; but that boundary once passed, they take place among the worthiest and best. And surely their anxiety as to the reply to the question of “Miss or Mrs.?” is pardonable. Matrimony means an utter change of life to a woman; while to a man it is of infinitely less import.

I am afraid I cannot class the “Signorina Guiseppina Pace” as having formed one of the pleasant section of old maids; I must even, however reluctantly, place her among the decidedly unpleasant ones. “Peace”—“Pace” was her name, but her old mother, with whom she lived, would have told you that she differed greatly from her name.

So do most of us, indeed; and I am sure you have only to run over the list of your friends in the kindest manner to see that I am right in my affirmation.

Perhaps Miss Guiseppina thought that one can have too much of even a good thing; that the name of Pace was quite enough for the house, and that, in consequence, she ought to do her best to banish it under all other circumstances. She certainly succeeded; for she led her poor old widow-mother and their single servant such a life as to give them a lively foretaste of what Purgatory—to say no worse—might possibly be.

Ah! if she could but have cut off the Pace from her own name as cleanly as she cut off all possible peace from the two poor women who were doomed, for their sins, to live under the same roof with her!

But, despite the endeavours during thirty odd long years, she had never had one single chance of doing so; and it riled her to the core. Schoolfellows had floated away upon the sea of matrimony, friends had become mothers—grandmothers—and yet she remained Guiseppina Pace, as she ever had remained; and with no prospect of a change.

Page 74

How she learned to loathe the sight of a bridal procession; and how she taught mother and maid to tremble at the passing of the same! How the news of a projected marriage stirred her bile, and how her dearest friends hastened to her with any matrimonial news they could gather, or invent! It was wonderful to see, and pleasant enough to witness—from a distance.

Guisseppina and her mother occupied a small flat in Via Santa Teresa: Guisseppina's bed-room and their one sitting-room looking into the street; her mother's room, the kitchen and a sort of coal-hole in which the servant slept being at the back of the house.

It was summer. People pushed perspiringly for the shady side of the street, puffed and panted under pillar and portico. The public gardens were besieged; fans fluttered everywhere; iced-beer and pezzi duri were in constant requisition.

It was on a Friday afternoon. Guisseppina had sunk, exhausted with the heat and exasperated with the flies, into a large arm-chair opposite her bed, and was sitting there fanning herself violently and trying to catch a breath of fresh air from the widely-opened window beside her. But there was no air, fresh or otherwise; and nothing but the languid steps of the passers in the street below was heard. Not the roll of a wheel, the hoof of a horse, or the yelp of a dog. It seemed as if the whole place had been given over to the cruel glare of sunshine and the persevering impertinence of flies.

It was just one of those days which make one long intensely for the shade of ilexes upon the sea shore, and the swish of idle waters upon the beach.

And Guisseppina *did* long, and *had* longed, and had finally driven her poor mother in tears to her room with reproaches for not being able to go for a month to Pegli, as, that very morning, their upper floor neighbours, the Castelles, had gone—and—and—and—: the usual litany—the usual nagging—the usual temper; hinc ille lacrimae.

"Why should she alone," she exclaimed to herself sitting there, "remain to roast in town, while all her friends—? Ah, it was too cruel! If she could only—!"

Her eyes fell upon the little picture of Saint Antonio hanging over her bed—the Saint credited with presiding over marriages—the Saint to which, through all these long years, Guisseppina had daily appealed and prayed. Alas, all in vain! Not the shadow of a lover had he sent her—not the ghost of an offer had he vouchsafed her in return for all her tears and tapers.

She looked across at the Saint, this time with a scowl, however. The Saint seemed to return her gaze with a mocking smile. No! That was indeed adding insult to injury! After thirty years unswerving devotion, to mock at her thus!

She didn't say thirty years, mind, though she could have added somewhat to the figure without risking a fib. She said something else, a something that didn't sound exactly like a blessing; and, in a sudden fit of rage, started from her seat, sprang across the room, tore the offending Saint from the nail from which he had dangled for such long years, and, without further ceremony, flung him out through the open window into the street below.

Page 75

Then, aghast at what she had done, she stood as if turned to stone, not daring to go to the window to see what the effect of her novel proceeding might have been.

Minutes, to her ages, passed: then came a ring at the bell. Answer she must; the maid was out marketing, her mother in tears—for it might be the post—it might be—! Ah, she shivered as she thought thereon—it might be a municipal guard with a “contravvenzione”—fine; for in Italy one cannot now fling even saints from a window down upon the passers’ heads with impunity. Time was when worse things were periodically showered down upon passengers, but, thanks to government and wholesome laws, nous avons change tout cela.

With a beating heart Guiseppina drew the bolt and opened the door. There on the landing stood, not a policeman, but an elderly gentleman, his hat in one hand, Saint Antonio in the other, and his bald head looming out from the gloom—some Turin stairs are *very* dark—like the moon in a fog.

“Signora”—he began in a hesitating voice, and holding forward the imperturbable Saint as a shield and excuse for his intrusion—

“Signore,” replied the ancient maiden, gazing forth at her visitor with wonder on her face and relief in her heart.

The relief fled quickly, however, for she suddenly remembered that many of the police were said to prow about in civil clothes and inflict no end of fines, of which they pocketed a part.

But he didn’t look a bit like a policeman. So she smiled upon him, and listened benignantly to his tale. He had been passing the house—musing upon his business—that of a broker—and trying to guess at the truth of a report relative to certain investments, when suddenly his calculations had been put to flight by the arrival of some unseen object from on high, which, after alighting upon the crown of his Panama, fell at his feet.

Here a wave of his hand and a flourish of the Saint indicated his having picked up the same.

He then proceeded to relate his having looked up—the Saint could only have come from Heavenward, he had perched so exactly upon the crown of his hat—having seen the open window—all the rest in the house were closed—and having taken the liberty—

Here another wave of the hand, followed by a bow.

And then, at this juncture, Signora Pace came out from her room, and she, after being informed of the cause of her daughter’s being found in close converse upon the landing with a stranger of the male sex, asked the said stranger in. Her invitation being



accepted, the trio adjourned to the sitting-room, the gallant knight still retaining his trophy.

Only after being warmly pressed to do so by Signora Pace did the all-unexpected and unknown visitor deposit Saint Antonio upon the centre table, and take his seat upon the red rep sofa next to her.

Guispeppina sat facing him. She seemed suddenly to have quite changed—never once snubbed her mother, and appeared throughout all sugar and sweetness.

Page 76

We can suppose that remorse at having treated her Saint after this fashion, and relief at his not having fallen into the hands of a policeman, as she at first had most reasonably feared, had worked the change.

Policeman, indeed! Signor Cesare Garelli—such the visitor gave as his name—appeared to her to be quite a charming person. To be sure, he was bald, but that mattered little. So was Julius Caesar and a host of other great men.

Cesare Garelli was something, to her, infinitely more interesting than his great namesake ever had been. He was a partner of the well-known Zucco, and the office they kept in Via Carlo Alberto had wooden cups of gold nuggets, no end of glittering coins and crisp bank-notes of foreign and formidable appearance, in its solitary window. More than once she had longingly halted before its treasures.

So a vast deal of information was exchanged on both sides, and when Signor Cesare Garelli rose to go, the flood of golden sunshine had crept quite across to the other side of the street.

Apparently some of it had crept into Guiseppina's heart also, for she refrained from flying out when the long-delayed "minestra" turned out to be smoked, and she even went so far as to give Saint Antonio a chaste kiss as she restored him to the crooked nail to which he had hung for so long a time.

Cesare Garelli's visits became more and more frequent in Via Santa Teresa. Then followed excursions to Rivoli, to Superza, to Moncalieri. Nice little dinners, and evenings spent at the Caffè San Carlo or under the horse-chestnuts in the Valentino garden, succeeded rapidly. La Signora Pace's life savoured of the seventh heaven, and Guiseppina's temper grew mellow as the peaches which her admirer was for ever sending her.

That phase passed away, and then one fine day Cesare Garelli burst forth in all the glory and radiance of a declared and accepted lover.

In less than three months from the date of Saint Antonio's flight through the window into the hot, dusty street, Guiseppina voluntarily—oh, how voluntarily!—renounced the name of Pace for ever and took that of Garelli.

If you want to know if Saint or Satan made his match for him, you had better ask Cesare Garelli himself. I cannot tell you.

A. BERESFORD.

IN A BERNESE VALLEY.

I met her by this mountain stream
At twilight's fall long years gone by,
While, rosy with day's afterbeam,
Yon snow-peaks glowed against the sky;

And she was but a simple maid
Who fed her goats among the hills,
And sang her songs within the glade,
And caught the music of the rills;

And drank the fragrance of the flowers
That bloomed within love-haunted dells;
And wandered home in gloaming hours,
Amid the sound of tinkling bells.

Page 77

And now I'm in this vale again,
And once more hear the tinkling sound;
But yet 'tis not the same as when
That maiden 'mid her flock I found.

And still the rosy light of morn
Steals soft o'er mount and stream and tree;
And yet I hear the Alpine horn,
But the old charm is lost to me;

For I would see that angel face,
And hear again the simple tale
Which to that twilight lent the grace
That changed this to Arcadian vale.

It cannot be: my dream is o'er;
No more among the hills she'll roam;
No more she'll sing the songs of yore;
Or call the weary cattle home;

For she is in her bed of rest,
Encompassed all with gentians blue,
With Edelweiss upon her breast,
And by her head wild thyme and rue.

Sweet *Angelus*, from yon church-tower,
That floatest now so soft and clear,
Ring back again that golden hour
When I still sat beside her here!

ALEXANDER LAMONT.