

The Argosy eBook

The Argosy

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THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1891.

THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

CHAPTER XIV.

Drashkil-smoking.

"It must and shall be mine!"

So spoke Captain Ducie on the spur of the moment as he wrote the last word of his translation of M. Platzoff's *Ms.* And yet there was a keen sense of disappointment working within him. His blood had been at fever heat during the latter part of his task. Each fresh sentence of the cryptogram as he began to decipher it would, he hoped, before he reached the end of it, reveal to him the hiding-place of the great Diamond. Up to the very last sentence he had thus fondly deluded himself, only to find that the abrupt ending of the *Ms.* left him still on the brink of the secret, and left him there without any clue by which he could advance a single step beyond that point. He was terribly disappointed, and the longer he brooded over the case the more entirely hopeless was the aspect it put on.

But there was an elasticity of mind about Captain Ducie that would not allow him to despair utterly for any length of time. In the course of a few days, as he began to recover from his first chagrin, he at the same time began to turn the affair of the Diamond over and over in his mind, now in one way, now in another, looking at it in this light and in that; trying to find the first faint indications of a clue which, judiciously followed up, might conduct him step by step to the heart of the mystery. Two questions naturally offered themselves for solution. First: Did Platzoff habitually carry the Diamond about his person? Second: Was it kept in some skilfully-devised hiding-place about the house? These were questions that could be answered only by time and observation.

So Captain Ducie went about Bon Repos like a man with half-a-dozen pairs of eyes, seeing, and not only seeing but noting, a hundred little things such as would never have been observed by him under ordinary circumstances. But when, at the end of a week, he came to sum up and classify his observations, and to consider what bearing they had upon the great mystery of the hiding-place of the Diamond, he found that they had no bearing upon it whatever; that for anything seen or heard by him the world might hold no such precious gem, and the Russian's letter to Signor Lampini might be nothing more than an elaborate hoax.



When the access of chagrin caused by the recognition of this fact had in some degree subsided, Ducie was ready enough to ridicule his own foolish expectations. "Platzoff has had the Diamond in his possession for years. For him there is nothing of novelty in such a fact. Yet here have I been foolish enough to expect that in the course of one short week I should discover by some sign or token the spot where it is hidden, and that too after I knew from his own confession that the secret was one which he guarded most jealously. I might be here for five years and be not one whit wiser at the end of that time as regards the hiding-place of the Diamond than I am now. From this day I give up the affair as a bad job."

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Nevertheless, he did not quite do that. He kept up his habit of seeing and noting little things, but without any definite views as to any ulterior benefit that might accrue to him therefrom. Perhaps there was some vague idea floating in his mind that Fortune, who had served him so many kind turns in years gone by, might befriend him once again in this matter—might point out to him the wished-for clue, and indicate by what means he could secure the Diamond for his own.

The magnitude of the temptation dazzled him. Captain Ducie would not have picked your pocket, or have stolen your watch, or your horse, or the title-deeds of your property. He had never put another man's name to a bill instead of his own. You might have made him trustee for your widow or children, and have felt sure that their interests would have been scrupulously respected at his hands. Yet with all this—strange contradiction as it may seem—if he could have laid surreptitious fingers on M. Platzoff's Diamond, that gentleman would certainly never have seen his cherished gem again. But had Platzoff placed it in his hands and said, "Take this to London for me and deposit it at my bankers'," the commission would have been faithfully fulfilled. It seemed as if the element of mystery, of deliberate concealment, made all the difference in Captain Ducie's unspoken estimate of the case. Besides, would there not be something princely in such a theft? You cannot put a man who steals a diamond worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds in the category of common thieves. Such an act verges on the sublime.

One of the things seen and noticed by Captain Ducie was the absence, through illness, of the mulatto, Cleon, from his duties, and the substitution in his place of a man whom Ducie had never seen before. This stranger was both clever and obliging, and Platzoff himself confessed that the fellow made such a good substitute that he missed Cleon less than he at first feared he should have done. He was indeed very assiduous, and found time to do many odd jobs for Captain Ducie, who contracted quite a liking for him.

Between Ducie and Cleon there existed one of those blind unreasoning hatreds which spring up full-armed and murderous at first sight. Such enmities are not the less deadly because they sometimes find no relief in words. Cleon treated Ducie with as much outward respect and courtesy as he did any other of his master's guests; no private communication ever passed between the two, and yet each understood the other's feelings towards him, and both of them were wise enough to keep as far apart as possible. Neither of them dreamed at that time of the strange fruit which their mutual enmity was to bear in time to come. Meanwhile, Cleon lay sick in his own room, and Captain Ducie was rather gladdened thereby.

* * * * *

M. Platzoff rarely touched cigar or pipe till after dinner; but, whatever company he might have, when that meal was over, it was his invariable custom to retire for an hour or two to the room consecrated to the uses of the Great Herb, and his guests seldom or never

declined to accompany him. To Captain Ducie, as an inveterate smoker, these *seances* were very pleasant.

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On the very first evening of the Captain's arrival at Bon Repos, M. Platzoff had intimated that he was an opium smoker, and that at no very distant date he would enlighten Ducie as to the practice in question. About a week later, as they sat down to their pipes and coffee, said Platzoff, "This is one of my big smoke-nights. To-night I go on a journey of discovery into Dreamland—a country that no explorations can exhaust, where beggars are the equals of kings, and where the Fates that control our actions are touched with a fine eccentricity that in a more commonplace world would be termed madness. But there nothing is commonplace."

"You are going to smoke opium?" said Ducie, interrogatively.

"I am going to smoke drashkil. Let me, for this once, persuade you to follow my example."

"For this once I would rather be excused," said Ducie, laughingly.

Platzoff shrugged his shoulders. "I offer to open for you the golden gates of a land full of more strange and wondrous things than were ever dreamed of by any early voyager as being in that new world on whose discovery he was bent; I offer to open up for you a set of experiences so utterly fresh and startling that your matter-of-fact English intellect cannot even conceive of such things. I offer you all this, and you laugh me down with an air of superiority, as though I were about to present you with something which, however precious it might be in my eyes, in yours was utterly without value."

"If I sin at all," said Ducie, "it is through ignorance. The subject is one respecting which I know next to nothing. But I must confess that about experiences such as you speak of there is an intangibility—a want of substance—that to me would make them seem singularly valueless."

"And is not the thing we call life one tissue of intangibilities?" asked the Russian. "You can touch neither the beginning nor the end of it. Do not its most cherished pleasures fly you even as you are in the very act of trying to grasp them? Do you know for certain that you—you yourself—are really here?—that you do not merely dream that you are here? What do you know?"

"Your theories are too far-fetched for me," said Ducie. "A dream can be nothing more than itself—nothing can give it backbone or substance. To me such things are of no more value than the shadow I cast behind me when I walk in the sun."

"And yet without substance there could be no shadow," snarled the Russian.

"Do your experiences in any way resemble those recorded by De Quincey?"

"They do and do not," answered Platzoff. "I can often trace, or fancy that I can, a slight connecting likeness, arising probably from the fact that in the case of both of us a

similar, or nearly similar, agent was employed for a similar purpose. But, as a rule, the intellectual difference between any two men is sufficient to render their experiences in this respect utterly dissimilar.”

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"It does not follow, I presume, that all the visions induced by the imbibing of opium, or what you term drashkil, are pleasant ones?"

"By no means. You cannot have forgotten what De Quincey has to say on that score. But whether they are pleasant or the contrary, I accept them as so much experience, and in so far I am satisfied. You look incredulous, but I tell you, sir, that what I see, and what I undergo—subjectively—while under the influence of drashkil make up for me an experience as real, that dwells as vividly in my memory and that can be brought to mind like any other set of recollections, as if it were built up brick by brick, fact by fact, out of the incidents of everyday life. And all such experiences are valuable in this wise: that whatever I see while under the influence of drashkil I see, as it were, with the eyes of genius. I breathe a keener atmosphere; I have finer intuitions; the brain is no longer clogged with that part of me which is mortal; in whatever imaginary scenes I assist, whether actor or spectator, matters not; I seem to discern the underlying meaning of things—I hear the low faint beating of the hidden pulses of the world. To come back from this enchanted realm to the dull realities of everyday life is like depriving some hero of fairyland of his magic gifts and reducing him to the level of common humanity."

"At which pleasant level I pray ever to be kept," said Ducie; "I have no desire to soar into those regions of romance where you seem so thoroughly at home."

"So be it," said Platzoff drily. "The intellects of you English have been nourished on beef and beer for so many generations that there is no such thing as spiritual insight left among you. We must not expect too much." This was said not ill-naturedly, but in that quiet jeering tone which was almost habitual with Platzoff.

Ducie maintained a judicious silence and went on puffing gravely at his meerschaum. Platzoff touched the gong and Cleon entered, for this conversation took place before the illness of the latter. The Russian held up two fingers, and Cleon bowed. Then Cleon opened a mahogany box in one corner of the room, and took out of it a pipe-bowl of red clay, into which he fitted a flexible tube five or six yards in length and tipped with amber. The bowl was then fixed into a stand of black oak about a foot high and there held securely, and the mouthpiece handed to Platzoff. Cleon next opened an inlaid box, and by means of a tiny silver spatula he cut out a small block of some black, greasy-looking mixture, which he proceeded to fit into the bowl of the pipe. On the top of this he sprinkled a little aromatic Turkish tobacco, and then applied an allumette. When he saw that the pipe was fairly alight, he bowed and withdrew.

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While these preparations were going on Platzoff had not been silent. "I have spoken to you of what I am about to smoke, both as opium and drashkil," he said. "It is not by any means pure opium. With that great drug are mixed two or three others that modify and influence the chief ingredient materially. I had the secret of the preparation from a Hindoo gentleman while I was in India. It was imparted to me as an immense favour, it being a secret even there. The enthusiastic terms in which he spoke of it have been fully justified by the result, as you would discover for yourself if you could only be persuaded to try it. You shake your head. Eh bien! mon ami; the loss is yours, not mine."

"Some of what you have termed your 'experiences' are no doubt very singular ones?" said Ducie, interrogatively.

"They are—very singular," answered Platzoff. "In my last drashkil-dream, for instance, I believed myself to be an Indian fakir, and I seemed to realise to the full the strange life of one of those strange beings. I was stationed in the shade of a large tree just without the gate of some great city where all who came and went could see me. On the ground, a little way in front of me, was a wooden bowl for the reception of the offerings of the charitable. I had kept both my hands close shut for so many years that the nails had grown into the flesh, and the muscles had hardened so that I could no longer open them; and I was looked upon as a very holy man. The words of the passers-by were sweet in my ears, but I never spoke to them in return. Silent and immovable, I stood there through the livelong day—and in my vision it was always day. I had the power of looking back, and I knew that, in the first instance, I had been led by religious enthusiasm to adopt that mode of life. I should be in the world but not of it; I should have more time for that introspective contemplation the aim and end of which is mental absorption in the divine Brahma; besides which, people would praise me, and all the world would know that I was a holy man. But the strangest part of the affair remains to be told. In the eyes of the people I had grown in sanctity from year to year; but in my own heart I knew that instead of approaching nearer to Brahma, I was becoming more depraved, more wicked, with a great inward wickedness, as time went on. I struggled desperately against the slough of sin that was slowly creeping over me, but in vain. It seemed to me as if the choice were given me either to renounce my life of outward-seeming sanctity, and becoming as other men were, to feel again that inward peace which had been mine long years before; or else, while remaining holy in the eyes of the multitude, to feel myself sinking into a bottomless pit of wickedness from which I could never more hope to emerge. My mental tortures while this struggle was going on I can never forget: they are as much a real experience to me as if they had made up a part of my genuine

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waking life. And still I stood with closed hands in the shade of the tree; and the people cried out that I was holy, and placed their offerings in my bowl; and I could not make up my mind to abnegate the title they gave me and become as they were. And still I grew in inward wickedness, till I loathed myself as if I were some vile reptile; and so the struggle went on, and was still going on when I opened my eyes and found myself again at Bon Repos."

As Platzoff ceased speaking, Cleon applied the light, and Ducie in his eagerness drew a little nearer. Platzoff was dressed a la Turk, and sat with cross legs on the low divan that ran round the room. Slowly and deliberately he inhaled the smoke from his pipe, expelling it a moment later, in part through his nostrils and in part through his lips. The layer of tobacco at the top of the bowl was quickly burnt to ashes. By this time the drug below was fairly alight, and before long a thick white sickly smoke began to ascend in rings and graceful spires towards the roof of the room. Cleon was gone, and a solemn silence was maintained by both the men. Platzoff's eyes, black and piercing, were fixed on vacancy; they seemed to be gazing on some picture visible to himself alone. Ducie was careful not to disturb him. His inhalations were slow, gentle and regular. After a time, a thin film or glaze began to gather over his wide-open eyes, dimming their brightness, and making them seem like the eyes of someone dead. His complexion became livid, his face more cadaverous than it naturally was. Then his eyes closed slowly and gently, like those of an infant dropping to sleep. For a little time longer he kept on inhaling the smoke, but every minute the inhalations became fainter and fewer in number. At length the hand that held the pipe dropped nervelessly by his side, the amber mouthpiece slipped from between his lips, his jaw dropped, and, with an almost imperceptible sigh, his head sank softly back on to the cushions behind, and M. Paul Platzoff was in the opium-eater's paradise.

Ducie, who had never seen anyone similarly affected, was frightened by his host's death-like appearance. He was doubtful whether Platzoff had not been seized with a fit. In order to satisfy himself he touched the gong and summoned Cleon. That incomparable domestic glided in, noiseless as a shadow.

"Does your master always look as he does now after he has been smoking opium?" asked the Captain.

"Always, sir."

"And how long does it take him to come round?"

"That depends, sir, on the strength of the dose he has been smoking. The preparation is made of different strengths to suit him at different times; but always when he has been smoking drashkil I leave him undisturbed till midnight. If by that time he has not

come round naturally and of his own accord, I carry him to bed and then administer to him a certain draught, which has the effect of sending him into a natural and healthy sleep, from which he awakes next morning thoroughly refreshed.”

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"Then you will come to-night at twelve, and see how your master is by that time?" said Ducie.

"It is part of my duty to do so," answered Cleon.

"Then I will wait here till that time," said the Captain. Cleon bowed and disappeared.

So Ducie kept watch and ward for four hours, during the whole of which time Platzoff lay, except for his breathing, like one dead. As the last stroke of midnight struck Cleon reappeared. His master showed not the slightest symptom of returning consciousness. Having examined him narrowly for a moment or two, he turned to Ducie.

"You must pardon me, sir, for leaving you alone," he said, "but I must now take my master off to bed. He will scarcely wake up for conversation to-night."

"Proceed as though I were not here," said Ducie. "I will just finish this weed, and then I too will turn in."

Platzoff's private rooms, forming a suite four in number, were on the ground floor of Bon Repos. From the main corridor the first that you entered was the smoking-room already described. Next to that was the dressing-room, from which you passed into the bedroom. The last of the four was a small square room, fitted up with book-shelves, and used as a private library and study.

Cleon, who was a strong, muscular fellow, lifted Platzoff's shrivelled body as easily as he might have done that of a child, and so carried him out of the room.

Ducie met his host at the breakfast-table next morning. The latter seemed as well as usual, and was much amused when Ducie told him of his alarm, and how he had summoned Cleon under the impression that Platzoff had been taken dangerously ill.

Platzoff rarely indulged in the luxury of drashkil-smoking oftener than once a week. His constitution was delicate, and a too frequent use of so dangerous a drug would have tended to shatter still further his already enfeebled health. Besides, as he said, he wished to keep it as a luxury, and not, by a too frequent indulgence in it, to take off the fine edge of enjoyment and render it commonplace. Ducie had several subsequent opportunities of witnessing the process of drashkil-smoking and its effects, but one description will serve for all. On every occasion the same formula was gone through, precisely as first seen by Ducie. The pipe was charged and lighted by Cleon (after he became ill, by the new servant Jasmin). Precisely at midnight Cleon returned, and either conducted or carried his master to bed, as the necessities of the case might require. It was his knowledge of the latter fact that stood Ducie in such good stead later on, when he came to elaborate the details of his scheme for stealing the Great Hara Diamond.

But as yet his scheme was in embryo. His visit was drawing to a close, and he was still without the slightest clue to the hiding-place of the Diamond.

CHAPTER XV.

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The diamond.

Captain Ducie had been six weeks at Bon Repos; his visit would come to a close in the course of three or four days, but he was still as ignorant of the hiding-place of the Diamond as on that evening when he learned for the first time that M. Platzoff had such a treasure in his possession.

Since the completion of his translation of the stolen *Ms.* he had dreamed day and night of the Diamond. It was said to be worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. If he could only succeed in appropriating it, what a different life would be his in time to come! In such a case, he would of course be obliged to leave England for ever. But he was quite prepared to do that. He was without any tie of kindred or friendship that need bind him to his native land. Once safe in another hemisphere, he would dispose of the Diamond, and the proceeds would enable him to live as a gentleman ought to live for the remainder of his days. Truly, a pleasant dream.

But it was only a dream after all, as he himself in his cooler moments was quite ready to acknowledge. It was nothing but a dream even when Platzoff wrung from him an unreluctant consent to extend his visit at Bon Repos for another six weeks. If he stayed for six months, there seemed no likelihood that at the end of that time he would be one whit wiser on the one point on which he thirsted for information than he was now. Still, he was glad for various reasons to retain his pleasant quarters a little while longer.

Truth to tell, in Captain Ducie M. Platzoff had found a guest so much to his liking that he could not make up his mind to let him go again. Ducie was incurious, or appeared to be so; he saw and heard, and asked no questions. He seemed to be absolutely destitute of political principles, and therein he formed a pleasant contrast both to M. Platzoff himself and to the swarm of foreign gentlemen who at different times found their way to Bon Repos. He was at once a good listener and a good talker. In fine, he made in every way so agreeable, and was at the same time so thorough a gentleman that Platzoff was as glad to retain him as he himself was pleased to stay.

Three out of the Captain's second term of six weeks had nearly come to an end when on a certain evening, as he and Platzoff sat together in the smoke-room, the latter broached a subject which Ducie would have wagered all he possessed—though that was little enough—that his host would have been the last man in the world even to hint at.

"I think I have heard you say that you have a taste for diamonds and precious stones," remarked Platzoff. Ducie had hazarded such a remark on one or two occasions as a quiet attempt to draw Platzoff out, but had only succeeded in eliciting a little shrug and a cold smile, as though for him such a statement could have no possible interest.

“If I have said so to you I have only spoken the truth,” replied Ducie. “I am passionately fond of gems and precious stones of every kind. Have you any to show me?”

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"I have in my possession a green diamond said to be worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds," answered the Russian quietly.

The simulated surprise with which Captain Ducie received this announcement was a piece of genuine comedy. His real surprise arose from the fact of Platzoff having chosen to mention the matter to him at all.

"Great heaven!" he exclaimed. "Can you be in earnest? Had I heard such a statement from the lips of any other man than you, I should have questioned either his sanity or his truth."

"You need not question either one or the other in my case," answered Platzoff, with a smile. "My assertion is true to the letter. Some evening when I am less lazy than I am now, you shall see the stone and examine it for yourself."

"I take it as a great proof of your friendship for me, monsieur," said Ducie warmly, "that you have chosen to make me the recipient of such a confidence."

"It *is* a proof of my friendship," said the Russian. "No one of my political friends—and I have many that are dear to me, both in England and abroad—is aware that I have in my possession so inestimable a gem. But you, sir, are an English gentleman, and my friend for reasons unconnected with politics; I know that my secret will be safe in your keeping."

Ducie winced inwardly, but he answered with grave cordiality, "The event, my dear Platzoff, will prove that your confidence has not been misplaced."

After this, the Russian went on to tell Ducie that the *Ms.* lost at the time of the railway accident had reference to the great Diamond; that it contained secret instructions, addressed to a very dear friend of the writer, as to the disposal of the Diamond after his, Platzoff's, death; all of which was quite as well known to Ducie as to the Russian himself; but the Captain sat with his pipe between his lips, and listened with an appearance of quiet interest that impressed his host greatly.

That night Ducie's mind was too excited to allow of sleep. He was about to be shown the great Diamond; but would the mere fact of seeing it advance him one step towards obtaining possession of it? Would Platzoff, when showing him the stone, show him also the place where it was ordinarily kept? His confidence in Ducie would scarcely carry him as far as that. In any case, it would be something to have seen the Diamond, and for the rest, Ducie must trust to the chapter of accidents and his own wits. On one point he was fully determined—to make the Diamond his own at any cost, if the slightest possible chance of doing so were afforded him. He was dazzled by the magnitude of the temptation; so much so, indeed, that he never seemed to realise in his own mind the foulness of the deed by which alone it could become his property. Had any man hinted

that he was a thief, either in act or intention, he would have repudiated the term with scorn—would have repudiated it even in his own mind, for he made a point of hoodwinking and cozening himself, as though he were some other person whose good opinion must on no account be forfeited.

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Captain Ducie awaited with hidden impatience the hour when it should please M. Platzoff to fulfil his promise. He had not long to wait. Three evenings later, as they sat in the smoking-room, said Platzoff: "To-night you shall see the Great Hara Diamond. No eyes save my own have seen it for ten years. I must ask you to put yourself for an hour or two under my instructions. Are you minded so to do?"

"I shall be most happy to carry out your wishes in every way," answered Ducie. "Consider me as your slave for the time being."

"Attend, then, if you please. This evening you will retire to your own rooms at eleven o'clock. Precisely at one-thirty a.m., you will come back here. You will be good enough to come in your slippers, because it is not desirable that any of the household should be disturbed by our proceedings. I have no further orders at present."

"Your lordship's wishes are my commands," answered Ducie, with a mock salaam.

They sat talking and smoking till eleven; then Ducie left his host as if for the night. He lay down for a couple of hours on the sofa in his dressing-room. Precisely at one-thirty he was on his way back to the smoke-room, his feet encased in a pair of Indian mocassins. A minute later he was joined by Platzoff in dressing-gown and slippers.

"I need hardly tell you, my dear Ducie," began the latter, "that with a piece of property in my possession no larger than a pigeon's egg, and worth so many thousands of pounds, a secure place in which to deposit that property (since I choose to have it always near me) is an object of paramount importance. That secure place of deposit I have at Bon Repos. This you may accept as one reason for my having lived in such an out-of-the-world spot for so many years. It is a place known to myself alone. After my death it will become known to one person only—to the person into whose possession the Diamond will pass when I shall be no longer among the living. The secret will be told him that he may have the means of finding the Diamond, but not even to him will it become known till after my decease. Under these circumstances, my dear Ducie, you will, I am sure, excuse me for keeping the hiding-place of the Diamond a secret still—a secret even from you. Say—will you not?"

With a malediction at his heart, but with a smile on his lips, Captain Ducie made reply.

"Pray offer no excuses, my dear Platzoff, where none are needed. What I want is to see the Diamond itself, not to know where it is kept. Such a piece of information would be of no earthly use to me, and it would involve a responsibility which, under any circumstances, I should hardly care to assume."

"It is well; you are an English gentleman," said the Russian, with a ceremonious inclination of the head, "and your words are based on wisdom and truth. It is necessary that I should blindfold you: oblige me with your handkerchief."

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Ducie with a smile handed over his handkerchief, and Platzoff proceeded to blindfold him—an operation which was rapidly and effectually performed by the deft fingers of the Russian.

“Now, give me your hand and come with me, but do not speak till you are spoken to.”

So Ducie laid a finger in the Russian’s thin, cold palm, and the latter, taking a small bronze hand-lamp, conducted his bandaged companion from the room.

In two minutes after leaving the smoke-room Ducie’s geographical ideas of the place were completely at fault. Platzoff led him through so many corridors and passages, turning now to the right hand, and now to the left—he guided him up and down so many flights of stairs, now of stone and now of wood, that he lost his reckoning entirely and felt as though he were being conducted through some place far more spacious than Bon Repos. He counted the number of stairs in each flight that he went up or down. In two or three cases the numbers tallied, which induced him to think that Platzoff was conducting him twice over the same ground, in order perhaps the more effectually to confuse his ideas as to the position of the place to which he was being led.

After several minutes spent thus in silent perambulation of the old house, they halted for a moment while Platzoff unlocked a door, after which they passed forward into a room, in the middle of which Ducie was left standing while Platzoff relocked the door, and then busied himself for a minute in trimming the lamp he had brought with him, which had been his only guide through the dark and silent house, for the servants had all gone to bed more than an hour ago.

Ducie, thus left to himself for a little while, had time for reflection. The floor on which he was standing was covered with a thick, soft carpet, consequently he was in one of the best rooms in the house. The atmosphere of this room was penetrated with a very faint aroma of pot-pourri, so faint that unless Captain Ducie’s nose had been more than ordinarily keen he would never have perceived it. To the best of his knowledge there was only one room in Bon Repos that was permeated with the peculiar scent of pot-pourri. That room was M. Platzoff’s private study, to which access was obtained through his bed-room. Ducie had been only twice into this room, but he remembered two facts in connection with it. First, the scent already spoken of; secondly, that besides the door which opened into it from the bed-room, there was another door which he had noticed as being shut and locked both times that he was there. If the room in which they now were was really M. Platzoff’s study, they had probably obtained access to it through the second door.

While silently revolving these thoughts in his mind, Captain Ducie’s fingers were busy with the formation of two tiny paper pellets, each no bigger than a pea. Unseen by Platzoff, he contrived to drop these pellets on the carpet.

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"I must really apologise," said the Russian, next moment, "for keeping you waiting so long; but this lamp will not burn properly."

"Don't hurry yourself on my account," said Ducie. "I am quite jolly. My eyes are ready bandaged; I am only waiting for the axe and the block."

"We are not going to dispose of you in quite so summary a fashion," said the Russian. "One minute more and your eyesight shall be restored to you."

Ducie's quick ears caught a low click, as though someone had touched a spring. Then there was a faint rumbling, as though something were being rolled back on hidden wheels.

"Lend me your hand again, and bend that tall figure of yours. Step carefully. There is another staircase to descend—the last and the steepest of all."

Keeping fast hold of Platzoff's hand, Ducie followed slowly and cautiously, counting the steps as he went down. They were of stone, and were twenty-two in number. At the bottom of the staircase another door was unlocked. The two passed through, and the door was shut and relocked behind them.

"Be blind no longer!" said Platzoff, taking off the handkerchief and handing it to Ducie, with a smile. A few seconds elapsed before the latter could discern anything clearly. Then he saw that he was in a small vaulted chamber about seven feet in height, with a flagged floor, but without furniture of any kind save a small table of black oak on which Platzoff's lamp was now burning. The atmosphere of this dungeon had struck him with a sudden chill as he went in. At each end was a door, both of iron. The one that had opened to admit them was set in the thick masonry of the wall; the one at the opposite end seemed built into the solid rock.

"Before we go any farther," said Platzoff, "I may as well explain to you how it happens that a respectable old country house like Bon Repos has such a suspicious-looking hiding-place about its premises. You must know that I bought the house, many years ago, of the last representative of an old North-country family. He was a bachelor, and in him the family died out. Three years after I had come to reside here the old man, at that time on his death-bed, sent me a letter and a key. The letter revealed to me the secret of the place we are now exploring, of which I had no previous knowledge; the key is that of the two iron doors. It seems that the old man's ancestors had been deeply implicated in the Jacobite risings of last century. The house had been searched several times, and on one occasion occupied by Hanoverian troops. As a provision against such contingencies, this hiding-place (a natural one as far as the cavern beyond is concerned, which has probably existed for thousands of years) was then first connected with the interior of the house, and rendered practicable at a moment's notice; and here

on several occasions certain members of the family, together with their plate and title-deeds,

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lay concealed for weeks at a time. The old gentleman gave me a solemn assurance that the secret existed with him alone; all who had been in any way implicated in the earlier troubles having died long ago. As the property had now become mine by purchase, he thought it only right that before he died these facts should be brought to my knowledge. You may imagine, my dear Ducie, with what eagerness I seized upon this place as a safe depository for my diamond, which, up to this time, I had been obliged to carry about my person. And now, forward to the heart of the mystery!"

Having unlocked and flung open the second iron door, Platzoff took up his lamp, and, closely followed by Ducie, entered a narrow winding passage in the rock. After following this passage, which tended slightly downwards for a considerable distance, they emerged into a large cavernous opening in the heart of the hill.

Platzoff's first act was, by means of a long crook, to draw down within reach of his hand a large iron lamp that was suspended from the roof by a running chain. This lamp he lighted from the hand-lamp he had brought with him. As soon as released, it ascended to its former position, about ten feet from the ground. It burned with a clear white flame that lighted up every nook and cranny of the place. The sides of the cave were of irregular formation. Measuring by the eye, Ducie estimated the cave to be about sixty yards in length, by a breadth, in the widest part, of twenty. In height it appeared to be about forty feet. The floor was covered with a carpet of thick brown sand, but whether this covering was a natural or an artificial one Ducie had no means of judging. The atmosphere of the place was cold and damp, and the walls in many places dripped with moisture; in other places they scintillated in the lamplight as though thousands of minute gems were embedded in their surface.

In the middle of the floor, on a pedestal of stones loosely piled together, was a hideous idol, about four feet in height, made of wood, and painted in various colours. In the centre of its forehead gleamed the great Diamond.

"Behold!" was all that Platzoff said, as he pointed to the idol. Then they both stood and gazed in silence.

Many contending emotions were at work just then in Ducie's breast, chief of which was a burning, almost unconquerable desire to make that glorious gem his own at every risk. In his ear a fiend seemed to be whispering.

"All you have to do," it seemed to say, "is to grip old Platzoff tightly round the neck for a couple of minutes. His thread of life is frail and would be easily broken. Then possess yourself of the Diamond and his keys. Go back by the way you came and fasten everything behind you. The household is all a-bed, and you could get away unseen. Long before the body of Platzoff would be discovered, if indeed it were ever discovered,

you would be far away and beyond all fear of pursuit. Think! That tiny stone is worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.”

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This was Ducie's temptation. It shook him inwardly as a reed is shaken by the wind. Outwardly he was his ordinary quiet, impassive self, only gazing with eyes that gleamed on the gleaming gem, which shone like a new-fallen star on the forehead of that hideous image.

The spell was broken by Platzoff, who, going up to the idol, and passing his hand through an orifice at the back of the skull, took the Diamond out of its resting-place, close behind the hole in the forehead, through which it was seen from the front. With thumb and forefinger he took it daintily out, and going back to Ducie dropped it into the outstretched palm of the latter.

Ducie turned the Diamond over and over, and held it up before the light between his forefinger and thumb, and tried the weight of it on his palm. It was in the simple form of a table diamond, with only sixteen facets in all, and was just as it had left the fingers of some Indian cutter, who could say how many centuries ago! It glowed with a green fire, deep, yet tender, that flashed through its facets and smote the duller lamplight with sparkles of intense brilliancy. This, then, was the wondrous gem which for reign after reign was said to have been regarded as their choicest possession by the great lords of Hyderabad. Ducie seemed to be examining it most closely; but, in truth, at that very moment he was debating in his own mind the terrible question of murder or no murder, and scarcely saw the stone itself at all.

"Ami, you do not seem to admire my Diamond!" said the Russian presently, with a touch of pathos in his voice.

Ducie pressed the Diamond back into Platzoff's hands. "I admire it so much," said he, "that I cannot enter into any commonplace terms of admiration. I will talk to you to-morrow respecting it. At present I lack fitting words."

The Russian took back the stone, pressed it to his lips, and then went and replaced it in the forehead of the idol.

"Who is your friend there?" said Ducie, with a desperate attempt to wrench his thoughts away from that all-absorbing temptation.

"I am not sufficiently learned in Hindu mythology to tell you his name with certainty," answered Platzoff. "I take him to be no less a personage than Vishnu. He is seated upon the folds of the snake Jesha, whose seven heads bend over him to afford him shade. In one hand he holds a spray of the sacred lotus. He is certainly hideous enough to be a very great personage. Do you know, my dear Ducie," went on Platzoff, "I have a very curious theory with regard to that Hindu gentleman, whoever he may be. Many years ago he was worshipped in some great Eastern temple, and had priests and acolytes without number to attend to his wants; and then, as now, the great Diamond shone in his forehead. By some mischance the Diamond was lost or stolen—in any

case, he was dispossessed of it. From that moment he was an unhappy idol. He derived pleasure

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no longer from being worshipped, he could rest neither by night nor day—he had lost his greatest treasure. When he could no longer endure this state of wretchedness he stole out of the temple one fine night unknown to anyone, and set out on his travels in search of the missing Diamond. Was it simple accident or occult knowledge, that directed his wanderings after a time to the shop of a London curiosity dealer, where I saw him, fell in love with him, and bought him? I know not: I only know that he and his darling Diamond were at last re-united, and here they have remained ever since. You smile as if I had been relating a pleasant fable. But tell me, if you can, how it happens that in the forehead of yonder idol there is a small cavity lined with gold into which the Diamond fits with the most exact nicety. That cavity was there when I bought the idol and has in no way been altered since. The shape of the Diamond, as you have seen for yourself, is rather peculiar. Is it therefore possible that mere accident can be at the bottom of such a coincidence? Is not my theory of the Wandering Idol much more probable as well as far more poetical? You smile again. You English are the greatest sceptics in the world. But it is time to go. We have seen all there is to be seen, and the temperature of this place will not benefit my rheumatism.”

So the lamp was put out and Idol and Diamond were left to darkness and solitude. In the vaulted room, at the entrance to the winding way that led to the cavern, Ducie's eyes were again bandaged. Then up the twenty-two stone stairs, and so into the carpeted room above, where was the scent of pot-pourri. From this room they came, by many passages and flights of stairs, back to the smoking-room, where Ducie's bandage was removed. One last pipe, a little desultory conversation, and then bed.

M. Platzoff being out of the way for an hour or two next afternoon, Captain Ducie contrived to pay a surreptitious visit to his host's private study. On the carpet he found one of the two paper pellets which he had dropped from his fingers the previous evening. There, too, was the same faint, sickly smell that had filled his nostrils when the handkerchief was over his eyes, which he now traced to a huge china jar in one corner, filled with the dried leaves of flowers gathered long summers before.

CHAPTER XVI.

Janet's return.

“There he is! there is dear Major Strickland!”

The tidal train was just steaming into London Bridge station on a certain spring evening as the above words were spoken. From a window of one of the carriages a bright young face was peering eagerly, a face which lighted up with a smile of rare sweetness the moment Major Strickland's soldierly figure came into view. A tiny gloved hand was

held out as a signal, the Major's eye was caught, the train came to a stand, and next moment Janet Hope was on the platform with her arms round the old soldier's neck and her lips held up for a kiss.

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The publicity of this transaction seemed slightly to shock the sensibilities of Miss Close, the English teacher in whose charge Janet had come over; but she was won to a quite different view of the affair when the Major, after requesting to be introduced to her, shook her cordially by the hand, said how greatly obliged he was to her for the care she had taken of "his dear Miss Hope," and invited her to dine next day with himself and Janet. Then Miss Close went her way, and the Major and Janet went theirs in a cab to a hotel not a hundred miles from Piccadilly.

Janet's first words as they got clear of the station were:

"And now you must tell me how everybody is at Deeply Walls."

"Everybody was quite well when I left home except one person—Sister Agnes."

"Dear Sister Agnes!" said Janet, and the tears sprang to her eyes in a moment. "I am more sorry than I can tell to hear that she is ill."

"Not ill exactly, but ailing," said the Major. "You must not alarm yourself unnecessarily. She caught a severe cold one wet evening about three months ago as she was on her way home from visiting some poor sick woman in the village, and she seems never to have been quite well since."

"I had a letter from her five days ago, but she never hinted to me that she was not well."

"I can quite believe that. She is not one given to complaining about herself, but one who strives to soothe the complaints of others. The good she does in her quiet way among the poor is something wonderful. I must tell you what an old bed-ridden man, to whom she had been very kind, said to her the other day. Said he, 'If everybody had their rights in this world, ma'am, or if I was king of fairyland, you should have a pair of angel's wings, so that everybody might know how good you are.' And there are a hundred others who would say the same thing."

"If I had not had her dear letters to hearten me and cheer me up, I think that many a time I should have broken down utterly under the dreadful monotony of my life at the Pension Clissot. I had no holidays, in the common meaning of the word; no dear friends to go and see; none even to come once in a way to see me, were it only for one happy hour. I had no home recollections to which I could look back fondly in memory, and the future was all a blank—a mystery. But the letters of Sister Agnes spoke to me like the voice of a dear friend. They purified me, they lifted me out of my common work-a-day troubles and all the petty meannesses of school-girl existence, and set before me the example of a good and noble life as the one thing worth striving for in this weary world."

"Tut, tut, my dear child!" said the Major, "you are far too young to call the world a weary world. Please heaven, it shall not be quite such a dreary place for you in time to come."

We will begin the change this very evening. We shall just be in time to get a bit of dinner, and then, heigh! for the play.”

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"The play, dear Major Strickland!" said Janet, with a sudden flush and an eager light in her eyes; "but would Sister Agnes approve of my going to such a place?"

"I scarcely think, poverina, that Sister Agnes would disapprove of any place to which I might choose to take you."

"Forgive me!" cried Janet; "I did not intend you to construe my words in that way."

"I have never construed anything since I was at school fifty years ago," answered the Major, laughingly. "Can you tell me now from your heart, little one, that you would not like to go to the play?"

"I should like very, very much to go, and after what has been said I will never forgive you if you do not take me."

"The penalty would be too severe. It is agreed that we shall go."

"To me it seems only seven days instead of seven years since I was last driven through London streets," resumed Janet, as they were crawling up Fleet Street. "The same shops, the same houses, and even, as it seems to me, the same people crowding the pathways; and, to complete the illusion, the same kind travelling companion now as then."

"To me the illusion seems by no means so complete. To London Bridge, seven years ago, I took a simple child of twelve: to-day I bring back a young lady of nineteen—a woman, in point of fact—who, I have no doubt, understands more of flirtation than she does of French, and would rather graduate in coquetry than in crochet-work."

"Take care then, sir, lest I wing my unslaked arrows at you."

"You are too late in the day, dear child, to practise on me. I am your devoted slave already—bound fast to the wheel of your triumphant car. What more would you have?"

The hotel was reached at last, and the Major gave Janet a short quarter of an hour for her toilette. When she got downstairs dinner was on the point of being served, and she found covers laid for three. Before she had time to ask a question, the third person entered the room. He was a tall, well-built man of six or seven and twenty. He had light-brown hair, closely cropped, but still inclined to curl, and a thick beard and moustache of the same colour. He had blue eyes, and a pleasant smile, and the easy, self-possessed manner of one who had seen "the world of men and things." His left sleeve was empty.

Janet did not immediately recognise him, he looked so much older, so different in every way; but at the first sound of his voice she knew who stood before her. He came forward and held out his hand—the one hand that was left him.

“May I venture to call myself an old friend, Miss Hope? And to trust that even after all these years I am not quite forgotten?”

“I recognise you by your voice, not by your face. You are Mr. George Strickland. You it was who saved my life. Whatever else I may have forgotten, I have not forgotten that.”

“I am too well pleased to find that I live in your memory at all to cavil with your reason for recollecting me.”



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"But—but, I never heard—no one ever told me—" Then she stopped with tears in her eyes, and glanced at his empty sleeve.

"That I had left part of myself in India," he said, finishing the sentence for her. "Such, nevertheless, is the case. Uncle there says that the yellow rascals were so fond of me that they could not bear to part from me altogether. For my own part, I think myself fortunate that they did not keep me there *in toto*, in which case I should not have had the pleasure of meeting you here to-day."

He had been holding her hand quite an unnecessary length of time. She now withdrew it gently. Their eyes met for one brief instant, then Janet turned away and seated herself at the table. The flush caused by the surprise of the meeting still lingered on her face, the tear-drops still lingered in her eyes; and as George Strickland sat down opposite to her he thought that he had never seen a sweeter vision, nor one that appealed more directly to his imagination and his heart.

Janet Hope at nineteen was very pleasant to look upon. Her face was not one of mere commonplace prettiness, but had an individuality of its own that caused it to linger in the memory like some sweet picture that once seen cannot be readily forgotten. Her eyes were of a tender, luminous grey, full of candour and goodness. Her hair was a deep, glossy brown; her face was oval, and her nose a delicate aquiline. On ordinary occasions she had little or no colour, yet no one could have taken the clear pallor of her cheek as a token of ill-health; it seemed rather a result of the depth and earnestness of the life within her.

In her wardrobe there was a lack of things fashionable, and as she sat at dinner this evening she had on a dress of black alpaca, made after a very quiet and nun-like style; with a thin streak of snow-white collar and cuff round throat and wrist; but without any ornament save a necklace of bog-oak, cut after an antique pattern, and a tiny gold locket in which was a photographic likeness of Sister Agnes.

That was a very pleasant little dinner-party. In the course of conversation it came out that, a few days previously, Captain George had been decorated with the Victoria Cross. Janet's heart thrilled within her as the Major told in simple, unexaggerated terms of the special deed of heroism by which the great distinction had been won. The Major told also how George was now invalided on half-pay; and her heart thrilled with a still sweeter emotion when he went on to say that the young soldier would henceforth reside with him at Eastbury—at Eastbury, which was only two short miles from Deepley Walls! The feeling with which she heard this simple piece of news was one to which she had hitherto been an utter stranger. She asked herself, and blushed as she asked, whence this new sweet feeling emanated? But she was satisfied with asking the question, and seemed to think that no answer was required.

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When dinner was over, they set out for the play. Janet had never been inside a theatre before, and for her the experience was an utterly novel and delightful one.

On the third day after Janet's arrival in London they all went down to Eastbury together—the Major, and she and George. But in the course of those three days the Major took Janet about a good deal, and introduced her to nearly all the orthodox sights of the Great City—and a strange kaleidoscopic jumble they seemed at the time, only to be afterwards rearranged by memory as portions of a bright and sunny picture the like of which she scarcely dared hope ever to see again.

Captain Strickland parted from the Major and Janet at Eastbury station. The two latter were bound for Deepley Walls, for the Major felt that his task would have been ill-performed had he failed to deliver Janet into Lady Chillington's own hands. As they rumbled along the quiet country roads—which brought vividly back to Janet's mind the evening when she saw Deepley Walls for the first time—the Major said: "Do you remember, poppetina, how seven years ago I spoke to you of a certain remarkable likeness which you then bore to someone whom I knew when I was quite a young man, or has the circumstance escaped your memory?"

"I remember quite well your speaking of the likeness, and I have often wondered since who the original was of whom I was such a striking copy. I remember, too, how positively Lady Chillington denied the resemblance which you so strongly insisted upon."

"Will her ladyship dare to deny it to-day?" said the Major sternly. "I tell you, child, that now you are grown up, the likeness seen by me seven years ago is still more clearly visible. When I look into your eyes I seem to see my own youth reflected there. When you are near me I can fancy that my lost treasure has not been really lost to me—that she has merely been asleep, like the princess in the story-book, and that while time has moved on for me, she has come back out of her enchanted slumber as fresh and beautiful as when I saw her last. Ah, poverina! you cannot imagine what a host of recollections the sight of your sweet face conjures up whenever I choose to let my day-dreams have way for a little while."

"I remember your telling me that my parents were unknown to you," answered Janet. "Perhaps the lady to whom I bear so strong a resemblance was my mother."

"No, not your mother, Janet. The lady to whom I refer died unmarried. She and I had been engaged to each other for three years; but death came and claimed her a fortnight before the day fixed for our wedding; and here I am, a lonely old bachelor still."

"Not quite lonely, dear Major Strickland," murmured Janet, as she lifted his hand and pressed it to her lips.

“True, child, not quite lonely. I have George, whom I love as though he were a son of my own. And there is Aunt Felicity, as the children used to call her, who is certainly very fond of me, as I also am of her.”



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"Not forgetting poor me," said Janet.

"Not forgetting you, dear, whom I love as a daughter."

"And who loves you very sincerely in return."

A few minutes later they drew up at Deepley Walls.

CHAPTER XVII.

Deeply walls after seven years.

Major Strickland rang the bell, and the door was opened by a servant who was strange to Janet.

"Be good enough to inform Lady Chillington that Major Strickland and Miss Hope have just arrived from town, and inquire whether her ladyship has any commands."

The servant returned presently. "Her ladyship will see Major Strickland. Miss Hope is to go to the housekeeper's room."

"I will see you again, poverina, after my interview with her ladyship," said the Major, as he went off in charge of the footman.

Janet, left alone, threaded her way by the old familiar passages to the housekeeper's room. Dance was not there, being probably in attendance on Lady Chillington, and Janet had the room to herself. Her heart was heavy within her. There was a chill sense of friendlessness, of being alone in the world upon her. Were these cold walls to be the only home her youth would ever know? A few slow salt tears welled from her eyes as she sat brooding over the little wood fire, till presently there came a sound of footsteps, and the Major's hand was laid caressingly upon her shoulder.

"What, all alone!" he said; "and with nothing better to do than read fairy tales in the glowing embers! Is there no one in all this big house to attend to your wants? But Dance will be here presently, I have no doubt, and the good old soul will do her best to make you comfortable. I have been to pay my respects to her ladyship, who is in one of her unamiable moods this evening. I, however, contrived to wring from her a reluctant consent to your paying Aunt Felicity and me a visit now and then at Eastbury, and it shall be my business to see that the promise is duly carried out."

"Then I am to remain at Deepley Walls!" said Janet. "I thought it probable that my visit might be for a few weeks only, as my first one was."

“From what Lady Chillington said, I imagine that the present arrangement is to be a permanent one; but she gave no hint of the mode in which she intended to make use of your services, and that she will make use of you in some way, no one who knows her can doubt. And now, dear, I must say good-bye for the present; good-bye and God bless you! You may look to see me again within the week. Keep up your spirits, and—but here comes Dance, who will cheer you up far better than I can.”

As the Major went out, Dance came in. The good soul seemed quite unchanged, except that she had grown older and mellow, and seemed to have sweetened with age like an apple plucked unripe. A little cry of delight burst from her lips the moment she saw Janet. But in the very act of rushing forward with outstretched arms, she stopped. She stopped, and stared, and then curtsied as though involuntarily. “If the dead are ever allowed to come back to this earth, there is one of them before me now!” she murmured.

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Janet caught the words, but her heart was too full to notice them just then. She had her arms round Dance's neck in a moment, and her bright young head was pressed against the old servant's faithful breast.

"Oh, Dance, Dance, I am so glad you are come!"

"Hush, dear heart! hush, my poor child! you must not take on in that way. It seems a poor coming home for you—for I suppose Deepley Walls is to be your home in time to come—but there are those under this roof that love you dearly. Eh! but you are grown tall and bonny, and look as fresh and sweet as a morning in May. Her ladyship ought to be proud of you. But she gets that cantankerous and cross-grained in her old age that you never know what will suit her for two minutes at a time. For all that, her spirit is just wonderful, and she is a real lady, every inch of her. And you, Miss Janet, you are a thorough lady; anybody can see that, and her ladyship will see it as soon as anybody. She will like you none the worse for being a gentlewoman. But here am I preaching away like any old gadabout, and you not as much as taken your bonnet off yet. Get your things off, dearie, and I'll have a cup of tea ready in no time, and you'll feel ever so much better when you have had it."

Dance could scarcely take her eyes off Janet's face, so attracted was she by the likeness which had rung from her an exclamation on entering the room.

But Janet was tired, and reserved all questions till the morrow; all questions, except one. That one was—

"How is Sister Agnes?"

Dance shook her head solemnly. "No worse and no better than she has been for the last two months. There is something lingering about her that I don't like. She is far from well, and yet not exactly what we call ill. Morning, noon and night she seems so terribly weary, and that is just what frightens me. She has asked after you I don't know how many times, and when tea is over you must go and see her. Only I must warn you, dear Miss Janet, not to let your feelings overcome you when you see her—not to make a scene. In that case your coming would do her not good, but harm."

Janet recovered her spirits in a great measure before tea was over. She and Dance had much to talk about, many pleasant reminiscences to call up and discuss. As if by mutual consent, Lady Chillington's name was not mentioned between them.

As soon as tea was over, Dance went to inquire when Sister Agnes would see Miss Hope. The answer was, "I will see her at once."

So Janet went with hushed footsteps up the well-remembered staircase, opened the door softly, and stood for a moment on the threshold. Sister Agnes was lying on a sofa.



She put her hand suddenly to her side and rose to her feet as Janet entered the room. A tall, wasted figure robed in black, with a thin, spiritualised face, the natural pallor of which was just now displaced by a transient flush that faded out almost as quickly as it had come. The white head-dress had been cast aside for once, and the black hair, streaked with silver, was tied in a simple knot behind. The large dark eyes looked larger and darker than they had ever looked before, and seemed lit up with an inner fire that had its source in another world than ours.

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Sister Agnes advanced a step or two and held out her arms. "My darling!" was all she said as she pressed Janet to her heart, and kissed her again and again. They understood each other without words. The feeling within them was too deep to find expression in any commonplace greeting.

The excitement of the meeting was too much for the strength of Sister Agnes. She was obliged to lie down again. Janet sat by her side, caressing one of her wasted hands.

"Your coming has made me very, very happy," murmured Sister Agnes after a time.

"Through all the seven dreary years of my school life," said Janet, "the expectation of some day seeing you again was the one golden dream that the future held before me. That dream has now come true. How I have looked forward to this day none save those who have been circumstanced as I have can more than faintly imagine."

"Are you at all acquainted with Lady Chillington's intentions in asking you to come to Deepley Walls?"

"Not in the least. A fortnight ago I had no idea that I should so soon be here. I knew that I could not stay much longer at the Pension Clissot, and naturally wondered what instructions Madame Delclos would receive from Lady Chillington as to my disposal. The last time I saw her ladyship, her words seemed to imply that, after my education should be finished, I should have to trust to my own exertions for earning a livelihood. In fact, I have looked upon myself all along as ultimately destined to add one more unit to the great tribe of governesses."

"Such a fate shall not be yours if my weak arm has power to avert it," said Sister Agnes. "For the present your services are required at Deepley Walls, in the capacity of 'companion' to Lady Chillington—in brief, to occupy the position held by me for so many years, but from which I am now obliged to secede on account of ill-health."

Janet was almost too astounded to speak.

"Companion to Lady Chillington! !! Impossible!" was all that she could say.

"Why impossible, dear Janet?" asked Sister Agnes, with her low, sweet voice. "I see no element of impossibility in such an arrangement. The duties of the position have been filled by me for many years; they have now devolved upon you, and I am not aware of anything that need preclude your acceptance of them."

"We are not all angels like you, Sister Agnes," said Janet. "Lady Chillington, as I remember, is a very peculiar woman. She has no regard for the feelings of others, especially when those others are her inferiors in position. She says the most cruel things she can think of and cares nothing how deeply they may wound. I am afraid that she and I would never agree."

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“That Lady Chillington is a very peculiar woman I am quite ready to admit. That she will say things to you that may seem hard and cruel, and that may wound your feelings, I will also allow. But granting all this, I can deduce from it no reason why the position should be refused by you. Had you gone out as governess, you would probably have had fifty things to contend against quite as disagreeable as Lady Chillington’s temper and cynical remarks. You are young, dear Janet, and life’s battle has yet to be fought by you. You must not expect that everything in this world will arrange itself in accordance with your wishes. You will have many difficulties to fight against and overcome, and the sooner you make up your mind to the acceptance of that fact, the better it will be for you in every way. If I have found the position of companion to Lady Chillington not quite unendurable, why should it be found so by you? Besides, her ladyship has many claims upon you—upon your best services in every way. Every farthing that has been spent upon you from the day you were born to the present time has come out of her purse. Except mere life itself, you owe everything to her. And even if this were not so, there are other and peculiar ties between you and her, of which you know nothing (although you may possibly be made acquainted with them by-and-by), which are in themselves sufficient to lead her to expect every reasonable obedience at your hands. You must clothe yourself with good temper, dear Janet, as with armour of proof. You must make up your mind beforehand that however harsh her ladyship’s remarks may sometimes seem, you will not answer her again. Do this, and her words will soon be powerless to sting you. Instead of feeling hurt or angry, you will be inclined to pity her—to pray for her. And she deserves pity, Janet, if any woman in this sinful world ever did. To have severed of her own accord those natural ties which other people cherish so fondly; to see herself fading into a dreary old age, and yet of her own free will to shut out the love that should attend her by the way and strew flowers on her path; to have no longer a single earthly hope or pleasure beyond those connected with each day’s narrow needs or with the heaping together of more money where there was enough before—in all this there is surely room enough for pity, but none for any harsher feeling.”

“Dear Sister Agnes, your words make me thoroughly ashamed of myself,” said Janet, with tearful earnestness. “Arrogance ill becomes one like me who have been dependent on the charity of others from the day of my birth. Whatever task may be set me either by Lady Chillington or by you, I will do it to the best of my ability. Will you for this once pardon my petulance and ill-temper, and I will strive not to offend you again?”

“I am not offended, darling; far from it. I felt sure that you had good-sense and good-feeling enough to see the matter in its right light when it was properly put before you. But have you no curiosity as to the nature of your new duties?”

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"Very little at present, I must confess," answered Janet, with a wan smile. "The chief thing for which I care just now is to know that so long as I remain at Deepley Walls I shall be near you; and that of itself would be sufficient to enable me to rest contented under worse inflictions than Lady Chillington's ill-temper."

"You ridiculous Janet! Ah! if I only dared to tell you everything. But that must not be. Let us rather talk of what your duties will be in your new situation."

"Yes, tell me about them, please," said Janet, "and you shall see in time to come that your words have not been forgotten."

"To begin: you will have to go to her ladyship's room precisely at eight every morning. Sometimes she will not want you, in which case you will be at liberty till after breakfast. Should she want you it will probably be to read to her while she sips her chocolate, or it may be to play a game of backgammon with her before she gets up. A little later on you will be able to steal an hour or so for yourself, as while her ladyship is undergoing the elaborate processes of the toilette, your services will not be required. On coming down, if the weather be fine, she will want the support of your arm during her stroll on the terrace. If the weather be wet, she will probably attend to her correspondence and book-keeping, and you will have to fill the parts both of amanuensis and accountant. When Mr. Madgin, her ladyship's man of business, comes up to Deepley Walls, you will have to be in attendance to take notes, write down instructions, and so on. By-and-by will come luncheon, of which, as a rule, you will partake with her. After luncheon you will be your own mistress for an hour while her ladyship sleeps. The moment she wakes you will have to be in attendance, either to play to her, or else to read to her—perhaps a little French or Italian, in both of which languages I hope you are tolerably proficient. Your next duty will be to accompany her ladyship in her drive out. When you get back, will come dinner, but only when specially invited will you sit down with Lady Chillington. When that honour is not accorded you, you and I will dine here, darling, by our two selves."

"Then I hope Lady Chillington will not invite me oftener than once a month," cried impulsive Janet.

"The number of your invitations to dinner will depend upon the extent of her liking for you, so that we shall soon know whether or no you are a favourite. She may or may not require you after dinner. If she does require you, it may be either for reading or music, or to play backgammon with her; or even to sit quietly with her without speaking, for the mere sake of companionship. One fact you will soon discover for yourself—that her ladyship does not like to be long alone. And now, dearest, I think I have told you enough for the present. We will talk further of these things to-morrow. Give me just one kiss and see what you can find to play among that heap of old music on the piano. Madame Delclos used to write in raptures of your style and touch. We will now prove whether her eulogy was well founded."

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Janet found that she was not to occupy the same bed-room as on her first visit to Deepley Walls, but one nearer that of Sister Agnes. She was not sorry for this, for there had been a secret dread upon her of having to sleep in a room so near that occupied by the body of Sir John Chillington. She had never forgotten her terrible experience in connection with the Black Room, and she wished to keep herself entirely free from any such influences in time to come. The first question she asked Dance when they reached her bed-room was—

“Does Sister Agnes still visit the Black Room every midnight?”

“Yes, for sure,” answered Dance. “There is no one but her to do it. Her ladyship would not allow any of the servants to enter the room. Rather than that, I believe she would herself do what has to be done there. Sister Agnes would not neglect that duty if she was dying.”

Janet said no more, but then and there she made up her mind to a certain course of action of which nothing would have made her believe herself capable only an hour before.

Early next forenoon she was summoned to an interview with Lady Chillington. Her heart beat more quickly than common as she was ushered by Dance into the old woman’s dressing-room.

Her ladyship was in demi-toilette—made up in part for the day, but not yet finished. Her black wig, with its long corkscrew curls, was carefully adjusted; her rouge and powder were artistically laid on, her eyebrows elaborately pointed, and in so far she looked as she always looked when visible to anyone but her maid. But her figure wanted bracing up, so to speak, and looked shrunken and shrivelled in the old cashmere dressing-robe, from which at that early hour she had not emerged. Her fingers—long, lean and yellow—were decorated with some half-dozen valuable rings. Increasing years had not tended to make her hands steadier than Janet remembered them as being when she last saw her ladyship; and of late it had become a matter of some difficulty with her to keep her head quite still: it seemed possessed by an unaccountable desire to imitate the shaking of her hands. She was seated in an easy-chair as Janet entered the room. Her breakfast equipage was on a small table at her elbow.

As the door closed behind Janet, she stood still and curtsied.

Lady Chillington placed her glass to her eye, and with a lean forefinger beckoned to Janet to draw near. Janet advanced, her eyes fixed steadily on those of Lady Chillington. A yard or two from the table she stopped and curtsied again.

“I hope that I have the happiness of finding your ladyship quite well,” she said, in a low, clear voice, in which there was not the slightest tremor or hesitation.

“And pray, Miss Hope, what can it matter to you whether I am well or ill? Answer me that, if you please.”

“I owe so much to your ladyship, I have been such a pensioner on your bounty ever since I can remember anything, that mere selfishness alone, if no higher motive be allowed me, must always prompt me to feel an interest in the state of your ladyship’s health.”

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"Candid, at any rate. But I wish you clearly to understand that whatever obligation you may feel yourself under to me for what is past and gone, you have no claim of any kind upon me for the future. The tie between us can be severed by me at any moment."

"Seven years ago your ladyship impressed that fact so strongly on my mind that I have never forgotten it. I have never felt myself to be other than a dependent on your bounty."

"A very praiseworthy feeling, young lady, and one which I trust you will continue to cherish. Not that I wish other people to look upon you as a dependent. I wish—" She broke off abruptly, and stared helplessly round the room. Suddenly her head began to shake. "Heaven help me! what do I wish?" she exclaimed; and with that she began to cry, and seemed all in a moment to have grown older by twenty years.

Janet, in her surprise, made a step or two forward, but Lady Chillington waved her fiercely back. "Fool! fool! why don't you go away?" she cried. "Why do you stare at me so? Go away, and send Dance to me. You have spoilt my complexion for the day."

Janet left the room and sent Dance to her mistress, and then went off for a ramble in the grounds. The seal of desolation and decay was set upon everything. The garden, no longer the choice home of choice flowers, was weed-grown and neglected. The greenhouses were empty, and falling to pieces for lack of a few simple repairs. The shrubs and evergreens had all run wild for want of pruning, and in several places the dividing hedges were broken down, and through the breaches sheep had intruded themselves into the private grounds. Even the house itself had a shabby out-at-elbows air, like a gentleman fallen upon evil days. Several of the upper windows were shuttered, some of the others showed a broken pane or two. Here and there a shutter had fallen away, or was hanging by a solitary hinge, suggesting thoughts of ghostly flappings to and fro in the rough wind on winter nights. Doors and window frames were blistering and splitting for want of paint. Close by the sacred terrace itself lay the fragments of a broken chimney-pot, blown down during the last equinoctial gales and suffered to lie where it had fallen. Everywhere were visible tokens of that miserly thrift which, carried to excess, degenerates into unthrift of the worst and meanest kind, from which the transition to absolute ruin is both easy and certain.

For a full hour Janet trod the weed-grown walks with clasped hands and saddened eyes. At the end of that time Dance came in search of her. Lady Chillington wanted to see her again.

(To be continued.)

SPES.

“When we meet,” she said. We never
Met again—the world is wide:
Leagues of sea, then Death did sever
Me from my betrothed Bride.
When we parted, long ago—

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Long it seems in sorrow musing—
Fair she stood, with face aglow,
In my heart a hope infusing.
Now I linger at the grave,
While the winds of Winter rave.

“When we meet,” the words are ringing
Clear as when they left her lips,
Clear as when her faith upspringing
Fronted life and life’s eclipse—
Rest, dear heart, dear hands, dear feet,
Rest; in spite of Death’s endeavour,
Thou art mine; we soon shall meet,
Ocean, Death be passed for ever.
Thus I linger by the grave,
Cherishing the hope she gave.

John Jervis Beresford, M.A.

(Author of “Last Year’s Leaves.”)

LONGEVITY.

By W.F. Ainsworth, F.S.A.

Disdain of the inevitable end is said to be the finest trait of mankind. Some profess to be weary of life, of its pains and penalties, its anxieties and sufferings, and to look upon death as a relief. Such states of mind are not real; they are either assumed or affected. No one can really hold the unsparing leveller—dreaded of all—in contempt. As to pretended wearisomeness of life, laying aside the love of life and fear of death, which are common to all mankind, there are habits and ties of affection, joys and hopes that never depart from us and make us cling to existence.

There are, no doubt, pains and sufferings which make many almost wish for the time being for death as a release; but these pass away. Time assuages all grief, as Nature relieves suffering beyond endurance by fainting and insensibility. Man may nerve himself to death or become resigned to it and meet it even with cheerfulness; and he may, in all sincerity of heart, offer up his life to his Maker to save that of a beloved one;

but there is a latent—an unacknowledged—yet an irrepressible reserve in such frames of mind.

Few men can prepare for death, or offer themselves up for a sacrifice, without feelings of a mixed nature playing a part in the act; whether forced or springing from self-abnegation. As to suicide, it is inevitably accompanied by certain—albeit various and different—degrees of mental alienation or disease. No one who is in a really healthy state of mind, whose faculties are perfectly balanced, or who is at peace with God and man, commits suicide. The temporary exaltation of grief, despondency or disappointment produces as utter a state of insanity as disease itself.

Man, as a rule, desires to live. It is part of his nature to do so; and exceptions to the rule are rare and unnatural—so much so that they in all cases imply a certain degree of mental alienation. Even the weariness, lassitude and despondency which lead some to talk of death as a release is mainly to be met with in the pampered and the idle. Such feelings, no doubt, take possession also of the poor and the lowly; but that, mostly, when there is no work or no incitement to it. There is always joy and happiness in work and in doing one's duty.

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It is then the normal condition to wish to live, and a most abnormal one to wish to die; and with many there is even a further aspiration, and that is to prolong a life which, with all its drawbacks, is to so many a desirable state of things.

Examples of rare longevity are carefully treasured up and even placed on record. As whenever a human being is carried away, causes from which we are supposed to be free, or against which we take precautions, are complacently sought for, so instances of longevity are studied to discover what habits and manners, what system of diet, or conduct, and which environing circumstances, have most tended to ensure such a result.

Numerous treatises have been written on the subject, both in this country and on the continent; but it cannot be said that the result has been eminently satisfactory. When carefully inquired into, it has been found that the most contradictory state of things has been in existence. It is not always to the strong that long life is given, nor is such, as often supposed, hereditary. Riches and the comforts and luxuries they place at man's disposal no more conduce to long life than poverty. Even moderation and temperance, so universally admitted as essentials to health and long life, are found to have their exceptions in well-attested cases of prolongation of life with the luxurious and self-indulgent and even in the intemperate and the inebriate. Strange to say, even health is not always conducive to long life. There is a common proverb (and most proverbs are founded upon experience) about creaking hinges, and so it is that people always ailing have been known to live longer than the strong, the hearty, and the healthy. The latter have overtaxed their strength, their spirits, and their health. Even vitality itself, stronger in some than others, may in excess conduce to the premature wearing out and decay of the faculties and powers.

It is not surprising, then, that great difficulties have had to be encountered in fixing any general laws by which longevity can be assured; yet such are in existence, and like all the gracious gifts of a most merciful Creator, are at the easy command and disposal of mankind.

They are to be found in implicit obedience to the Laws of God and Nature. These imply the use and not the misuse or abuse of all the powers and faculties given to us by an all-wise and all-merciful Providence. If human beings would only abide by these laws they would not only enjoy long health and long life but they would also pass that life in comfort and happiness.

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With respect to the physical, intellectual and moral man, work is the essential factor in procuring health and happiness. Idleness is the bane of both. Man and woman were born to work either by hand or brain. Man in the outer world, woman in the home. The man who lives without an object in life is not only not doing his duty to God, but he is a curse to himself and others. But work, like everything else, should be limited. Many cannot do this, and overtax both their physical and intellectual energies. The employment of labour should be regulated by the capabilities of the working-classes, not by the economy or profits to be obtained by extra labour; and legislation, if paternal, as it should be, ought to protect the toiler in all instances—not in the few in which it attempts to ameliorate his condition. So with every pursuit or avocation, the leisure essential to health and happiness is too often sacrificed to cupidity, and when this is the case there can be no longevity.

Exercise is beneficial to man; but it should not be taken in excess, or in too trying a form. It is very questionable if what are called “Athletic Sports” are not too often as hurtful as they are beneficial. It is quite certain that they cannot be indulged in with impunity after a certain time of life.

Sustenance is essential alike to life and longevity, but it is trite to say it must be in moderation, and as far as possible select. So in the case of temperance, moderation is beneficial, excess hurtful. Total abstainers defeat the very object they propose to advocate when they propose to do away with all because excess is hurtful. Extremes are always baneful, and the monks of old were wise in their generation when they denounced gluttony and intemperance as cardinal vices. The physical powers are as a rule subject to the will, which is the exponent of our passions and propensities and of our moral and intellectual impulses. Were it not so we could not curb our actions, restrain our appetites, or keep within that moderation which is essential to health, happiness and longevity.

Our passions and propensities are imparted to us for a wise purpose, and are therefore beneficial in their use. It is only in their neglect, misuse or abuse that they become hurtful. A French author has pertinently put it thus: “The passions act as winds to propel our vessel, our reason is the pilot that steers her; without the winds she would not move, without the pilot she would be lost.”

Even our affections, so pure and beautiful in themselves, may, by abuse, be made sources of mischief, evil and disease. The abuses are too well known to require repetition here. The powers of energy and resistance, beneficial in themselves, in their abuse bring about the spirit of contradiction, violence and combat.

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It seems passing strange that even our moral feelings should be liable to abuse; but it is so, even with the best. Benevolence and charity may be misplaced or be in excess of our means. They assume the shape of vices in the form of prodigality and extravagance. The honest desire to acquire the necessities of life or the means for moral and intellectual improvement may in excess become cupidity or covetousness, and lead even to the appropriation of what is not our own. Kleptomania is met with in the book-worm or the antiquarian, as well as in the feminine lover of dress or those in poverty and distress. Firmness may become obstinacy; the justifiable love of self may, by abuse, become pride; and a proper and chaste wish for the approbation of others may be turned into the most absurd of vanities. Even religion itself may be carried to uncharitableness, fanaticism and persecution. Still more strange it must appear that even the intellectual faculties should be liable to abuse; but it is part of the pains and penalties of the constitution of man that it should be so. It is so to teach us that moderation is wisdom and the only conduct that leads to health and happiness.

The abuse of the moral faculties is directly injurious; that of the intellectual faculties mostly so in an indirect manner. Such abuses are more hurtful by the influence they have upon the conduct than they have upon the intellect itself. If a man's judgment is unsound, for example, it leads to deleterious consequences, not only to himself, but to others. If the powers of observation are weak, and a person is deficient in the capacity of judging of form, distance or locality, he will be incapacitated from success in many pursuits of life without his suffering thereby, except in an indirect manner. The imagination, the noblest manifestation of intellect, may, without judgment, be allowed to run riot, or abused by its exaltation; and with the faculty of wonder may lead to superstition, fanaticism and folly. The intellectual faculties may be altogether weak or almost wanting. In such cases we have foolishness merging into idiocy.

The examples here given of use, as opposed to neglect, misuse, or abuse, are simply illustrative of the point in question. They might be extended in an indefinite degree, especially if it were proposed to enter into details. They will, however, suffice for the purpose in view, which is to show that the use of all the powers and faculties granted to us by the Creator is intended for our benefit, and is conducive to health, happiness and longevity, but that their neglect or their abuse leads to misery, pain, affliction, disaster and disease.

The lesson to be conveyed is that moderation is essential in all things. Why is it that the sickly and the ailing sometimes survive the strong and hearty? Because suffering has taught the former moderation, whilst the sense of power leads the latter to excesses which too often prove fatal. Everyone has, in his experience, known instances of the kind.

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But the use and not the neglect or abuse of the faculties is the observance of the laws of God and Nature. If neglect and misuse of our faculties lead to loss of power, so their abuse leads to bad conduct and its pains and penalties. What has been here termed moderation, as a medium between neglect, use and abuse, is really obedience to the laws of God and Nature.

The whole secret of health, happiness and longevity lies then in this simple observance, if it can only be fully understood, appreciated in all its importance, and carried out in all the smallest details of life. As such perfection is rare, and somewhat difficult to attain—the trials and temptations of life being so great—so are none of the results here enumerated often arrived at; but that is no reason why man should not endeavour to reach as near perfection as possible, and enjoy as much health and happiness as he can. One of the most common and one of the greatest errors is to suppose that happiness is to be obtained by the pursuit of pleasure and excitement. The temporary enjoyment created by such is inevitably followed by reaction—lassitude and weariness—and human nature is palled by the surfeit of amusement as much as it is by the luxuries of the table. There cannot be a more humiliating spectacle than that of the man of the world, as he is called, or the woman of fashion or pleasure. Blase is too considerate an expression. Such persons are worn-out prematurely in body, mind and intellect—they are soulless and unsympathetic—the wrecks of the noble creatures God created as man and woman in all the simplicity of their nature.

It is surely worth while, then, considering whether the enjoyment of health and happiness is not worth a little study and a little sacrifice of the vain and imaginary pleasures of the world. There is no doubt that some amount of restraint and some power of self-control are requisite to ensure moderation. But the disdain of many pleasures is a chief part of what is commonly called wisdom.

It is with waking and sleeping, with talking and walking, with eating and drinking, with toil and labour, with all the acts of life, that moderation or obedience to the laws of Nature requires some little sacrifice in their observance; but it is quite certain that without this obedience there is neither health nor happiness nor longevity.

SONNET.

Who said that there were slaves? There may be men
In bondage, bought or sold: there are no slaves
Whilst God looks down, whilst Christ's most pure blood laves
The black man's sins; whilst within angel ken
He bears his load and drags his iron chain.
The slaves are they whom, on His Judgment Day,
God shall renounce for aye and cast away.
Oh, Jesus Christ! Thou wilt give justice then!

A drop of blood shall seem a swelling sea,
More piercing than a cry the

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lowest moan.

Come down, ye mountains! in your gloom come down,
And bury deep the sinner's agony!
Master and slave have past; Time, thou art gone:
Eternity begins—Christ rules alone!

Julia Kavanagh.

THE SILENT CHIMES.

Not heard.

That oft-quoted French saying, a *mauvais-quart-d'heure*, is a pregnant one, and may apply to small as well as to great worries of life: most of us know it to our cost. But, rely upon it, one of the very worst is that when a bride or bridegroom has to make a disagreeable confession to the other, which ought to have been made before going to church.

Philip Hamlyn was finding it so. Standing over the fire, in their sitting-room at the Old Ship Hotel at Brighton, his elbow on the mantelpiece, his hand shading his eyes, he looked down at his wife sitting opposite him, and disclosed his tale: that when he married her fifteen days ago he had not been a bachelor, but a widower. There was no especial reason for his not having told her, save that he hated and abhorred that earlier period of his life and instinctively shunned its remembrance.

Sent to India by his friends in the West Indies to make his way in the world, he entered one of the most important mercantile houses in Calcutta, purchasing a lucrative post in it. Mixing in the best society, for his introductions were undeniable, he in course of time met with a young lady named Pratt, who had come out from England to stay with her elderly cousins, Captain Pratt and his sister. Philip Hamlyn was caught by her pretty doll's face, and married her. They called her Dolly: and a doll she was, by nature as well as by name.

"Marry in haste and repent at leisure," is as true a saying as the French one. Philip Hamlyn found it so. Of all vain, frivolous, heartless women, Mrs. Dolly Hamlyn turned out to be about the worst. Just a year or two of uncomfortable bickering, of vain endeavours on his part, now coaxing, now reproaching, to make her what she was not and never would be—a reasonable woman, a sensible wife—and Dolly Hamlyn fled. She decamped with a hair-brained lieutenant, the two taking sailing-ship for England, and she carrying with her her little one-year-old boy.



I'll leave you to guess what Philip Hamlyn's sensations were. A calamity such as that does not often fall upon man. While he was taking steps to put his wife legally away for ever and to get back his child, and Captain Pratt was aiding and abetting (and swearing frightfully at the delinquent over the process), news reached them that Heaven's vengeance had been more speedy than theirs. The ship, driven out of her way by contrary winds and other disasters, went down off the coast of Spain, and all the passengers on board perished. This was what Philip Hamlyn had to confess now: and it was more than silly of him not to have done it before.

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He touched but lightly upon it now. His tones were low, his words when he began somewhat confused: nevertheless his wife, gazing up at him with her large dark eyes, gathered an inkling of his meaning.

"Don't tell it me!" she passionately interrupted. "Do not tell me that I am only your second wife."

He went over to her, praying her to be calm, speaking of the bitter feeling of shame which had ever since clung to him.

"Did you divorce her?"

"No, no; you do not understand me, Eliza. She died before anything could be done; the ship was wrecked."

"Were there any children?" she asked in a hard whisper.

"One; a baby of a year old. He was drowned with his mother."

Mrs. Hamlyn folded her hands one over the other, and leaned back in her chair. "Why did you deceive me?"

"My will was good to deceive you for ever," he confessed with emotion. "I hate that past episode in my life; hate to think of it: I wish I could blot it out of remembrance. But for Pratt I should not have told you now."

"Oh, he said you ought to tell me?"

"He did: and blamed me for not having told you already."

"Have you any more secrets of the past that you are keeping from me?"

"None. Not one. You may take my honour upon it, Eliza. And now let us—"

She had started forward in her chair; a red flush darkening her pale cheeks, "Philip! Philip! am I legally married? Did you describe yourself as a *bachelor* in the license?"

"No, as a widower. I got the license in London, you know."

"And no one read it?"

"No one save he who married us: Robert Grame, and I don't suppose he noticed it."

Robert Grame! The flush on Eliza's cheeks grew deeper.

"Did you *love* her?"

"I suppose I thought so when I married her. It did not take long to disenchant me," he added with a harsh laugh.

"What was her Christian name?"

"Dolly. Dora, I believe, by register. My dear wife, I have told you all. In compassion to me let us drop the subject, now and for ever."

Was Eliza Hamlyn—sitting there with pale, compressed lips, sullen eyes, and hands interlocked in pain—already beginning to reap the fruit she had sown as Eliza Monk by her rebellious marriage? Perhaps so. But not as she would have to reap it later on.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn spent nearly all that year in travelling. In September they came to Peacock's Range, taking it furnished for a term of old Mr. and Mrs. Peveril, who had not yet come back to it. It stood midway, as may be remembered, between Church Leet and Church Dykely, so that Eliza was close to her old home. Late in October a little boy was born: it would be hard to say which was the prouder of him, Philip Hamlyn or his wife.

"What would you like his name to be?" Philip asked her one day.

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"I should like it to be Walter," said Mrs. Hamlyn.

"Walter!"

"Yes, I should. I like the name for itself, but I once had a dear little brother named Walter, just a year younger than I. He died before we came home to England. Have you any objection to the name?"

"Oh, no, no objection," he slowly said. "I was only thinking whether you would have any. It was the name given to my first child."

"That can make no possible difference—it was not my child," was her haughty answer. So the baby was named Walter James; the latter name also chosen by Eliza, because it had been old Mr. Monk's.

In the following spring Mr. Hamlyn had to go to the West Indies. Eliza remained at home; and during this time she became reconciled to her father.

Hubert brought it about. For Hubert lived yet. But he was just a shadow and had to take entirely to the house, and soon to his room. Eliza came to see him, again and again; and finally over Hubert's sofa peace was made—for Captain Monk loved her still, just as he had loved Katherine, for all her rebellion.

Hubert lingered on to the summer. And then, on a calm evening, when one of the glorious sunsets that he had so loved to look upon was illumining the western sky, opening up to his dying view, as he had once said, the very portals of Heaven, he passed peacefully away to his rest.

II.

The next change that set in at Leet Hall concerned Miss Kate Dancox. That wilful young pickle, somewhat sobered by the death of Hubert in the summer, soon grew unbearable again. She had completely got the upper hand of her morning governess, Miss Hume—who walked all the way from Church Dykely and back again—and of nearly everyone else; and Captain Monk gave forth his decision one day when all was turbulence—a resident governess. Mrs. Carradyne could have danced a reel for joy, and wrote to a governess agency in London.

One morning about this time (which was already glowing with the tints of autumn) a young lady got out of an omnibus in Oxford Street, which had brought her from a western suburb of London, paid the conductor, and then looked about her.

"There!" she exclaimed in a quaint tone of vexation, "I have to cross the street! And how am I to do it?"

Evidently she was not used to the bustle of London streets or to crossing them alone. She did it, however, after a few false starts, and so turned down a quiet side street and rang at the bell of a house in it. A slatternly girl answered the ring.

“Governess-agent—Mrs. Moffit? Oh, yes; first-floor front,” said she crustily, and disappeared.

The young lady found her way upstairs alone. Mrs. Moffit sat in state in a big arm-chair, before a large table and desk, whence she daily dispensed joy or despair to her applicants. Several opened letters and copies of the daily journals lay on the table.

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"Well?" cried she, laying down her pen, "what for you?"

"I am here by your appointment, madam, made with me a week ago," said the young lady. "This is Thursday."

"What name?" cried Mrs. Moffit sharply, turning over rapidly the leaves of a ledger.

"Miss West. If you remember, I—"

"Oh, yes, child, my memory's good enough," was the tart interruption. "But with so many applicants it's impossible to be at any certainty as to faces. Registered names we can't mistake."

Mrs. Moffit read her notes—taken down a week ago. "Miss West. Educated in first-class school at Richmond; remained in it as teacher. Very good references from the ladies keeping it. Father, Colonel in India."

"But—"

"You do not wish to go into a school again?" spoke Mrs. Moffit, closing the ledger with a snap, and peremptorily drowning what the applicant was about to say.

"Oh, dear, no, I am only leaving to better myself, as the maids say," replied the young lady smiling.

"And you wish for a good salary?"

"If I can get it. One does not care to work hard for next to nothing."

"Or else I have—let me see—two—three situations on my books. Very comfortable, I am instructed, but two of them offer ten pounds a-year, the other twelve."

The young lady drew herself slightly up with an involuntary movement.

"Quite impossible, madam, that I could take any one of them."

Mrs. Moffit picked up a letter and consulted it, looking at the young lady from time to time, as if taking stock of her appearance. "I received a letter this morning from the country—a family require a well-qualified governess for their one little girl. Your testimonials as to qualifications might suit—and you are, I believe, a gentlewoman—"

"Oh, yes; my father was—"

"Yes, yes, I remember—I've got it down; don't worry me," impatiently spoke the oracle, cutting short the interruption. "So far you might suit: but in other respects—I hardly know what to think."

“But why?” asked the other timidly, blushing a little under the intent gaze.

“Well, you are very young, for one thing; and they might think you too good-looking.”

The girl’s blush grew red as a rose; she had delicate features and it made her look uncommonly pretty. A half-smile sat in her soft, dark hazel eyes.

“Surely that could not be an impediment. I am not so good-looking as all that!”

“That’s as people may think,” was the significant answer. “Some families will not take a pretty governess—afraid of their sons, you see. This family says nothing about looks; for aught I know there may be no sons in it. ‘Thoroughly competent’—reading from the letter—’a gentlewoman by birth, of agreeable manners and lady-like. Salary, first year, to be forty pounds.’”

“And will you not recommend me?” pleaded the young governess, her voice full of soft entreaty. “Oh, please do! I know I should be found fully competent, and I promise you that I would do my very best.”

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"Well, there may be no harm in my writing to the lady about you," decided Mrs. Moffit, won over by the girl's gentle respect—with which she did not get treated by all her clients. "Suppose you come here again on Monday next?"

The end of the matter was that Miss West was engaged by the lady mentioned—no other than Mrs. Carradyne. And she journeyed down into Worcestershire to enter upon the situation.

But clever (and generally correct) Mrs. Moffit made one mistake, arising, no doubt, from the chronic state of hurry she was always in. "Miss West is the daughter of the late Colonel William West," she wrote, "who went to India with his regiment a few years ago, and died there." What Miss West had said to her was this: "My father, a clergyman, died when I was a little child, and my uncle William, Colonel West, the only relation I had left, died three years ago in India." Mrs. Moffit somehow confounded the two.

This might not have mattered on the whole. But, as you perceive, it conveyed a wrong impression at Leet Hall.

"The governess I have engaged is a Miss West; her father was a military man and a gentleman," spake Mrs. Carradyne one morning at breakfast to Captain Monk. "She is rather young—about twenty, I fancy; but an older person might never get on at all with Kate."

"Had good references with her, I suppose?" said the Captain.

"Oh, yes. From the agent, and especially from the ladies who have brought her up."

"Who was her father, do you say?—a military man?"

"Colonel William West," assented Mrs. Carradyne, referring to the letter she held. "He went to India with his regiment and died there."

"I'll refer to the army-list," said the Captain; "daresay it's all right. And she shall keep Kate in order, or I'll know the reason why."

* * * * *

The evening sunlight lay on the green plain, on the white fields from which the grain had been reaped, and on the beautiful woods glowing with the varied tints of autumn. A fly was making its way to Leet Hall, and its occupant, looking out of it on this side and that, in a fever of ecstasy, for the country scene charmed her, thought how favoured was the lot of those who could live out their lives amidst its surroundings.

In the drawing-room at the Hall, watching the approach of this same fly, stood Mrs. Hamlyn, a frown upon her haughty face. Philip Hamlyn was still detained in the West



Indies, and since her reconciliation to her father, she would go over with her baby-boy to the Hall and remain there for days together. Captain Monk liked to have her, and he took more notice of the baby than he had ever taken of baby yet. For when Kate was an infant he had at first shunned her, because she had cost Katherine her life. This baby, little Walter, was a particularly forward child, strong and upright, walked at ten months old, and much resembled his mother in feature. In temper also. The young one would stand sturdily in his little blue shoes and defy his grandpapa already, and assert his own will, to the amused admiration of Captain Monk.

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Eliza, utterly wrapt in her child, saw her father's growing love for him with secret delight; and one day when he had the boy on his knee, she ventured to speak out a thought that was often in her heart.

"Papa," she said, with impassioned fervour, "*he* ought to be the heir, your own grandson; not Harry Carradyne."

Captain Monk simply stared in answer.

"He lies in the *direct* succession; he has your own blood in his veins. Papa, you ought to see it."

Certainly the gallant sailor's manners were improving. For perhaps the first time in his life he suppressed the hot and abusive words rising to his tongue—that no son of that man, Hamlyn, should come into Leet Hall—and stood in silence.

"*Don't* you see it, papa?"

"Look here, Eliza: we'll drop the subject. When my brother, your uncle, was dying, he wrote me a letter, enjoining me to make Emma's son the heir, failing a son of my own. It was right it should be so, he said. Right it is; and Harry Carradyne will succeed me. Say no more."

Thus forbidden to say more, Eliza Hamlyn thought the more, and her thoughts were not pleasant. At one time she had feared her father might promote Kate Dancox to the heirship, and grew to dislike the child accordingly. Latterly, for the same reason, she had disliked Harry Carradyne; hated him, in fact. She herself was the only remaining child of the house, and her son ought to inherit.

She stood this evening at the drawing-room window, this and other matters running in her mind. Miss Kate, at the other end of the room, had prevailed on Uncle Harry (as she called him) to play a game at toy ninepins. Or perhaps he had prevailed on her: anything to keep her tolerably quiet. She was in her teens now, but the older she grew the more troublesome she became; and she was remarkably small and childish-looking, so that strangers took her to be several years younger than she really was.

"This must be your model governess arriving, Aunt Emma," exclaimed Mrs. Hamlyn, as the fly came up the drive.

"I hope it is," said Mrs. Carradyne; and they all looked out. "Oh, yes, that's an Evesham fly—and a ramshackle thing it appears."

"I wonder you did not send the carriage to Evesham for her, mother," remarked Harry, picking up some of the ninepins which Miss Kate had swept off the table with her hand.

Mrs. Hamlyn turned round in a blaze of anger. "Send the carriage to Evesham for the governess! What absurd thing will you say next, Harry?"

The young man laughed in good humour. "Does it offend one of your prejudices, Eliza? —a thousand pardons, then. But really, nonsense apart, I can't see why the carriage should not have gone for her. We are told she is a gentlewoman. Indeed, I suppose anyone else would not be eligible, as she is to be made one of ourselves."

"And think of the nuisance it will be! Do be quiet, Harry! Kate ought to have been sent to school."

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"But your father would not have her sent, you know, Eliza," spoke Mrs. Carradyne.

"Then—"

"Miss West, ma'am," interrupted Rimmer, the butler, showing in the traveller.

"Dear me, how very young!" was Mrs. Carradyne's first thought. "And what a lovely face!"

She came in shyly. In her whole appearance there was a shrinking, timid gentleness, betokening refinement of feeling. A slender, lady-like girl, in a plain, dark travelling suit and a black bonnet lined and tied with pink, a little lace border shading her nut-brown hair. The bonnets in those days set off a pretty face better than do these modern ones. That's what the Squire tells us.

Mrs. Carradyne advanced and shook hands cordially; Eliza bent her head slightly from where she stood; Harry Carradyne stood up, a pleasant welcome in his blue eyes and in his voice, as he laughingly congratulated her upon the ancient Evesham fly not having come to grief en route. Kate Dancox pressed forward.

"Are you my new governess?"

The young lady smiled and said she believed so.

"Aunt Eliza hates governesses; so do I. Do you expect to make me obey you?"

The governess blushed painfully; but took courage to say she hoped she should. Harry Carradyne thought it the very loveliest blush he had ever seen in all his travels, and she the sweetest-looking girl.

And when Captain Monk came in he quite took to her appearance, for he hated to have ugly people about him. But every now and then there was a look in her face, or in her eyes, that struck him as being familiar—as if he had once known someone who resembled her. Pleasing, soft dark hazel eyes they were as one could wish to see, with goodness in their depths.

III.

Months passed away, and Miss West was domesticated in her new home. It was not all sunshine. Mrs. Carradyne, ever considerate, strove to render things agreeable; but there were sources of annoyance over which she had no control. Kate, when she chose, could be verily a little elf, a demon; as Mrs. Hamlyn often put it, "a diablesse." And she, that lady herself, invariably treated the governess with a sort of cool, indifferent contempt; and she was more often at Leet Hall than away from it. The

Captain, too, gave way to fits of temper that simply terrified Miss West. Reared in the quiet atmosphere of a well-trained school, she had never met with temper such as this.

On the other hand—yes, on the other hand, she had an easy place of it, generous living, was regarded as a lady, and—she had learnt to love Harry Carradyne for weal or for woe.

But not—please take notice—not unsolicited. Tacitly, at any rate. If Mr. Harry's speaking blue eyes were to be trusted and Mr. Harry's tell-tale tones when with her, his love, at the very least, equalled hers. Eliza Hamlyn, despite the penetration that ill-nature generally can exercise, had not yet scented any such treason in the wind: or there would have blown up a storm.

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Spring was to bring its events; but first of all it must be said that during the winter little Walter Hamlyn was taken ill at Leet Hall when staying there with his mother. The malady turned out to be gastric fever, and Mr. Speck was in constant attendance. For the few days that the child lay in danger, Eliza was almost wild. The progress to convalescence was very slow, lasting many weeks; and during that time Captain Monk, being much with the little fellow, grew to be fond of him with an unreasonable affection.

"I'm not sure but I shall leave Leet Hall to him," he suddenly observed to Eliza one day, not observing that Harry Carradyne was standing in the recess of the window. "Halloa! are you there, Harry? Well, it can't be helped. You heard what I said?"

"I heard, Uncle Godfrey: but I did not understand."

"Eliza thinks Leet Hall ought to go in the direct line—through her—to this child. What should you say to that?"

"What could he say to it?" imperiously demanded Eliza. "He is only your nephew."

Harry looked from one to the other in a sort of bewildered surprise: and there came a silence.

"Uncle Godfrey," he said, starting out of a reverie, "you have been good enough to make me your heir. It was unexpected on my part, unsolicited; but you did do it, and you caused me to leave the army in consequence, to give up my fair prospects in life. I am aware that this deed is not irrevocable, and certainly you have the right to do what you will with your own property. But you must forgive me for saying that you should have made quite sure of your intentions beforehand: before picking me up, if it be only to throw me down again."

"There, there, we'll leave it," retorted Captain Monk testily. "No harm's done to you yet, Mr. Harry; I don't know that it will be."

But Harry Carradyne felt sure that it would be; that he should be despoiled of the inheritance. The resolute look of power on Eliza's face, bent on him as he quitted the chamber, was an earnest of that. Captain Monk was not the determined man he had once been; that was over.

"A pretty kettle of fish, this is," ruefully soliloquised Harry, as he marched along the corridor. "Eliza's safe to get her will; no doubt of that. And I? what am I to do? I can't repurchase and go back amongst them again like a returned shilling; at least, I won't; and I can't turn Parson, or Queen's Counsel, or Cabinet Minister. I'm fitted for nothing now, that I see, but to be a gentleman-at-large; and what would the gentleman's income be?"



Standing at the corridor window, softly whistling, he ran over ways and means in his mind. He had a pretty house of his own, Peacock's Range, formerly his father's, and about four hundred a-year. After his mother's death it would not be less than a thousand a-year.

"That means bread and cheese at present. Later—Heyday, young lady, what's the matter?"

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The school-room door, close by, had opened with a burst, and Miss Kate Dancox was flying down the stairs—her usual progress the minute lessons were over. Harry strolled into the room. The governess was putting the littered table straight.

“Any admission, ma’am?” cried he quaintly, making for a chair. “I should like to ask leave to sit down for a bit.”

Alice West laughed, and stirred the fire by way of welcome; he was a very rare visitor to the school-room. The blaze, mingling with the rays of the setting sun that streamed in at the window, played upon her sweet face and silky brown hair, lighted up the bright winter dress she wore, and the bow of pink ribbon that fastened the white lace round her slender, pretty throat.

“Are you so much in need of a seat?” she laughingly asked.

“Indeed I am,” was the semi-grave response. “I have had a shock.”

“A very sharp one, sir?”

“Sharp as steel. Really and truly,” he went on in a different tone, as he left the chair and stood up by the table facing her; “I have just heard news that may affect my whole future life; may change me from a rich man to a poor one.”

“Oh, Mr. Carradyne!” Her manner had changed now.

“I was the destined inheritor, as you know—for I’m sure nobody has been reticent upon the subject—of these broad lands,” with a sweep of the hand towards the plains outside. “Captain Monk is now pleased to inform me that he thinks of substituting for me Mrs. Hamlyn’s child.”

“But would not that be very unjust?”

“Hardly fair—as it seems to me. Considering that my good uncle obliged me to give up my own prospects for it.”

She stood, her hands clasped in sympathy, her face full of earnest sadness. “How unkind! Why, it would be cruel!”

“Well, I confess I felt it to be so at the first blow. But, standing at the outside window yonder to pull myself together, a ray or two of light crept in, showing me that it may be for the best after all. ‘Whatever *is*, is right,’ you know.”

“Yes,” she slowly said—“if you can think so. But, Mr. Carradyne, should you not have anything at all?—anything to live upon after Captain Monk’s death?”

“Just a trifle, I calculate, as the Americans say—and it is calculating I have been—that I need not altogether starve. Would you like to know how much it will be?”

“Oh, please don’t laugh at me!”—for it suddenly struck the girl that he was laughing, perhaps in reproof, and that she had spoken too freely. “I ought not to have asked that; I was not thinking—I was too sorry to think.”

“But I may as well tell you, if you don’t mind. I have a very pretty little place, which you have seen and heard of, called by that delectable title Peacock’s Range—”

“Is Peacock’s Range yours?” she interrupted, in surprise. “I thought it belonged to Mr. Peveril.”

“Peacock’s Range is mine and was my father’s before me, Miss Alice. It was leased to Peveril for a term of years, but I fancy he would be glad to give it up to-morrow. Well, I have Peacock’s Range and about four hundred pounds a-year.”

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Her face brightened. "Then you need not talk about starving," she said, gaily.

"And, later, I shall have altogether about a thousand a-year. Though I hope it will be very long before it falls to me. Do you think two people might venture to set up at Peacock's Range, and keep, say, a couple of servants upon four hundred a-year? Could they exist upon it?"

"Oh, dear, yes," she answered eagerly, quite unconscious of his drift. "Did you mean yourself and some friend?"

He nodded.

"Why, I don't see how they could spend it all. There'd be no rent to pay. And just think of all the fruit and vegetables in the garden there!"

"Then I take you at your word, Alice," he cried impulsively, passing his arm round her waist. "You are the 'friend.' My dear, I have long wanted to ask you to be my wife, and I did not dare. This place, Leet Hall, encumbered me: for I feared the opposition that I, as its heir, should inevitably meet."

She drew away from him, with doubting, frightened eyes. Mr. Harry Carradyne brought all the persuasion of his own dancing blue ones to bear upon her. "Surely, Alice, you will not say me nay!"

"I dare not say yes," she whispered.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of it altogether; of your friends. Captain Monk would—would—perhaps—turn me out. And there's Mrs. Carradyne!"

Harry laughed. "Captain Monk can have no right to any voice in my affairs, once he throws me off; he cannot expect to have a finger in everyone's pie. As to my mother—ah, Alice, unless I am much mistaken, she will welcome you with love."

Alice burst into tears: emotion was stirring her to its depths. "*Please* to let it all be for a time," she pleaded. "If you speak it would be sure to lead to my being turned away."

"I *will* let it be for a time, my darling, so far as speaking of it goes: for more reasons than one it may be better. But you are my promised wife, Alice; always recollect that."

And Mr. Harry Carradyne, bold as a soldier should be, took a few kisses from her unresisting lips to enforce his mandate.

IV.

Some time rolled on, calling for no particular record. Mr. Hamlyn's West Indian property, which was large and lucrative, had been giving him trouble of late; at least, those who had the care of it gave it, and he was obliged to go over occasionally to see after it in person. Between times he stayed with his wife at Peacock's Range; or else she joined him in London. Their town residence was in Bryanstone Square; a very pretty house, but not a large one.

It had been an unfavourable autumn; cold and wet. Snow had fallen in November, and the weather continued persistently dull and dreary. One gloomy afternoon towards the close of the year, Mrs. Hamlyn, shivering over her drawing-room fire, rang impatiently for more coal to be piled upon it.

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"Has Master Walter come in yet?" she asked of the footman.

"No, ma'am. I saw him just now playing in front there."

She went to the window. Yes, running about the paths of the Square garden was the child, attended by his nurse. He was a sturdy little fellow. His mother, wishing to make him hardy, sent him out in all weathers, and the boy thrived upon it. He was three years old now, but looked older; and he was as clever and precocious as some children are at five or six. Her heart thrilled with a strange joy only at the sight of him: he was her chief happiness in life, her idol. Whether he would succeed to Leet Hall she knew not; since the one time he mentioned it, Captain Monk had said no more upon the subject, for or against it.

Why need she have longed for it so fervently? to the setting at naught the expressed wishes of her deceased uncle and to the detriment of Harry Carradyne? It was just covetousness. As his father's eldest son (there were no younger ones yet) the boy would inherit a fine property, a large income; but his doting mother must give him Leet Hall as well.

Her whole heart went out to the child as she watched him playing there. A few snowflakes were beginning to fall, and dusk would soon be drawing on, but she would not call him in. Standing thus at the window, it gradually grew upon her to notice that something was standing back against the opposite rails, looking fixedly at the houses. A young, fair woman apparently, with a profusion of light hair; she was draped in a close dark cloak which served to conceal her figure, just as the thick veil she wore concealed her face.

"I believe it is *this* house she is gazing at so attentively—and at *me*," thought Mrs. Hamlyn. "What can she possibly want?"

The woman did not move away and Mrs. Hamlyn did not move; they remained staring at one another. Presently Walter burst into the room, laughing in glee at having distanced his nurse. His mother turned, caught him in her arms and kissed him passionately. Wilful though he was by disposition, and showing it at times, he was a lovable, generous child, and very pretty: great brown eyes and auburn curls. His life was all sunshine, like a butterfly's on a summer's day; his path as yet one of roses without their thorns.

"Mamma, I've got a picture-book; come and look at it," cried the eager little voice, as he dragged his mother to the hearthrug and opened the picture-book in the light of the blaze. "Penelope bought it for me."

She sat down on a footstool, the book on her lap and one arm round him, her treasure. Penelope waited to take off his hat and pelisse, and was told to come for him in five minutes.

"It's not my tea-time yet," cried he defiantly.

"Indeed, then, Master Walter, it is long past it," said the nurse. "I couldn't get him in before, ma'am," she added to her mistress. "Every minute I kept expecting you'd be sending one of the servants after us."

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"In five minutes," repeated Mrs. Hamlyn. "And what's *this* picture about, Walter? Is it a little girl with a doll?"

"Oh, dat bootiful," said the eager little lad, who was not yet as quick in speech as he was in ideas. "It says she—dere's papa!"

In came Philip Hamlyn, tall, handsome, genial. Walter ran to him and was caught in his arms. He and his wife were just a pair for adoring the child.

But nurse, inexorable, appeared again at the five minutes' end, and Master Walter was carried off.

"You came home in a cab, Philip, did you not? I thought I heard one stop."

"Yes; it is a miserable evening. Raining fast now."

"Raining!" she repeated, rather wondering to hear it was not snowing. She went to the window to look out, and the first object her eyes caught sight of was the woman; leaning in the old place against the railings, in the growing dusk.

"I'm not sorry to see the rain; we shall have it warmer now," remarked Mr. Hamlyn, who had drawn a chair to the fire. "In fact, it's much warmer already than it was this morning."

"Philip, step here a minute."

His wife's tone had dropped to a half-whisper, sounding rather mysterious, and he went at once.

"Just look, Philip—opposite. Do you see a woman standing there?"

"A woman—where?" cried he, looking of course in every direction but the right one.

"Just facing us. She has her back against the railings."

"Oh, ay, I see now; a lady in a cloak. She must be waiting for someone."

"Why do you call her a lady?"

"She looks like one—as far as I can see in the gloom. Does she not? Her hair does, any way."

"She has been there I cannot tell you how long, Philip; half-an-hour, I'm sure; and it seems to me that she is *watching* this house. A lady would hardly do that."



"This house? Oh, then, Eliza, perhaps she's watching for one of the servants. She might come in, poor thing, instead of standing there in the rain."

"Poor thing, indeed!—what business has any woman to watch a house in this marked manner?" retorted Eliza. "The neighbourhood will be taking her for a female detective."

"Nonsense!"

"She has given me a creepy feeling; I can tell you that, Philip."

"But why?" he exclaimed.

"I can't tell you why; I don't know why; it is so. Do not laugh at me for confessing it."

Philip Hamlyn did laugh; heartily. "Creepy feelings" and his imperiously strong-minded wife could have but little affinity with one another.

"We'll have the curtains drawn, and the lights, and shut her out," said he cheerily.

"Come and sit down, Eliza; I want to show you a letter I've had to-day."

But the woman waiting outside there seemed to possess for Eliza Hamlyn somewhat of the fascination of the basilisk; for she never stirred from the window until the curtains were drawn.

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"It is from Peveril," said Mr. Hamlyn, producing the letter he had spoken of from his pocket. "The lease he took of Peacock's Range is not yet out, but he can resign it now if he pleases, and he would be glad to do so. He and his wife would rather remain abroad, it seems, than return home."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, he writes to me to ask whether he can resign it; or whether I must hold him to the promise he made me—that I should rent the house to the end of the term. I mean the end of the lease; the term he holds it for."

"Why does he want to resign it? Why can't things go on as at present?"

"I gather from an allusion he makes, though he does not explicitly state it, that Mr. Carradyne wishes to have the place in his own hands. What am I to say to Peveril, Eliza?"

"Say! Why, that you must hold him to his promise; that we cannot give up the house yet. A pretty thing if I had no place to go down to at will in my own county!"

"So far as I am concerned, Eliza, I would prefer to stay away from the county—if your father is to continue to treat me in the way he does. Remember what it was in the summer. I think we are very well here."

"Now, Philip, I have *said*. I do not intend to release our hold on Peacock's Range. My father will be reconciled to you in time as he is to me."

"I wonder what Harry Carradyne can want it for?" mused Philip Hamlyn, bowing to the imperative decision of his better half.

"To live in it, I should say. He would like to show his resentment to papa by turning his back on Leet Hall. It can't be for anything else."

"What cause of resentment has he? He sent for him home and made him his heir."

"*That* is the cause. Papa has come to his senses and changed his mind. It is our darling little Walter who is to be the heir of Leet Hall, Philip—and papa has so informed Harry Carradyne."

Philip Hamlyn gazed at his wife in doubt. He had never heard a word of this; instinct had kept her silent.

"I hope not," he emphatically said, breaking the silence.

"*You hope not?*"

“Walter shall never inherit Leet Hall with my consent, Eliza. Harry Carradyne is the right and proper heir, and no child of mine, as I hope, must or shall displace him.”

Mrs. Hamlyn treated her husband to one of her worst looks, telling of contempt as well as of power; but she did not speak.

“Listen, Eliza. I cannot bear injustice, and I do not believe it ever prospers in the long run. Were your father to bequeath—my dear, I beg of you to listen to me!—to bequeath his estates to little Walter, to the exclusion of the true heir, rely upon it the bequest would *never bring him good*. In some way or other it would not serve him. Money diverted by injustice from its natural and just channel does not carry a blessing with it. I have noted this over and over again in going through life.”

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“Anything more?” she contemptuously asked.

“And Walter will not need it,” he continued persuasively, passing her question as unheard. “As my son, he will be amply provided for.”

A very commonplace interruption occurred, and the subject was dropped. Nothing more than a servant bringing in a letter for his master, just come by hand.

“Why, it is from old Richard Pratt!” exclaimed Mr. Hamlyn, as he turned to the light.

“I thought Major Pratt never wrote letters,” she remarked. “I once heard you say he must have forgotten how to write.”

He did not answer. He was reading the note, which appeared to be a short one. She watched him. After reading it through he began it again, a puzzled look upon his face. Then she saw it flush all over, and he crushed the note into his pocket.

“What is it about, Philip?”

“Pratt wants a prescription for gout that I told him of. I’m sure I don’t know whether I can find it.”

He had answered in a dreamy tone with thoughts preoccupied, and quitted the room hastily, as if to search for it.

Eliza wondered why he should flush up at being asked for a prescription, and why he should have suddenly lost himself in a reverie. But she had not much curiosity as to anything that concerned old Major Pratt—who was at present staying in lodgings in London.

Downstairs went Mr. Hamlyn to the little room he called his library, seated himself at the table under the lamp, and opened the note again. It ran as follows:

“DEAR PHILIP HAMLYN,—The other day, when calling here, you spoke of some infallible prescription to cure gout that had been given you. I’ve symptoms of it flying about me—and be hanged to it! Bring it to me yourself to-morrow; I want to see you. *I suppose there was no mistake in the report that that ship did go down?*—and that none of the passengers were saved from it?

“Truly yours,

“RICHARD PRATT.”

“What can he possibly mean?” muttered Philip Hamlyn.

But there was no one to answer the question, and he sat buried in thought, trying to answer it himself. Starting up from the useless task, he looked in his desk, found the infallible prescription, and then snatched his watch from his pocket.

“Too late,” he decided impatiently; “Pratt would be gone to bed. He goes at all kinds of unearthly hours when out of sorts.” So he went upstairs to his wife again, the prescription displayed in his hand.

Morning came, bringing the daily routine of duties in its train. Mrs. Hamlyn had made an engagement to go with some friends to Blackheath, to take luncheon with a lady living there. It was damp and raw in the early portion of the day, but promised to be clear later on.

“And then my little darling can go out to play again,” she said, hugging the child to her. “In the afternoon, nurse; it will be drier then; it is really too damp this morning.”

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Parting from him with fifty kisses, she went down to her comfortable and handsome carriage, her husband placing her in.

"I wish you were coming with me, Philip! But, you see, it is only ladies to-day. Six of us."

Philip Hamlyn laughed. "I don't wish it at all," he answered; "they would be fighting for me. Besides, I must take old Pratt his prescription. Only picture his storm of anger if I did not."

Mrs. Hamlyn was not back until just before dinner: her husband, she heard, had been out all day, and was not yet in. Waiting for him in the drawing-room listlessly enough, she walked to the window to look out. And there she saw with a sort of shock the same woman standing in the same place as the previous evening. Not once all day long had she thought of her.

"This is a strange thing!" she exclaimed. "I am *sure* it is this house that she is watching."

On the impulse of the moment she rang the bell and called the man who answered it to the window. He was a faithful, attached servant, had lived with them ever since they were married, and previously to that in Mr. Hamlyn's family in the West Indies.

"Japhet," said his mistress, "do you see that woman opposite? Do you know why she stands there?"

Japhet's answer told nothing. They had all seen her downstairs yesterday evening as well as this, and wondered what she could be watching the house for.

"She is not waiting for any of the servants, then; not an acquaintance of theirs?"

"No, ma'am, that I'm sure she's not. She is a stranger to us all."

"Then, Japhet, I think you shall go over and question her," spoke his mistress impulsively. "Ask her who she is and what she wants. And tell her that a gentleman's house cannot be watched with impunity in this country—and she will do well to move away before the police are called to her."

Japhet looked at his mistress and hesitated; he was an elderly man and cautious. "I beg your pardon, madam," he began, "for venturing to say as much, but I think it might be best to let her alone. She'll grow tired of stopping there. And if her motive is to attract pity, and get alms sent out, why the fact of speaking to her might make her bold enough to ask for them. If she comes there to-morrow again, it might be best for the master to take it up himself."



For once in her life Mrs. Hamlyn condescended to listen to the opinion of an inferior, and Japhet was dismissed without orders. Close upon that, a cab came rattling down the square, and stopped at the door. Her husband leaped out of it, tossed the driver his fare—he always paid liberally—and let himself in with his latch-key. To Mrs. Hamlyn's astonishment, she had seen the woman dart from her standing-place to the middle of the road, evidently to look at or to accost Mr. Hamlyn. But his movements were too quick: he was within in a moment and had closed the outer door. She then walked rapidly away, and disappeared.

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Eliza Hamlyn stood there lost in thought. The nurse came in to take the child; Mr. Hamlyn had gone to his room to dress for dinner.

“Have you seen the woman who has been standing out there yesterday evening and this, Penelope?” she asked of the nurse, speaking upon impulse.

“Oh, yes, ma’am. She has been there all the blessed afternoon. She came into the garden to talk to us.”

“Came into the garden to talk to you?” repeated Mrs. Hamlyn. “What did she talk about?”

“Chiefly about Master Walter, ma’am. She seemed to be much taken with him; she clasped him in her arms and kissed him, and said how old was he, and was he difficult to manage, and that he had his father’s beautiful brown eyes—”

Penelope stopped abruptly. Mistaking the hard stare her mistress was unconsciously giving her for one of displeasure, she hastened to excuse herself. The fact was, Mrs. Hamlyn’s imagination was beginning to run riot.

“I couldn’t help her speaking to me, ma’am, or her kissing the child; she took me by surprise. That, was all she said—except that she asked whether you were likely to be going into the country soon, away from the house here. She didn’t stay five minutes with us, but went back to stand by the railings again.”

“Did she speak as a lady or as a common person?” quite fiercely demanded Mrs. Hamlyn. “Is she young?—good-looking?”

“Oh, I think she is a lady,” replied the girl, her accent decisive. “And she’s young, as far as I could see, but she had a thick veil over her face. Her hair is lovely, just like silken threads of pale gold,” concluded Penelope as Mr. Hamlyn’s step was heard.

He took his wife into the dining-room, apologising for being late. She, giving full range to the fancies she had called up, heard him in silence with a hardening, haughty face.

“Philip, you know who that woman is,” she suddenly exclaimed during a temporary absence of Japhet from the dining-room. “What is it that she wants with you?”

“I!” he returned, in a surprise very well feigned if not real. “What woman? Do you mean the one who was standing out there yesterday?”

“You know I do. She has been there again—all the blessed afternoon, as Penelope expresses it. Asking questions of the girl about you—and me—and Walter; and saying the child has your beautiful brown eyes. *I ask you who is she?*”

Mr. Hamlyn laid down his knife and fork to gaze at his wife. He looked quite at sea.

“Eliza, I assure you I know nothing about it. Or about her.”

“Indeed! Don’t you think it may be some acquaintance, old or new? Possibly someone you knew in the days gone by—come over seas to see whether you are yet in the land of the living? She has wonderful hair, which looks like spun gold.”

All in a moment, as the half-mocking words left her lips, some idea seemed to flash across Philip Hamlyn, bringing with it distress and fear. His face turned to a burning red and then grew white as the hue of the grave.

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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE BRETONS AT HOME.

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

Amongst the many advantages possessed by Morlaix may be mentioned the fact of its being a central point from which a number of interesting excursions may be made. It is one of the chief towns of the Finistere, a Department crowded with churches, and here will be found at once some of the best and worst examples of ecclesiastical architecture in Brittany.

Of the churches of Morlaix we have said nothing. Interesting and delightful as it is in its old houses, it fails in its churches. Those worthy of note were destroyed at the Revolution, that social scourge which passed like a blight over the whole country, leaving its traces behind it for ever.

[Illustration: A BRETON CALVARY.]

The church of St. Melaine is the only one deserving a passing notice. It is in the third Pointed style, and, built on an eminence, is approached by a somewhat imposing flight of steps. A narrow thoroughfare leads up to it, and the nearer houses are inhabited by the priests and other members of the religious community.

The porch and windows are Flamboyant, and a little of the stained glass is good. The interior is divided into three naves by wooden partitions, consisting of pillars without capitals supporting pointed arches. The wall-plates represent monks in grotesque attitudes: portraits, perhaps, of those who inhabited the Priory of St. Melaine of Rennes, to which the church originally belonged. The basin for holy water between the porches has a very interesting cover; but still more remarkable is the cover to the font, an imposing and elegantly sculptured octagonal work of art of the Renaissance period, raised and lowered by means of pulleys. The organ case is also good; and having said so much, there is nothing left to record in favour of St. Melaine. The general effect of the church is poor and mean, and the most vivid impression left upon the mind is that caused by the sharp climb up the narrow street and flight of steps, with little reward beyond one's trouble for the pains of mounting.

But other churches in the neighbourhood of Morlaix are well worth visiting; churches typical of the Finistere, with their wonderful calvaries, mortuaries and triumphal arches.

"These," said Monsieur Hellard, our host of the Hotel d'Europe, who had, by this time, fully atoned for the transgressions of that one and almost fatal night—"these must on no account be neglected. Morlaix, more than any other town in the Finistere, as it seems

to me, is surrounded by objects of intense interest; monuments of antiquity, both secular and religious.”

“Yet you are not the chief town of the Finistere,” we observed.

“True,” he replied; “Quimper is our chief town; we are only second in rank; but in many ways we are more interesting than Quimper.”

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"You are partial," cried H.C., but very amiably. "What about Quimper's wonderful cathedral? Where can you match that architectural dream in Morlaix?"

"There, indeed, I give in," returned our host, meekly. "Morlaix has nothing to boast of in the way of churches, thanks to the revolution. But in the neighbourhood, each within the limits of a day's excursion, we have St. Thegonnec, Guimiliau, St. Jean-du-Doigt—and last and greatest of all—Le Folgoet. Besides these, we have a host of minor but interesting excursions."

"The minor must be left to the future," we replied; "for the present we must confine ourselves to the major monuments."

"One can't do everything," chimed in Madame Hellard, who came up at the moment. "I never recommend small excursions unless you are making a long stay in the neighbourhood. It becomes too tiring. We had a charming English family with us last year; a milord, very rich—they are all rich—with a sweetly amiable wife, who made herself in the hotel quite one of ourselves, and would chatter with us in my bureau by the hour together. Mon cher—to her husband—"do you remember how they enjoyed the regatta, and seeing all the natives turn out in their Sunday clothes; and how Madame laughed at the old women who fried the pancakes upon their knees in the open air; and the boys and girls who took them up hot and buttery in their fingers and devoured them like savages? Do you remember?"

Monsieur Hellard apparently did remember, and shook with laughter at the recollection of that or of something equally droll.

"I shall never forget Madame's look of astonishment," he cried, "as the pancakes were turned out of the poele, and disappeared wholesale like lightning." 'Ah, madame,' I said, 'you have yet to learn the capacious appetites of our Breton boys and girls. It is one of the few things in which they are not slow and phlegmatic.'

"And have not improved in,' laughed Madame. 'These habits are the remains of barbarism.'

"Madame,' I replied, 'you must not forget that we are descended from the Ancient Britons.' Ah! that was a clencher, Madame laughed, but she said no more."

"Until she returned," added our hostess. "Then she whispered to me: 'Madame Hellard, those pancakes looked extremely good, and as they are peculiar to Brittany, you must give us some for dinner. I must taste your *crepes*.'

"Madame la Comtesse,' I returned, 'Brittany has many peculiarities; we cannot deny it; would that they were all as innocent as these crepes. My chef is not a Breton, and he will not make them, perhaps, quite a la maniere des notres; but I will superintend him for

once. You shall have our famous dish.' And if you wish to know how she liked them," concluded Madame, laughing, "ask Catherine, la-haut. Three times a week at least we had pancakes on the menu. But nothing delights us more than when we please our guests. We like them to be at home here, and to feel that they may do as they please and order what they like."

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To the truth of which self-commendation we bore good testimony.

“Now about the excursions,” said M. Hellard. “I recommend you to go to-morrow to St. Thegonnec and Guimiliau, the next day to St. Jean-du-Doigt and Plougasnou, and the third day to Landerneau and Le Folgoet. The two first by carriage, the last by train.”

So it was arranged, and we were about to separate when in came our hostess of that little auberge by the river-side, *A la halte des Pecheurs*, carrying a barrel of oysters. She had walked all the way, and though the sun shone brilliantly, she was armed with a huge cotton umbrella that would have roofed a fair-sized tent.

“Madame Mirmiton!” cried M. Hellard; “and with a barrel of oysters, too! You are welcome as fine weather at the *Fete-Dieu*! But why you and not your husband?”

“Ah, monsieur!” replied Madame Mirmiton: “Figurez-vous, my husband was running after that naughty girl of mine, stumbled over the cat and sprained his ankle. He will be quite a week getting well again.”

“And the cat?” asked our host, comically.

“Pauvre Minette!” answered Madame Mirmiton, with tears in her voice. “She flew up the chimney. We have never seen her since—two days ago.”

“Well, whether you or your bon homme bring them, these oysters are equally a propos. I am sure ces messieurs will enjoy our natives for déjeuner. I have it!” he cried, striking his forehead. “You shall have an early déjeuner, and start immediately after for St. Thegonnec, instead of delaying it until to-morrow. You will have plenty of time, and must profit by the fine weather. I will order déjeuner at once, and the carriage in an hour.”

So are there times when our days, and occasionally the whole course of our lives, are apparently changed by the turning of a straw.

Having mentioned the oysters, we ought also to record their excellence. Catherine flew about the *salle a manger*, served us with her own hands, and gave us her whole attention, for we had the room to ourselves. She was proud of our praise.

“There is nothing better than our lobsters and oysters,” she remarked. “I always say so, and Mirmiton always brings us the best of the good. But to-day it was Madame who came in. Ah! *the Cat!*” laughing satirically. “The cat comes in for everything, everywhere. She is a domestic animal invented for two reasons: to catch mice and to furnish an excuse for whatever happens. I dare affirm it was a glass too much and not the cat that caused the bon homme to sprain his ankle.”

But we who had heard Madame Mirmiton's chapter and verse, were of a different opinion. Every rule has an exception, and the cat is certainly in fault—sometimes.

We started for St. Thegonnec. Monsieur packed us into the victoria, a heavy vehicle well matched by the horse and the man. We should certainly not fly on the wings of the wind.

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"Take umbrellas," cried Madame Hellard, prudently, from the doorway. "Remember your drenching that day, and what fatal consequences *might* have happened."

But we saw no necessity for umbrellas to-day, for there was not a cloud in the sky.

"Still, to please you, I will take my macintosh," said H.C.; "it is hanging up in the hall."

But the macintosh had disappeared. A traveller who had left by the last train had good-naturedly appropriated it to his own use and service. It was that admirable macintosh that has already adorned these pages, with the cape finished off with fish-hooks for carrying old china, brown paper parcels and headless images; and as the invention was not yet patented, the loss was serious. H.C. lamented openly.

"I only hope," he said, "that the man who has taken it will put it on inside out, and that all the fish-hooks will stick into him." The most revengeful saying his gentle mind had ever uttered.

"C'est encore le chat!" screamed Catherine, who was leaning out of a first-floor window of the *salle a manger*, quite undaunted by Madame Hellard's reproving "Voyons, voyons, Catherine!"

But Catherine was loyal, for all her mild sarcasm, and we knew that if ever the delinquent turned up again he would have a *mauvais quart d'heure* at her hands, whilst M. Hellard would certainly enforce restitution.

Some months later on, at a subsequent visit we paid to Morlaix, we asked after the fate of the macintosh and its borrower.

"Ah, monsieur," cried our host, sadly, "his punishment was even greater than we could have wished; two months afterwards the poor fellow died of *la grippe*."

But to return. We started for St. Thegonnec. It was a longish drive; the road undulated a good deal, and the horse seemed to think that whether going up hill or down a funereal pace was the correct thing. It took us half our time to rouse our sleepy driver to a sense of his duty. At last we tried a severe threat. "If you are not back again by *table d'hôte* time, you shall have no *pourboire*," we said, in solemn and determined tones. The effect was excellent. We had no more trouble, but the unfortunate horse had a great deal of whip.

There was very little to notice in the country we passed through. The most conspicuous objects were the large stone crucifixes erected here and there by the roadside or where two roads met: ancient and beautiful; and throwing, as we have remarked, a religious tone and atmosphere over the country. It was wonderfully picturesque to see, as we occasionally did, a Brittany peasant kneeling at the foot of one of these old crosses, the pure white Brittany cap standing out conspicuously against the dark grey stone: a figure

wrapped in devotion, apparently lost to the sense of all outward things. It all adds a charm to one's wanderings in Brittany.

St. Thegonnec at last, announced some time before we reached it by its remarkable church, which is very visible in the flatness of the surrounding country. The small town numbers some three thousand inhabitants, but has almost the primitive look of a village. Many of the people still wear the costumes of the place, especially on a Sunday, when the interior of the church at high mass looks very picturesque and imposing.

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The dress of the women is peculiar, and at first sight they might almost be taken for nuns or sisters of mercy: a dress which leaves scope for a certain refinement rather contradicted by the physical appearance of the women themselves. Men and women, in fact, belong for the most part to the peasantry, and pass their simple lives labouring in the fields, beating out flax, cultivating their little gardens, so that such an official as the gravedigger becomes an important personage amongst them. We came across him, at his melancholy work, but could make no more of him than we made of the people of Roscoff. He understood no word of French, but spoke his own native tongue, the language of la Bretagne Bretonnante, as Froissart has it, in contradistinction to la Bretagne douce. Nothing, certainly, can be softer and more beautiful than the pure French language; but that of Brittany is hard and guttural, without beauty or refinement of any sort.

The men of St. Thegonnec dress very differently from the women, but the costume is also very characteristic. It is entirely black, and consists of wide breeches, pleated and strapped at the knee; a square tunic; a scarf tied round the waist, with loose ends; a large hat, and shoes with buckles.

[Illustration: OLD HOUSE ST. POL DE LEON.]

To-day few inhabitants were visible. We seemed to be in possession of the place, together with the old gravedigger, who stopped his work and escorted us about, but was too stupid to understand even the most intelligent signs.

The church is very elaborate and fanciful, cruciform and sixteenth century, in the Renaissance style, much decorated with sculptures in dark Kersanton stone. The word *Kersanton* is Breton for St. Anthony's House; therefore we may suppose that the Saint had his house, and possibly his pig-stye, built of this same stone. For, as we know, St. Anthony had a weakness for pigs, and was famous for recovering one of his favourites from the devil, who had stolen it: recovered it not quite undamaged, as the animal was restored with his tail on fire: a base return for the Saint's politeness, who had offered his petition in poetical terms to which his audience could scarcely have been accustomed.

"Rendez-moi mon cochon, s'il-vous-plait,
Il faisait toute ma felicite,"

chanted the Saint, and to restore the pig with his tail on fire was conduct worthy only of fallen spirits.

But let us leave the Saint's pigs and return to our sheep.

The Kersanton stone, of which so many churches in Brittany are built, possesses many virtues, but one great drawback. It defies the ravages of time, yet is admirable for



carving, yielding easily to the chisel. But time has no influence upon it. Centuries pass, yet still it remains the same: ever youthful, ever hard and cold. It knows nothing of the beauty of age; it does not crumble or decay, or wear away into softened outlines; it takes no charm

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of tone; no lights and shadows. A dark grey-green it was originally, and so it remains. Thus, in point of effect, a church built of Kersanton stone two centuries ago might, as far as appearance goes, almost have been built yesterday. This is a great defect; and interferes very much with the charm of some of Brittany's best churches. It is hard, cold and severe, without refinement, poetry or romance.

In some cases it atones somewhat by its richness and elaborateness of sculpture, as in the case of St. Thegonnec. The west front of this church is Gothic, of the fourteenth century. One of the turrets has a small, elegant spire, and at the S.W. angle there is a very effective domed tower bearing the date 1605.

You enter the churchyard by a triumphal arch, in Renaissance dated 1587. It is large and massive, with a great amount of detail substantially introduced, its summit crowned by a number of crosses. On the frieze St. Thegonnec is represented conducting a waggon drawn by an ox: a facsimile of the waggon that is said to have assisted in carrying the stone to build the church. St. Thegonnec is the patron saint of all animals, and to him the peasants appeal for success and good-luck in such matters.

Adjoining the triumphal arch is a Flamboyant ossuary or mortuary chapel, dated 1581, richly gabled, in perfect preservation, and of two storeys. The first consists of semicircular arches supported by small pillars with Corinthian capitals. A short staircase within leads to a crypt converted into a small chapel, in which is an entombment formed of life-size figures carved in wood, gilded and painted, bearing date 1702. The calvary in the churchyard, a remarkable monument, completes the history, by a multitude of small statues representing all the principal episodes of the Passion. Its date is 1610. Even the crosses are surmounted by statuettes, as if the designer had not known how to heap up sufficient richness of ornamentation. The carved pulpit in the interior of the church is also remarkable.

We could only devote an hour to St. Thegonnec; Guimiliau had still to be seen, and we wished to be back in Morlaix by a certain time, for "the night cometh." Fortunately the drive was not a long one.

Guimiliau is a village not half the size of St. Thegonnec, and is even less civilized. Into the inn, which no doubt is respectable, but was rough and primitive, we did not venture. The driver and the landlord were apparently on excellent terms, and whilst they fraternised over their glasses, we inspected the church.

The place takes its name from Miliiau, a king of the Cornouaille, who was treacherously murdered by his brother Rivod, who then proclaimed himself king about the year 531. The church and the people canonised him, and he has become the patron saint of many a Breton village.

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The church of Guimiliau dates chiefly from the sixteenth century. The aisles and the south porch are Renaissance, richly ornamented by delicate sculptures representing scenes from the Old and New Testament; statues of the Apostles. The triumphal arch and ossuary are very inferior to St. Thegonnec, but the calvary is a magnificent monument, unequalled in Brittany, richly sculptured and ornamented. It rests on five arches, and you ascend to the platform by a short staircase in the interior. Here are crosses bearing the Saviour, and the thieves, quaintly carved, but with a great deal of religious feeling. The Evangelists, each with his particular attribute portrayed, are placed at the angles: and the whole history of the Life of Christ is represented by a countless number of small figures or personages dressed in costumes of the sixteenth century. The effect is occasionally grotesque, but very wonderful. A procession armed with drums and other instruments precedes the *Bearing of the Cross*; and another scene which does not belong to the Divine Life, but was introduced as an accessory, represents Catel Gollet (the lost Catherine) precipitated by devils in the form of grotesques into the jaws of a fiery dragon emblematical of Purgatory.

Catel Gollet was one who concealed a sin in confession, was condemned to suffer, and returning miraculously in 1560 announced her condemnation to her companions in these terms:

Voici ma main, cause de mon malheur,
Et voici ma langue detestable!
Ma main qui a fait le peche,
Et ma langue qui l'a nie.

The bas-relief represents the Adoration of the Magi, and bears date 1588, whilst the upper part bears that of 1581.

The interior of the church possesses some wonderful and almost matchless carved wood, which surprised and delighted us. There were sixteenth century statues, full of expression, of St. Herve and St. Miliou; an elaborate and beautiful pulpit, a font with a canopy supported by twisted columns, magnificently carved and thirty feet high, dated 1675; a matchless organ case, with three bas-reliefs, representing David, St. Cecilia and a Triumphal March, the latter reproduced from one of Alexander's battles by Lebrun.

In short, Guimiliau was a treasury of sculptured wood, which alone would have made it remarkable amongst churches. It was almost impossible to leave its fascination, and I fear that we more than envied the church its possession. It also came with a surprise, for we had heard nothing of this treasure of refined carving, and had anticipated nothing more than the wonderful calvary. It still lives in our imagination, almost as a dream; a dream of beauty and genius.

We lingered as long as we dared, but knew that we should not travel back at express speed, and that our coachman, after his indulgence in Breton beer or spirit, would probably be more sleepy than ever.

The sun was declining as we left Guimiliau, the church and its monuments forming a very singular composition against the background of the sky as we turned and gave it a farewell look. One scarcely analysed the reason, but there was almost an effect of heathendom about it, as if it dated from some remote age, when visible objects were worshipped, and the sun and the moon and dragons and grotesques took a prominent place in religion.

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The sun was declining and twilight was beginning to creep over the land. It threw out in greater relief the wayside crosses that we passed on the road, solemnising the scene, and insensibly leading the mind to contemplation; all the beauty, all the mystery of our faith, the lights and shadows of our earthly pilgrimage, so typified by the days and nights of creation; and the “one far-off divine event” which concerns us all.

When we entered Morlaix the sun had set; table d’hôte was not over, and we knew that Catherine had our places and our welfare in her special keeping; and the driver having done his best on the road, and having fallen asleep not more than five times on his box, we forgot our threat, and dismissed him with a *pourboire*, for which he returned us a Breton benediction.

[Illustration: BRITTANY PEASANTS.]

Once again the next day was kindly, the sun shone, the sky was unclouded. These are rare days in Brittany, which, surrounded on three sides by water, lives in an atmosphere that is always damp and too often gloomy and depressing.

Mindful of our host’s wise counsel to profit by the fine weather, we started for St. Jean-du-Doigt.

This time our drive lay in a different direction. Yesterday it had been inland, to-day it was towards the sea-coast. The country for some time was sad and barren-looking, but as we approached St. Jean and the coast it became more interesting and fertile.

Lanmeur, a small town not far from St. Jean, lies in a rather sad and solitary plain, and is said to occupy the site of a city of great antiquity. Here runs the river Douaron, a small stream that, considerably higher up, separates the Department of Finistere from Les Cotes du Nord. The ancient city was named *Kerfeunteun*, and possessed a wonderful church which was destroyed by the Normans in the eleventh century, but of which the crypt still remains. In the centre of this crypt springs a fountain or well, dedicated to St. Melar, a Breton prince put to death in the year 538, by that same Rivod who murdered his brother Miliou, and then had himself proclaimed king. The crypt also contains a statue of St. Melar of the fourteenth century, representing him minus a hand and foot, which Rivod had had cut off before putting him to death, in order that he should not be able to mount a horse or use a sword. Of the church built in the eleventh century only a few arches in the nave and the south porch remain. The rest of the existing building is modern.

The coast beyond Lanmeur is extremely broken, rugged and rocky, full of small bays and sharp points of land jutting out into the sea. The whole neighbourhood is interesting. Especially remarkable is the Pointe de Beg an Fri, the fine and rugged rocks of Primel and of Plougasnou; whilst on the land the pointed roofs of many an old manor rise above the trees.

St. Jean-du-Doigt is four miles from all this. It is a very pretty and fertile village watered by the Dounant, which passes through it on its way to the Bay of St. Jean, where it loses itself in the sea.

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The village lies between two high and barren hills, which shelter it from the cold winds, and make the valley laughing and fertile. Here you find well-grown elm trees, and hedges full of the whitethorn, honeysuckle and wild vines; hedges surrounding rich and productive orchards, amongst which, here and there, you will see rising the thatched roof of the small cottages inhabited by the Breton peasantry.

As at Roscoff, so the moment we reached St. Jean-du-Doigt, we felt its fascination. Its situation between the hills is extremely picturesque. Approaching, its rich gateway, leading to the churchyard, stands before you with fine effect; and beyond it rises the church.

The gateway is Flamboyant gothic, of great beauty and refinement. The church is fifteenth century gothic. Its wooden roof is beautifully carved and painted. The interior has no transept, but is composed of three naves under one roof. The west aisle has been shortened to make room for the tower; and in the north nave is a closed-up pointed doorway, which must have belonged to the earlier chapel dedicated to St. Meriadec. The apsis is terminated by a straight wall. The three naves are separated below the choir by prismatic pillars supporting light and bold arches.

The tower is pierced on the four sides by two long, narrow lancet windows, ending in a platform bearing a Flamboyant balustrade, above which rise four bell-turrets in lead, supporting a tall leaden spire.

The churchyard contains two remarkable objects: a mortuary chapel of the date 1577, open on three sides, with a stone altar at the end. The other is an exquisite Renaissance fountain of lead, with admirable figures, the goal of many a pilgrimage. It is a rare work of art, composed of three trenchers or shallow basins united by a slender column, of which the base enters a large reservoir in the form of a basin resting on a pedestal, the water issuing from lions' mouths. The overflow from the upper basins is discharged into the larger basins below by means of a cordon or garland, consisting of angels' heads, full of grace and beauty. The summit of the fountain is crowned by an image of the FATHER ETERNAL, leaning forward to watch the Baptism of the SON by John the Baptist. These figures are all in lead, as also are the innumerable heads of the angels pouring out water from the three upper stages. The exquisite composition is said to have been the work of an Italian artist, and was given by Anne of Brittany.

The whole village scene is picturesque and striking. You feel at home at once; it is marked by a certain refinement, a delicious quietness and repose in which there is something singularly soothing. Lying in a hollow, it seems to have carefully withdrawn from the outer world. It is warm and sunny, and marked and beautified by a wealth of flowers. Surrounding the churchyard are some of the small houses of this mediaeval village.



The inn opposite the gothic gateway looks the very picture of cleanliness and quiet comfort. Through an open window you see a table spread with a snow-white cloth, a capital ensign for an inn, promising much that is loyal. The whole of the exterior is a wealth of blossom, roses and wisteria covering the white walls, framing the casements, overflowing to the roof.

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[Illustration: ST. THEGONNEC.]

On the churchyard walls sat some of the village girls knitting; and as we took them with our instantaneous cameras, some rushed shyly across the road and disappeared in the small houses; whilst others, made of bolder material, placed themselves in becoming attitudes, and looked the very image of conscious vanity. The men came and talked to us freely—an exception amongst Breton folk; but it was often difficult to understand their mixture of languages. They were rather less rough and sturdy-looking than the ordinary type of Breton, and had somewhat the look of having descended from the mediaeval days of their village, becoming pale and long drawn out in the process. Probably the sheltered position of the village has much to do with it.

[Illustration: ST. JEAN-DU-DOIGT.]

St. Jean-du-Doigt takes its name from the fact of the church possessing the index finger of the right hand of St. John the Baptist, carefully preserved in a sheath of gold, silver and enamel, a work of art executed in 1429. The church considers it its greatest possession, and it has been the object of many a pilgrimage. The treasures of St. Jean-du-Doigt are unusually rich and beautiful.

The chief village fete of the year, that in Holland and Belgium would be called Kermesse, in some parts of France Ducasse, is in Brittany called *Pardon*. These are the occasions when the little country is seen at its best, and when all the costume that has come down to the present day exhibits itself. The Bretons take their pleasures somewhat sadly it is true, but even owls sometimes become excited and frivolous, and the Breton, if ever gay and lively, is so at his Pardon.

The Pardon of St. Jean-du-Doigt is, however, not all merriment. It is in some ways one of their saddest days, and it is certainly not all picturesqueness.

On the 23rd June, the day of the Pardon, many of the beggars of Brittany, the extreme poor afflicted with lameness and all sorts of unsightly diseases, make a pilgrimage to the church. A religious service is held, during which they press forward and crowd upon each other that the priest may touch their eyes with the finger of St. John, which is supposed to possess miraculous powers of healing.

Before this, they have all crowded round the fountain in the cemetery, to bathe their eyes and faces in the water, which also has miraculous charms. Then a procession is formed, and begins slowly winding its way to the top of one of the hills: a long procession, consisting of inhabitants, beggars, afflicted, and priests of the church carrying banners, crosses and other signs and symbols. The scene is best seen from the platform of the tower, where you may escape contact with the crowd and enjoy the lovely surrounding view, listen to the surging multitude on one side, and—rather in imagination—the surging of the sea in the Bay of St. Jean on the other.

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The object of this procession is a stake or bonfire that has been placed on the summit of one of the hills. This is in communication with the steeple of the church by means of a long wire—and the distance is considerable. At a given signal a firework is launched from the steeple, runs along the wire, and sets light to the stake. As soon as the flames burst forth there is a general discharge of musketry, drums in the fields beat loudly, the smoke of incense, mingling with the smoke of gunpowder, ascends heavenwards, and the priests sing what is called the “Hymn of the Holy Finger.”

Les Miraclou—as those are called who have been miraculously cured the previous year by bathing in the water of the fountain, or touching the finger of St. John—of course play an important part in the procession.

To-day it was our fate to see a very different but hardly less effective ceremony. As we were sitting quietly near the beautiful gateway, the hills in front of us, contemplating the sylvan scene and waiting for our driver, suddenly a small procession appeared coming down the road that wound round the hill out into the world. It was a funeral, and nothing could have been more striking than this concourse of priests and crosses and mourners, some carrying their sad burden, thrown out in conspicuous relief by the green hills and valleys around.

Mournfully and sadly the little group approached. First the priests, then the sad burden, then the women, the chief mourners wearing long cloaks, with hoods thrown over their heads, which made them look like nuns, and followed by quite a large company of men walking bareheaded.

Absolute and solemn silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the measured tread of the men carrying the coffin, which grew more and more audible as they approached; that measured tread that is one of the saddest of sounds. At the gate of the cemetery they paused a moment, then slowly defiled up the churchyard, and disappeared into the church; the chief mourner, who was the widow of the dead man, weeping silently but bitterly.

We were ready to leave, and when the last mourner had disappeared within the church, followed by some of the village people, we turned to our driver and gave him the signal for departure. We left St. Pol very reluctantly. There was an indescribable charm about it, as there is about certain places and certain people. St. Thegonnec, Guimiliau—as far as the villages were concerned, we were glad to turn our backs upon them; nothing attracted us; we had nothing in common with them; the charm was wanting. But at St. Jean-du-Doigt it was the very opposite; we longed to take up a short abode there, and felt that the days would be well spent and full of happiness. But time forbade the indulgence, as time generally forbids all such luxuries to the workers in the world. Only those whose occupation in life is the pursuit of pleasure can, like Dr. Syntax, go off in search of the picturesque, and wander about at their own sweet desire like a will-o'-the-wisp. Such luxuries were not ours; and so it came to pass that, very soon after we had

seen the sad procession winding down the hill, we were winding up it; looking back with “long lingering gaze” at the lovely spot which was fast disappearing from view.

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"I knew you would be charmed with St. Jean-du-Doigt," said Madame Hellard; "everyone is so. *Le paysage est si riant*. A pity you could not be there for the *Pardon*."

We hardly agreed with her.

"I assure you," she continued, "seen from the tower, where you are removed from the crowd and the beggars and the sick folk, it is most interesting and picturesque. Am I not right, cher ami?" turning to her husband.

"You are always right," replied Monsieur gallantly.

"Oh, that is prejudice," laughed Madame. "But le Pardon of St Jean-du-Doigt, with its procession winding up the hill, its bonfire, its religious observances, is quite exceptionally interesting. I am sure when I saw the *dragon* go off from the tower and set fire to the *bucher*, and heard the charge of musketry and roll of drums, I could have thrown myself off the platform with emotion."

"A mercy for me you did not," replied our host, who was evidently in a very amiable mood that morning. The fair was over and many had left the hotel, and he had more time for repose.

"I hope monsieur has come back with an appetite," said Catherine, referring to H.C., when we had taken our seats at the table d'hôte. We were early, and the first in the room. "It is of no use running about the country and exhausting our fresh air if one is to remain as thin as a leg of a stork and as pale as Pierrot."

[Illustration: MAKING PANCAKES AT THE REGATTA.]

"Where is our vis-a-vis?" we asked, pointing to the empty chair opposite and the very conspicuous vacuum it presented.

"He is gone, thank goodness—with last year's swallows," cried Catherine. "But, alas, he will come back again—like the swallows. Some people bear a charmed life."

"You will find him improved, perhaps."

"*Enlarged*," retorted Catherine, "and with a more capacious appetite—if that be possible; that will be the only change. They say there are limits to all things—I shall never believe it now."

And then the few who were now in the hotel came in, and dinner began; and Catherine's presence filled the room, cap streamers seemed floating about in all directions; and her voice was every now and then heard proclaiming LA SUITE.

And later on, in the darkness, we went out according to our custom, and revelled in the old-world streets, the latticed windows, still lighted up, waiting for the curfew—real or figurative, public or domestic. For we all have our curfews, only they are not proclaimed from some ancient tower; and, alas, they are, like Easter, a movable institution; whereby it comes to pass that we too often waste the midnight oil and burn the candle at both ends, and before our time fall into the “sere and yellow leaf.”

ACROSS THE RIVER.

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Here we sat beside the river
Long ago, my Love and I,
Where the willows droop and quiver
'Twixt the water and the sky.
We were wrapped in fragrant shadow,
'Twas the quiet vesper time,
And the bells across the meadows
Mingled with the ripple's chime.
With no thought of ill betiding,
"Thus," we said, "life's years shall be
For us twain a river gliding
To a calm, eternal sea."

I am sitting by the river
Where we used to sit of old,
And the willows droop and quiver
'Gainst a sky of burning gold;
But my Love long since went onward,
Down the river's shining tide,
To the land that is far sunward,
With the angels to abide;
And in pastures fair and vernal,
In the coming by-and-bye,
Far across the sea eternal
We shall meet—my Love and I.

HELEN M. BURNSIDE.

AN APRIL FOLLY.

BY GILBERT H. PAGE.

April 1, 1890. 58A, Lincoln's Inn Fields.—I execrate my fellow men—and women! To-day I was over at Catherine's. Not an unusual occurrence with me, but on a more than usually important mission. I needn't note down how I achieved it. Am I likely to forget my impotent speeches? Still, she had given me plenty of excuse for supposing she liked me, and I said so. And then Catherine laughed her exasperating little laugh that always dries up all sentiment on the spot, and makes my blood boil with anger. "I *like* you?" she repeated mockingly; "not at all! not in the least! What can you be dreaming of?"

I did for a moment dream of rolling her elaborately curled head in the dust of the drawing-room carpet; but I restricted myself to saying a few true and exceedingly bitter

things, and departed without giving her time to reply; and herewith I register a vow on the tablets of my heart: "If ever again I make a single friendly overture to that young woman, may I cut off the hand that so betrays me!"

By-the-bye, it is April Fools' Day, an appropriate date by which to remember my folly.

April 2.—My feelings are still exceedingly sore. Oh for a cottage in some wilderness—some vast contiguity of shade—whither I might retire, like a stricken hart from the herd, and sulk majestically! The very thing! There rises before me an opportune vision of a certain lonely farm-house I wot of down by a lonely sea. I discovered it last summer while staying at Shoreford. I had ridden westward across the marsh lands of Windle, over the cliffs that form the coastline between this and REXINGHAM; and being thirsty, had followed some cows through a rick-yard, in the hopes of obtaining a glass of milk.

There, behind the hayricks, I had come upon my first view of Down End Farm; and the picture of its grey stone, lichened walls, red roof, cosy kitchen and comely mistress, had remained painted on my brain. So, too, I retained a scrap of my conversation with Mrs. Anderson, and her casual mention of the London family then occupying her best rooms. "We don't have many folk at Down End, it being so out of the way, sir; but the gentleman here now says he do like it, just on account of the solitude and quiet."

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There was no particular reason at the time why these words should have so impressed me. Solitude was the last thing I desired then, having gone down to Shoreford for my holiday, merely because Catherine was spending the summer there too. But now that everything is over between us, the solitary farm comes as balm to my wounded spirit. Let me see; to-day is Tuesday the 2nd. Good Friday is the day after to-morrow; I could get away to-morrow evening. All right! I'll go out and telegraph to Mrs. Anderson, and pay for her reply.

April 4. Down End Farm.—I reached this last night. At seven o'clock I found myself driving up from REXINGHAM station, with the crimson flaming brands of the sunset behind me, and the soft mysterious twilight closing in on all sides. It was almost dark when we got to the top of Beacon Point Hill, and quite dark for a time as we began to descend the other side, for the road here is cut down between steep red gravel banks, crowned with sombre fir trees. When these were passed and we reached the remembered stack-yard gate, there was clear heaven again above my head, its exquisite ever-darkening blue already gemmed with the more brilliant stars. The Plough faintly outlined above, and beautiful spica hanging low over Windle Flats. A cheerful glow-worm of red earth-light gleamed from the farm-house windows as we drove round to the inner gate, while at the sound of the wheels the kitchen door opened, and my hostess came down the flagged pathway between the sleepy flowers to bid me welcome.

How delightful the first evening in country quarters always is. How comfortable the wood fire that flamed and sputtered on the parlour hearth, how inviting the meal of tea, new-laid eggs, homemade breads and jams, honey and hot scones spread out upon a spotless cloth around a centre piece of daffodils and early garden flowers. For a rejected suitor I felt singularly cheerful; for a blighted being I made a most excellent meal; and for the desperate misogynist I had determined on becoming I surely felt too much placid satisfaction at Mrs. Anderson's homely talk.

But it was really pleasant to lie back in the capacious leathern chair, while this good woman cleared away the tea-things, and lazily eyeing the fire, listen to the history of herself and her family, of her husband, her children, her landlord, of her courtship, her marriage, her troubles, of the death of her mother in the room overhead the year before last, and of the wedding of her eldest boy Robert which is to take place this summer as soon as the corn is carried.

Such openness of disposition, so often found among people of Mrs. Anderson's class, is very refreshing, and it is convenient too. You know at once where you stand. I wish it were the custom in society. I should then have learned from Catherine's own lips how many fellows she had already sent to the right-about, and I should have given her no opportunity of adding to their number.

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I came down very late to breakfast this morning—my first breakfast in the country is always luxuriously late—and I found a tall and pretty young girl busy building up the fire in my sitting-room. I guessed at once she was the “Annie” of whom I heard a long and pleasing account last night. Annie is the image of what her mother must have been twenty years ago. She has the same agreeable blue eyes, the same soft straw coloured hair. But while Mrs. Anderson wears hers in bands at each side of the head, Annie’s is drawn straight back to display the smoothest of white foreheads, the freshest of freckled little faces in the world. She is about seventeen, and a sweet girl, I feel sure. Could no more play with a man’s feelings than she could torture one of the creatures committed to her care. She has charge of the poultry, she tells me, and is allowed half the profits. Mem.—I shall eat a great many eggs.

April 5.—I have done an excellent thing in exchanging the hollow shams of society for the healing powers of nature. I shall live to forget Catherine and to be happy yet. And there was after all something artificial about that girl. Pretty, certainly, but with the beauty of the stage; now little Annie here is pretty with the beauty of the sky and meadows.

I am delighted with this place. There is nothing like the country in early spring. Suppose I were never to go back to town again, but stay with the Andersons, see them through the lambing season, lend a hand at tossing the hay, swing a scythe at corn cutting (and probably cut off my own legs into the bargain), drink a health at son Robert’s wedding, and then during the winter—yes, during the long dark winter evenings when the wind raves round the old house and whistles down the chimneys, when the boom of the sea echoes all along the coast as it breaks against the cliffs—then to sit in the cosy sitting-room, with the curtains drawn along the low windows, a famous fire flashing and glaring upon the hearth, one’s limbs pleasantly weary with the day’s labour, one’s cheeks tingling from exposure to the keen air; would not this be an agreeable exchange for the feverish anxieties and stagnant pleasures of London life?

After a time, a considerable time no doubt, it would possibly occur to Catherine to wonder what had become of me.

April 6.—Easter Sunday. I am writing in my sitting-room window. I raise my eyes and see first the broad window-sill, whereon stand pots of musk and geranium, not yet in flower; then through the clear latticed panes, the bee-haunted garden, descending by tiny grassy terraces to the kitchen-garden with its rows of peas and beans, its beds of lettuce and potatoe, its neat patches of parsley and thyme; then a field beyond. I note the double meandering hedge-line that indicates the high road, and beyond again the ground rises in sun-bathed pastures and ploughed land to the gorse-covered cliff edge with its background of pure sky; a little to the right, yet still in full view from my window, is an abrupt dip in the cliff, which shows a great wedge of glittering sea. It is here that my eyes always ultimately rest, until they ache with the dazzle and the beauty, and then by a natural transition I think of—Catherine.

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At this moment she is probably dressing to go to church, and is absorbed in the contemplation of a new hat. I should think she had as many hats on her head as hairs—no, I don't mean that; it suggests visions of “ole clo'es”—I mean she must have almost as many hats as hairs on her head.

How inexpressibly mean and petty this devotion to rags and tags and gewgaws seems when one stands in the face of the Immensities and the Eternities! Yet it would appear as though the feminine mind were really incapable of impression by such Carlylean sublimities, for I saw Annie start for church awhile since in a most terrible combination of maroon and magenta. Her best clothes evidently, cachemire and silk, with two flowers and a feather in her hat, her charming baby prettiness as much crushed and eclipsed as bad taste and a country town dressmaker could accomplish. What I like to see Annie in is the simple stuff gown she wears of a morning, with the big bib apron of white linen, and the spotless white collar caressing her creamy throat. I would lock her best clothes up in that delightful carved oak chest that stands upstairs on the landing and throw the key into the sea; and little Annie would let me do it; she is evidently the most docile of child-women. Catherine, now, had I ever ventured on adverse criticism of her garments, would have thrown me into the sea instead.

April 7.—Bank holiday, and wet, of course. The weather is never propitious on the feast of St. Lubbock. The old Saints apparently owe a grudge to this latest addition to the calendar. How beastly it must be in town, with the slushy streets and the beshuttered shops! How depressing for Paterfamilias who arose at seven in the morning to set off with his wife and his brats and the family food-basket to catch some early excursion train! How much more depressing for him who has no train to catch, and nothing at all to do but worry through twelve mortal pleasure hours!

St. Lubbock's malevolent influence doesn't fortunately extend down here, where everything seems to work in time-worn ruts. I walked over the fields opposite. There were a great many new-dropped lambs in the second meadow. They didn't appear to mind the drizzle, but kneeling with their little front legs doubled under them, they sucked vigorously at their mothers, while their long tails danced and quivered in the air.

There was one lamb lying quietly on its side. The ewe stood by, staring down at it with a sort of quiescent curiosity from her brown, stupid, white-lashed eyes. When I went over to her I saw the lamb was dying; its lips moved incessantly, its little body kept rising and falling with its laboured breath, now and then it made a violent effort to get up, but always fell back in the same position. I passed back through the same field about an hour after. There was the lamb still dying, still breathing painfully, still moving its lips as before, but the mother, tired of the spectacle, had walked off, and was calmly munching mangel-wurzel in another part of the field.

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I sentimentalised and moralised—naturally; and naturally, too, I thought of Catherine. Strange there should be that vein of hardness running through the entire female sex.

As the rain still continued this afternoon, I proposed to Mrs. Anderson she should show me the house. The excellent creature, busy with the dairy, offered me Annie as her substitute. We went from cellar to garret, and the child's companionship and her ingenuous prattle successfully beguiled a couple of hours. The house in reality consists of two houses placed at right angles to each other. The older part, built between two and three hundred years ago, is inhabited by the Andersons themselves. It consists of a long, low kitchen, with an enormous hearth-place, an oaken settle, smoke-browned rafters, and a bricked floor.

In the centre of the room is a massive but worm-eaten table, capable of seating twenty persons at least. It was built up in the kitchen itself some two hundred years ago, since no earthly ingenuity could have coaxed it through the low windows or narrow door.

Two of these, latticed like those of my sitting room, with the door between them, face west; but long before the sun is down the wooded eminence opposite has intercepted all his beams. Outside is also a garden, full of forget-me-not, daffodil, and other humble flowers. Here Scot, the watch-dog, lies dreaming in his kennel, and beyond the gate the cocks and hens lay dolefully in the rain, or bunch themselves up, lumps of dirty feather, under the shelter of the wood shed.

Upstairs are three sleeping rooms, and the attics, with curious dormer windows, still higher. We come down again to the first floor. A long matted passage runs from one end of the house to the other. It sinks half a step where the newer portion is joined on. This part, containing in all four rooms, two here and two below, was built in July, 1793, as a rudely scratched tablet on the wall outside informs me.

I sit with Annie on the carved chest at the southern end of the passage. The window behind us gives an extensive view of grey rain and grey sea. But I prefer to look at the smiling, freckled face that speaks so eloquently of sunny days. The wet, trailing fingers of the briar-rose climbing over the porch tap at the casement, the loose branch of the plane-tree creaks in the wind, the distant sea moans and murmurs; but I prefer to listen to my little friend's artless and occasionally "h-less" English, as she tells me how the Andersons have always been tenants of Down End since her great-grandfather came to the county and added on the living-house to the farm-house for his young wife.

"July, 1793." The date takes my fancy. I can see the Anderson of those days, large-boned, sinewy, stooping, with a red, fiery beard, like his present representative, stolid, laborious, contented, building his house here facing the coasts of France, nearly as ignorant of, and quite as indifferent to, the wild work going on over there in Paris town as little Annie herself can be. King, Dictator, Emperor, King, Emperor, Commune, have

come and gone, but the sturdy race of farmers sprung from great-grandfather Anderson still carry on the same way of life in the same identical spot.

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“But I’m not amusing you,” says Annie, regretfully. “If only it would leave off raining we might go out and have a ride on the tin-tan.” It takes me some little time, and a closely-knit series of questions, to discover that tin-tan is Southshire for see-saw; and I think how Catherine would laugh at the spectacle of my bobbing up and down on one end of a plank and this little country damsel at the other. Her detestable laughter; but, thank Heaven! I need never suffer from it again.

April 8.—Gloomy again to-day. Ink-coloured rain clouds hanging close over the hills, their fringe-like lower edges showing ragged across a pale sky, against which the hills themselves rise dark and sharp. Now and again a shower of rain falls, but not energetically; the wind blows, the clouds shift, the rain ceases, and the sky darkens or gleams with a watery brightness alternately. Looking over the wide landscape and leaden sea, here and there a patch of sunshine falls, while I myself walk in gloom; now the sails of a ship catch the radiance, now a farmstead, now a strip of sand over by Windle Flats.

I feel slightly bored. Annie went into Rexingham this morning with Robert and the early milk cart. She is to spend the day with an aunt, and return with the empty cart this evening. Twice a day the Andersons send in their milk to Rexingham, and winter and summer son Robert must rise at 3 a.m. to see to the milking, harness Dolly or Dobbin, and jog off his seven miles. Seven miles there, and seven miles back, morning and evening; that is twenty-eight miles in all, and ever the self-same bit of road in every weather. So that a farmer’s life has its seamy side also. But then, to get back of a night! To find a good little wife like Annie waiting for you at the upper gate or by the house door. To eat your supper and smoke your pipe, with your feet on the mantel-piece if you pleased, and no possibility of being ordered into dress clothes to go to some vile theatre or idiotic dance—above all, to know that Catherine knew you were perfectly happy without her—by the bye, I wonder she has not written to me! Not that I want her to, of course. This would entail a few frozen conventional lines back by way of answer. But I am surprised she can endure thus easily the neglect of even the most insignificant of her subjects. I felt sure she would write to ask why I did not call on Sunday. She trusts, no doubt, to the greatness of my folly to bring me again, unasked, to her feet. Her confidence is for once misplaced.

April 9.—A great improvement in the weather. I was awakened by the sun pouring in at my window, and looked out on to a light, bright blue sky, full of white cumuli that cast down purple shadows upon a grey-green sea. I draped myself in the white dimity window curtain, and watched Annie making her way up between the lettuce rows, with her hands full of primroses. She came from the orchard, where the green tussucked grass at the foot of the apple trees is starred with these lovely little flowers.

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I must have a talk with Annie in the orchard one day. It would be just the background to show off her particular style of beauty. I like to suit my scenery to the drama in hand. Catherine would be quite out of place in an orchard, where she might stain her gown, or a harmless beetle or spider terrify her into fits.

There appears to be only one post a day here; but Mrs. Anderson tells me that by walking up to Orton village I might find letters awaiting to-morrow's morning delivery. I was ass enough to go over this afternoon, and of course found nothing.

As I passed the barn on my way in, my ear was saluted by much laughter and shouting. I came upon Annie giving her little brothers a swing. Both great doors of the barn were turned back upon the outside wall and the swing hanging by long ropes to the rafters, and holding two chubby urchins together on the seat, swung out now into the sunshine, now back into the gloom, while Annie stood and pushed merrily. Three tiny calves, penned off in a loose box at one end of the building, stared over the low partition with soft, astonished eyes. It was a charming little picture.

"There, Tim! I can only give you six more!" cries Annie. "I've got to go and make the puddings" (she said "puddens," but what matter?). Before she goes she pulls a handful of grass from the threshold and offers it to the calves. While they tug it this way and that to get it from her hand, she endeavours to plant a kiss on the moist black muzzle of the smallest, but he promptly and ungallantly backs and the grass falls to the ground. At the same moment the children discover me, and an awed silence succeeds to their chatter. Not to embarrass them, I move off and fall a-musing as to whether Catherine could make a pudding to save her life? It is pretty certain it would cost a man his to have to eat it; does not even her violin playing, to which she has given indubitable time and attention, set one's teeth on edge to listen to?

Yet why this bitterness? Let me erase Catherine and her deficiencies from my mind for ever.

April 10.—Again no letter! Very well! I know what I will do. I am almost certain I will do it. But first I will go down to the beach and give it a couple of hours' sober reflection. No one shall say I acted hastily, ill-advisedly, or in pique.

I cross over to the cliff edge. Here the gorse is aflame with blossom; the short dry grass is full of tiny insect life. Various larks are singing; each one seems to sing the same song differently; perhaps each never sings the same arrangement twice!

I go down the precipitous coastguards' stairs. At every step it grows hotter. Down on the beach it is very hot, but there is shade to be found among the boulders at the cliff's base. I sit down and stare along the vacant shore; at the ships floating on the sea; at the clouds floating in the sky; there is no sound but the little grey-green waves as they break and slosh upon the stones.

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I think of Catherine and Annie, and I remark that the breakwaters are formed of hop-poles, twined together and clasped with red-rusted iron girdles; the wood has been washed by the tides white and clean as bones. I wonder whether I shall ask Annie to be my wife, and I wonder also whence came those—literally—millions of wine bottle corks that strew the beach to my right. From a wreck? from old fishing nets? or merely from the natural consumption of beer at the building of the breakwater?

Coming back to Down End, I find a travelling threshing machine at work in the rick-yard. I had heard the monotonous thrumming of its wheels a good way off. The scene is one of great animation, the machine is drawn up against the conical-shaped haystack, its black smoke stretches out in serpentine coils against the sky. A dozen men are busy about her: those who work her, old Anderson, son Robert—a dreadful lout he is too, quite unlike his sister—various other louts of the same calibre, the two little boys, very much in everyone's way, and Mrs. Anderson and Annie, who have just brought out jugs of ale. I naturally stop to say a few words to Annie and watch the threshing. Anderson is grinding out some of last year's oats for the cattle.

Son Robert comes to take a pull out of Annie's jug. "That's prime, measter, ain't it?" he says to me, and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. I go in thoughtfully. Is son Robert exactly the sort of man I should care to call brother-in-law?

April 11, 12.—These two days I have been casting up the pros and cons of a marriage with Annie. Shall it be—or not be? I suffer from a Hamlet-like perplexity. On the one hand I get a good, an amiable, an adoring little wife, who would forestall my slightest wish, who would warm my slippers for me, for whom I should be the Alpha and Omega of existence. She would never argue with me, never contradict me, never dream of laughing *at* me; would never laugh at all unless I allowed her, for she would give into my keeping, as a good wife should, the key of her smiles and of her tears. But of course I should wish her to laugh. I should wish the dear little creature to remain as merry and thoughtless as possible. Dear Annie! what surprise and delight will shine in your innocent blue eyes when I tell you my story! Your childlike gratitude will be almost embarrassing. Last, and perhaps most weighty pro of all—when Catherine hears of it she will be filled with regret; yes, she may act indifference as gaily as she pleases, I am convinced that in her heart of hearts she will be sorry.

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Now for the cons; they, too, are many. As I said before, I should not like son Robert to call me brother. I should find honest old Anderson pere rather a trial with his red beard, his broken nails, the yawning chasm between his upper teeth; even Mrs. Anderson, so comely and pleasant here in her own farm-house, would suffer by being transplanted to Lincoln's Inn. So might little Annie herself. A lapsed "h" in a country hay-field has much less significance than when lost at a London dinner-table. How is it, I wonder, that while the dear child generally speaks of 'ay and 'ouse, she invariably besmirches with the strongest of aspirates the unfortunate village of H'Orton? Still, it would be easy to correct this, delightful to educate her during our quiet evenings, to read with her all my favourite prose writers and poets! And, even supposing she couldn't learn, is classical English in the wife an infallible source of married happiness? Let me penetrate below externals and examine into the realities of things.

I spend most of Friday and Saturday in this examination without making any sensible progress until supper on Saturday night, when I casually mention to Annie, who is laying the table, that I am bound to leave Down End on the following Monday, as term begins on the 15th.

"Must you really go? Well, we shall miss you, surely," says Annie. And I am not mistaken; there is a wistfulness in her blue eyes, a poignant regret in her voice that goes to my heart.

No, Annie! that decides me; I have suffered too much from blighted affection ever to inflict the same pangs on another. I am too well read myself in Love's sad, glad book to mistake the signs written in your innocent face. Without vanity I can see how different I must appear in your eyes to all the farm hands and country bumpkins you have hitherto met; without fatuity I can understand how unconsciously almost to yourself you have given me your young affections. Well, to-morrow you shall know you have won back mine in exchange.

If Catherine could but guess what is impending!

April 13 (Sunday).—Annie in the maroon and magenta gown, carrying a clean folded handkerchief and a Church Service in her hand, has gone up to church.

The bells are still ringing, and I am wandering through the little Copse on the right of the farm. This wood, or plantation rather flourishes down hill, fills up the narrow, interlying valley, and courageously climbs the eminence beyond. As I descend, it become more and more sheltered. The wind dies away and the church bells are heard no longer. I am following a cart-track used by the woodcutters. It is particularly bad walking. The last cart must have passed through in soft weather, the ruts are cut so deep, and these are filled with water from the last rains. The new buds are but just "exploding" into leaf; here and there the Dryades have laid down a carpet of white anemone flowers to dance on; trailing brambles lie across the track, with October's bronze and purple-green

leaves, still hale and hearty, making an exquisite contrast with the young, brilliant, fan-folded shoots just springing at their base.

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I will find an opportunity to speak to Annie this very afternoon. She is likely to be less busy to-day than at other times. I need not trouble much as to how I shall tell her. She is sure to listen to me in a sweet, bewildered silence. She will have no temptation to laugh at the most beautiful and sacred of earthly themes. There is, to my mind, something incurably frivolous about a woman who laughs when a man is in earnest. I have tried over and over again to impress this upon Catherine, but it never had any other effect but to increase her amusement. She is a young woman entirely without the bump of veneration, and *this*, I should say, far more than an elegant pronunciation, is the desideratum in a wife.

Sunday evening. I am in the mental condition of "Truthful James." I ask myself: "Do I wake? Do I dream?" I inquire at set intervals whether the Caucasian is played out? So far as I represent the race, I am compelled to reply in the affirmative. This is what has happened. I was smoking my post-prandial cigar in the terraced garden, lying back in a comfortable basket-chair fetched out from the sitting-room, when a shadow fell upon the grass, and Mrs. Anderson appeared in her walking things to know if there was anything I was likely to want, as she and "Faaether" and the little boys were just starting for H'Orton.

"Don't trouble about me," said I; "go and enjoy yourself. No one better deserves it than you, Mrs. Anderson." And I add diplomatically: "Doesn't Miss Annie also go with you?"

"Annie's over Fuller's Farm way," says the good woman smiling; and I smile too, for no particular reason. "She mostly walks up there of a Sunday afternoon."

I know Fuller's Farm. I have passed it in my rambles. You skirt the copse, cross the sunny upland field, drop over the stile to the right, and find yourself in Fuller's Lane. The farm is a little further on, a comfortable homestead, smaller than Down End, but built of the same grey, lichened stone, and with the same steep roof and dormer windows.

I gave the Andersons ten minutes start, then rose, unlatched the gate, and followed Annie. I reached the upland field. It was dotted with sheep: ewes and lambs; long shadows sloped across it; a girl stood at the further gate. This was Annie, but alas! someone was with her; a loutish figure that I at first took to be that of son Robert. But as I came nearer, I saw it was not Robert but his equally loutish friend, the young fellow I had seen working with him by the threshing machine. That day, in his working clothes, he had looked what he was, a strong and honest young farmer. To-day, in his Sunday broadcloth, with a brilliant blue neck scarf, a brass horseshoe pin, and a large bunch of primroses in his button-hole, he looked a blot, an excrescence, on the sunny earth. Personally, he might have been tall, but for a pronounced stoop; fair, but that he was burnt brick colour; smooth-faced, but for the multitude of lines and furrows, resulting from long exposure to the open air. His voice I couldn't help admitting was melodious and manly, yet the moment he caught sight of me he shuffled his feet like an idiot, and

blushed like a girl. He whispered something to his companion, dropped over the stile like a stone from a catapult, and vanished from view.

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Annie advanced to meet me, blushing sweetly. She had put a finishing touch to the magenta costume by a large pink moss rosebud. She looked at it with admiration.

“Me and my young man have changed nosegays,” she remarked simply; “he asked me to give him my primroses, and he gave me this. They do grow beautiful roses up at Fuller’s.”

“Your what?” said I dismayed. “Who did you say?”

“My young man,” repeated Annie; “Edward Fuller, from the next farm. He and me have been keeping company since Christmas only, but I’ve known him all my life. We always sat together in school; he used to do my sums for me, and I’ve got still a box full of slate pencil ends which he had touched.”

So my card castle came to the cloth. Here was a genuine case of true idyllic boy and girl love, that had strengthened and ripened with mature years. Annie had no more given me a thought—what an ass, what an idiot I am! But really, I think Catherine’s cruelty has turned my brain. I am become ready to plunge into any folly.

And it would have been folly. After the first second’s surprise and mortification, I felt my spirits rise with a leap. I was suddenly dragged back from moral suicide. The fascinating temptation was placed for ever beyond my reach. And it was Edward Fuller who thus saved me! Good young man! I fall upon your neck in spirit, and kiss you like a brother.

I am still free! who knows what to-morrow may bring.

April 14.—To-morrow is here and has brought a letter from Catherine. I find it lying by my plate when I come down to breakfast. I take it up, look at the superscription, partly in Catherine’s well-known writing, partly in my landlady’s spider scrawl—for it had gone first to my London rooms. I turn it over, feel it, decide it contains one sheet of paper only, and put it resolutely down. After breakfast is time enough to read it; nothing she can say shall ever move me more.

I pour out my coffee; my resolutions waver and dissipate themselves like the steam rising from my cup. I tear the letter open, and find myself in Heaven straightway. And these are the winged words that bore me there:—

“Why do you not come and see me? Why are you so blind? It is true I do not *like* you! But I love you with all my heart. Ah! could you not guess? did you not know?”

“PROCTORISED.”

What a ghostly train from the forgotten past rises before me as I write the word that heads this sketch! The memory dwells again upon that terrible quarter of an hour in the

Proctor's antechamber, where the brooding demon of "fine" and "rustication" seemed to dwell, and where the disordered imagination so clearly traced above the door Dante's fearful legend—Abandon hope all ye that enter here.

How eagerly each delinquent scanned the faces of his fellow-victims as they came forth from the Proctorial presence, vainly trying to gather from their looks some forecast of his impending fate; and how jealously (if a "senior") he eyed the freshman who was going to plead a first offence!

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And then the interview that followed—not half so terrible as was expected. The good-natured individual who stood before the fire, in blazer and slippers, was barely recognisable as the terrible official of yesterday's encounter; while the sleek attendant at the Proctor's elbow seemed more like a waiter than the pertinacious and fleet-footed "bull-dog." What a load was raised from the mind as the Proctor made a mild demand for five shillings, and the "bull-dog" pointed to a plate into which you gladly tossed the half-crowns. And then you quitted the room which you vowed never again to enter, feeling that you had been let down very easily. For you knew full well that beneath the Proctor's suave demeanour lurked a sting which too often took the painful form of rustication from the University.

But let us accompany the Proctor as he makes his nightly rounds with his faithful body-guard, and look once more upon the ceremony of "proctorisation."

What an imposing figure he is! The silk gown adorned with velvet sleeves; the white bands round his neck denoting the sanctity of his office; his sturdy attendants: are they not calculated to overawe the frivolous undergraduate?

Following him through the streets, into billiard-room and restaurant, one moralises on the sad necessity that compels this splendid dignitary to play the part of a common policeman. But there is little time for thought. On we go, on our painful mission. Suddenly the keen-eyed "bull-dog" crosses the street, for an undergraduate has just come forth from a tobacconist's shop. He is wearing cap and gown, and—oh, heinous offence—he puffs the "herba nicotiana."

The Proctor steps forward (for smoking in Academical dress is sternly forbidden) and, producing a note-book, vindicates thus the dignity of the law.

"Are you a member of this University, sir?" The offender murmurs that he is. "Your name and college, sir. I must trouble you to call upon me at nine a.m. to-morrow." Then, with raised cap and ceremonious bow, the Proctor leaves his victim to speculate mournfully on what the morrow will bring forth.

Forward! and we move on once more in quest of offenders against the "statutes." What curious reading some of these statutes afford! We seem to get a whiff from bygone ages as we read the enactment condemning the practice of wearing the hair long as unworthy the University; and equally curious is the provision that forbids the student to carry any weapon save a bow and arrow.

But let us continue our journey. Tramp, tramp, tramp! No wonder we find the streets empty: our echoing footsteps give the alarm. But soon we make another capture. This time the undergraduate seeks refuge in flight, but in vain. "Fast" though he is, the bull-dog is faster; and the Proctor enters another name in his note-book. Let him who runs read.

On we go; now visiting the railway station—favourite hunting-ground of the Proctor—now waiting while the theatre discharges its contents; for there the gownless student abounds and the Proctor's heart grows merry.

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Here a prisoner states that he is Jones, of Jesus. Vain subterfuge! Though there be many Welshmen at Jesus College, and many of its alumni bear the name of Jones, yet are you not of their number. So says the Proctor, a don of Jesus; and the pseudo Jones wishes that he had not been born.

Twelve o'clock now strikes, and our nightly vigil draws to a close. Still we move forward, amid the jangling rivalry of a thousand bells. Soon the Proctor adds yet another to the list of victims. This one leads us a pretty dance from Carfax to Summertown, and then declares he is not a member of the University. The Proctor smiles as a vision of Theodore Hook flashes across his mind; but, alas! the "bull-dog" recognises the prisoner as an old offender.

Unhappy man! Your dodge does not "go down," although beyond a doubt you will; for the Proctor will visit your double offence with summary rustication.

F.D.H.

UNEXPLAINED.

BY LETITA MCCLINTOCK.

"All ghost stories may be explained," said Mrs. Marchmont, smiling rather scornfully, and addressing a large circle of friends and neighbours who, one Christmas evening, were seated round her hospitable hearth.

"Ah! you think so? Pardon me, if I cannot agree with you," said Mr. Henniker, a well-known Dublin barrister, of burly frame and jovial countenance, famed for his wit and flow of anecdote.

The ladies of the party uttered exclamations in various keys, while the men looked attentive and interested. All that Mr. Henniker pleased to say was wont to command attention, in Dublin at least.

"So you think all ghost stories may be explained? What would Mrs. Marchmont say to our old woman in the black bonnet, Angela?" And the barrister turned to his quiet little wife, who rarely opened her lips. She was eager enough now.

"I wish I could quite forget that old woman, John, dear," she said, with a shiver.

"Won't you tell us, dear Mrs. Henniker? Please—please do!" cried the ladies in chorus.

"Nay; John must tell that tale," said the wife, shrinking into herself, as it were.

No one knew how it happened that the conversation had turned upon mesmerism, spiritualism and other themes trenching upon the supernatural. Perhaps the season, suggesting old-fashioned tales, had something to do with it; or maybe the whistling wind, mingling with the pattering of hail and rattle of cab-wheels, led the mind to brood over uncanny legends. Anyhow, all the company spoke of ghosts: some to mock, others to speculate; and here was the witty lawyer prepared to tell a grave tale of his own experience.

His jovial face grew stern. Like the Ancient Mariner, he addressed himself to one in company, but all were silent and attentive.

“You say all ghost stories may be explained, Mrs. Marchmont. So would I have said a year ago; but since we last met at your hospitable fireside, my wife and I have gone through a very astonishing experience. We ‘can a tale unfold.’ No man was better inclined to laugh at ghost stories than I.

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“Well, to begin my true tale. We wished for a complete change of scene last February, and Angela thought she would like to reside in the same county as her sisters and cousins and aunts—”

“Dorsetshire, I believe, Mrs. Henniker?” interrupted the lady of the house.

Angela nodded.

“I intended to take a house for my family, leave them comfortably settled in it, and run backwards and forwards between Dorsetshire and Dublin. Well, it so happened that I did leave them for a single day during the three months of my tenancy of the Hall. I had seen a wonderful advertisement of a spacious dwelling-house, with offices, gardens, pleasure grounds—to be had for fifty pounds per annum. I went to the agent to make inquiries.

“‘Is this flourishing advertisement correct?’ asked I.

“‘Perfectly.’

“‘What! so many advantages are to be had for fifty pounds a year?’

“‘Most certainly. I advise you to go and see for yourself.’

“I took the agent’s advice, and Angela was enchanted with the description I was able to give her on my return. A charming little park, beautifully planted with rare shrubs and trees—a bowery, secluded spot, so shut in by noble elms as to seem remote from the world. The house—such a mansion as in Ireland would be called Manor-house or Castle—large, lofty rooms thoroughly furnished, every modern improvement. My wife, as surprised as myself that a place of the kind should be going for a mere song, begged me to see the agent again, and close with him. It was done at once. I would have taken the Hall for a year, but Mr. Harold advised me not to do so. ‘Take it by the quarter, or at longest by the half-year,’ he recommended.

“I replied that it appeared such a desirable bargain that I wished to take it by the year. His answer to this was a reiteration of his first advice. I can’t tell you how he influenced me, for he really said no more than I tell you; but I yielded to his evident wish without knowing why I did so, and I closed with him for six months, not a year.”

“Glamour, Mr. Henniker!”

“It would seem so, Mrs. Marchmont. We went to the Hall, and Angela was delighted with it. The snowdrops lay in snowy masses about the grounds—the garden gave promise of beauty as the season advanced. How the children ran over the house! how

charmed we were with every nook and corner of it! Our own bed-room was a comfortable, large room, opening into a very roomy dressing-room, in which my wife placed two cribs for our youngest boys, Hal and Jack—”

“Don’t forget to say that our bed-chamber opened from a sitting-room,” interrupted Mrs. Henniker.

“Well, for three weeks we all slept the sleep of the just in our really splendid suite of apartments. Not a grumble from our servants—nothing but satisfaction with our rare bargain. I was on the eve of returning to dear, dirty Dublin and the Four Courts, when —”

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"When? We are all attention, Mr. Henniker."

"Angela and I were sitting in the drawing-room under the bed-chamber I have described, when a loud cry startled us, 'Mother, mother, mother!'

"The little boys were in bed in the dressing-room. Angela dropped her tea-cup and dashed out of the room, forgetting that there was no light in the rooms above us.

"I caught up a candle and followed her quickly. We found the children sobbing wildly. Jack's arms were almost strangling his mother, while he cried in great excitement, 'Oh, the old woman in the black bonnet! The old woman in the black bonnet! Oh—oh—oh!'

"I thought a little fatherly correction would be beneficial, but Angela would not suffer me to interfere. She tried to soothe the little beggars, and in a few minutes they were coherent enough in their story. A frightful old woman, wearing a black bonnet, had been in the room. She came close to them and bent over their cribs, with her dreadful face near to theirs.

"How did you see her?' we asked. 'There was no candle here.'

"She had light about her, they said; at any rate, they saw her quite well. An exhaustive search was made. No trace of a human being was to be found. I refrained from speaking to the other children, who slept in an upper story, though I softly entered their rooms and examined presses and wardrobes, and peeped behind dark corners, laughing in my sleeve all the while. Of course we both believed that Hal had been frightened by a dream, and that his little brother had roared from sympathy. 'Don't breathe a word of this to the servants,' whispered Mrs. Henniker. 'I'm not such a fool, my dear,' I replied. 'But pray search the lower regions, and see if Jane and Nancy have any visitor in the kitchen,' she continued. 'She came through your door, mother, from the sitting-room,' sobbed Hal, with eyes starting out of his head.

"Who, love?' asked his mother.

"The old woman in the black bonnet. Oh, don't go away, mother.'

"So Angela had to spend the remainder of the evening between the children's cribs.

"What can we do to-morrow evening?' asked she. 'I have it! Lucy shall be put to bed beside Jack.' Lucy was our youngest, aged two.

"All went well next night. There was no alarm to summon us from our papers and novels, and we went to bed at eleven, Angela remarking that the three cherubs were sleeping beautifully, and that it had been a good move to let Lucy bear the other two company. I was roused out of sound sleep by wild shrieks from the three children.

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“What! more bad dreams? This sort of thing must be put a stop to,” I said; and I confess I was very angry with the young rascals. My wife was fumbling for the match-box. ‘Hush!’ she whispered, ‘there *is* somebody in the room.’ And I, too, at that instant, felt the presence of some creature besides ourselves and the children. The candle lighted, we again reconnoitred—nothing to be seen in dressing-room, bed-room, or *the drawing-room beyond*, the door of which was shut. But the curious sense of a presence near us—stronger than any feeling of the kind I had ever previously experienced—was gone. You have all felt the presence of another person unseen. You may be writing—you have not heard the door open, but though your back is towards the visitor, you know somehow that he has entered.”

“Quite true, Mr. Henniker—but there is nothing unnatural or unpleasant in that sensation.”

“Nothing, of course; I merely instance it to give you some idea of what we felt on that occasion. We were astonished to find the sitting-room untenanted. Meanwhile poor Hal, Jack and Lucy shrieked in chorus ‘Oh, the old woman in the black bonnet! Oh, take her away!’

“Poor Angela, trembling, hung over the cribs trying to soothe the children. It was a good while before they could tell what had happened. ‘She came again,’ said Hal, ‘and she came close, close to me, and she put her *cold* face down near my cheek till she touched me, and I don’t like her—oh, I don’t like her, mother!’

“Did she go to Jack and Lucy too?”

“Yes, yes; and she made *them* cry as well.’

“Why do you not like her? Is it the black bonnet? You dreamt of a black bonnet last night, you know,’ said I, half-puzzled, half-provoked.

“She’s so frightful,’ cried Hal.

“How could you see her? There was no candle.’

“This question perplexed the little boys. They persisted that she had a light about her somewhere. I need hardly say that there was no comfort for us the rest of the night. ‘If anyone is trying to frighten us out of the place, I’ll be even with him yet,’ said I. My wife believed that a trick had been played upon the children, and she was most indignant.

“Next day the cribs were removed to the upper story, and Charlotte and Joanna, our daughters of twelve and fourteen, were put to sleep in the dressing-room. We predicted an end to the annoyance we had been suffering. The nurse was a quick-tempered woman, who would not stand any nonsense, and Hal’s bad dreams would be sternly driven away. We settled ourselves to our comfortable light reading by the drawing-room

fire. Suddenly there was a commotion overhead; an outcry—surprised more than terrified, it sounded to us. Angela laid her book down quickly and listened with all her ears. Fast-flying footsteps were heard above; the clapping of a door; then—scurry, scurry—the patter of bare feet down the staircase. We hurried across the hall, and saw Charlotte in her nightgown returning slowly up the kitchen stairs, with a puzzled expression on her honest face.

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“What on earth are you doing, child?” cried Angela.

“I was giving chase to a hideous old woman in a black bonnet, who chose to intrude upon us,” panted Charlotte. “I saw her in our room; I jumped out of bed and pursued her through your room and the sitting-room. Then I saw her before me going downstairs, and I ran after her; but the door at the foot of the kitchen staircase was shut. She certainly could not have had time to open it, and I really don’t know where she can have gone to!”

“This was Charlotte’s explanation of her mad scurry downstairs. Her downright sensible face was puzzled and angry.

“So you see the little ones must have been tormented by that old wretch, whoever she is. They didn’t dream it, father, as you thought. Wouldn’t I like to punish her!”

“What a brave girl!” cried Mrs. Marchmont.

“Brave? Oh, Charlotte’s as bold as a lion! She went back to bed; and when we followed her, in a couple of hours, she was sleeping soundly. But I can’t say either of *us* slept so well. If a trick was being played upon us, it was carried out in so clever a manner as to baffle me completely. I need not say that I made careful search of every cranny about the handsome house and offices; and if there was a secret passage or a door in the wall anywhere, it escaped me. We had peace for a fortnight, and then the annoyance recommenced.

“Angela’s nerve was shaken at last, and she began to whisper, ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio’—”

“John, you are making a story!” interrupted Mrs. Henniker.

“It is every word true. I am coming to an end. Angela, in spite of her disclaimer, *did* believe in a ghost in a black bonnet. Charlotte believed in her, but did not care about her ghostship. The nurse and cook and housemaid declared they were meeting the horrible appearance constantly; and they were all three in a mortal funk. As to the children, they would not leave off clinging to their mother, and fretting and trembling when evening came. The milkman, the baker and the butcher, all told the servants that we would not be long at the Hall, for nobody ever remained more than a month or two. This was cheerful and encouraging for me!”

“But you had never seen the charming old woman all this time?”

“No; but I saw her in the broad daylight. I had a good long look at her, and a more diabolical face I never saw—no, not even in the dock. I was writing letters in the study about twelve o’clock one morning, when I suddenly looked up, to see the appearance that had excited such a turmoil in my family standing near the table. A frightful face—a



short-set woman dressed in black—gown, shawl, bonnet—this was the impression I received. But she looked quite human—quite everyday—there was nothing ghostly in her air—only the evil face curdled one's blood. I stared at her, and then I took up a folded newspaper and threw

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it at her. My motive in so doing was to frighten her who had frightened my wife so much. Courtesy such a creature need not expect from me, being, as her villainous countenance proved, one of the criminal class. The newspaper fell upon the floor, after apparently going through the figure, and there was a vacuum where it had been. I was not much shaken, however, although my theory of a human trickster dressed like a woman seemed overturned.”

“Did you tell Mrs. Henniker what you had seen?”

“Naturally I did. At this period we talked of nothing else. She saw the apparition twice herself. Once she entered our dressing-room and saw the figure bending over a sleeping child (it faded as she looked); another time she was with me in the drawing-room, when she laid down her book and whispered, ‘See, see, near the door!’ There, sure enough was the appearance that had visited me in the study in clear daylight. I did not make her out quite as distinctly now because our candles did not light up that end of the long room, or my older eyes were not as good as Angela’s.”

“What did Mrs. Henniker do?”

“She started up and ran to catch the old woman in the black bonnet.”

“And did she catch her?”

“She caught a *shiver*—nothing more!

“After this I resolved to give up the Hall at once, sacrificing four months’ rent for the sake of my wife and children, whose nerves would have soon become shattered had we remained. I went to Mr. Harold and told him how disagreeable the place was to us. He was grave and very guarded in manner, confessing that no tenant stayed more than a couple of months at the Hall—that his client certainly made considerably in consequence—that he had done his utmost to find out what was wrong with the house, but all in vain. Mr. J—— would not speak about it, and when strenuously urged to explain, replied emphatically—‘*I shall never tell you the story of that house.*’

“We dismissed the servants with handsome presents at once on our return to Dublin, so desirous were we that the children should never be reminded of their terror. I think they have not heard the old woman in the black bonnet spoken of since we left the Hall, and the younger ones have probably forgotten her. As to us, we can only say that the mystery is unexplained.”