

The Argosy eBook

The Argosy

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Contents

The Argosy eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	14
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	25
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	28
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	31
Page 17.....	32
Page 18.....	33
Page 19.....	34
Page 20.....	35
Page 21.....	36
Page 22.....	38



Page 23..... 40

Page 24..... 42

Page 25..... 44

Page 26..... 46

Page 27..... 48

Page 28..... 50

Page 29..... 52

Page 30..... 54

Page 31..... 56

Page 32..... 58

Page 33..... 60

Page 34..... 62

Page 35..... 64

Page 36..... 66

Page 37..... 68

Page 38..... 70

Page 39..... 72

Page 40..... 74

Page 41..... 75

Page 42..... 76

Page 43..... 78

Page 44..... 80

Page 45..... 81

Page 46..... 82

Page 47..... 84

Page 48..... 85



[Page 49..... 87](#)

[Page 50..... 88](#)

[Page 51..... 89](#)

[Page 52..... 91](#)

[Page 53..... 93](#)

[Page 54..... 94](#)

[Page 55..... 96](#)

[Page 56..... 98](#)

[Page 57..... 99](#)

[Page 58..... 100](#)

[Page 59..... 102](#)

[Page 60..... 103](#)

[Page 61..... 105](#)

[Page 62..... 106](#)

[Page 63..... 108](#)

[Page 64..... 110](#)

[Page 65..... 112](#)

[Page 66..... 114](#)

[Page 67..... 115](#)

[Page 68..... 117](#)

[Page 69..... 119](#)

[Page 70..... 121](#)

[Page 71..... 123](#)

[Page 72..... 125](#)

[Page 73..... 127](#)

[Page 74..... 128](#)



[Page 75..... 130](#)
[Page 76..... 132](#)
[Page 77..... 134](#)



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
THE ARGOSY.		1
THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.		1
CHAPTER XVIII.		1
CHAPTER XIX.		4
CHAPTER XX.		8
CHAPTER XXI.		15
ON LETTER-WRITING.		21
THE SILENT CHIMES.		23
II.		27
III.		34
THE BRETONS AT HOME.		39
MY MAY-QUEEN		55
SWEET NANCY.		55
II.		60
III.		63
IV.		65
PAUL.		68
II.		72
THE CHURCH GARDEN.		76



Page 1

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1891.

THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Janet in A new character.

On entering Lady Chillington's room for the second time, Janet found that the mistress of Deepley Walls had completed her toilette in the interim, and was now sitting robed in stiff rustling silk, with an Indian fan in one hand and a curiously-chased vinaigrette in the other. She motioned with her fan to Janet. "Be seated," she said, in the iciest of tones; and Janet sat down on a chair a yard or two removed from her ladyship.

"Since you were here last, Miss Hope," she began, "I have seen Sister Agnes, who informs me that she has already given you an outline of the duties I shall require you to perform should you agree to accept the situation which ill-health obliges her to vacate. At the same time, I wish you clearly to understand that I do not consider you in any way bound by what I have done for you in the time gone by, neither would I have you in this matter run counter to your inclinations in the slightest degree. If you would prefer that a situation as governess should be obtained for you, say so without hesitation; and any small influence I may have shall be used ungrudgingly in your behalf. Should you agree to remain at Deepley Walls, your salary will be thirty guineas a-year. If you wish it, you can take a day for consideration, and let me have your decision in the morning."

Lady Chillington's mention of a fixed salary stung Janet to the quick: it was so entirely unexpected. It stung her, but only for a moment; the next she saw and gratefully recognised the fact that she should no longer be a pensioner on the bounty of Lady Chillington. A dependent she might be—a servant even, if you like; but at least she would be earning her living by the labour of her own hands; and even about the very thought of such a thing there was a sweet sense of independence that flushed her warmly through and through.

Her hesitation lasted but a moment, then she spoke. "Your ladyship is very kind, but I require no time for consideration," she said. "I have already made up my mind to take the position which you have so generously offered me; and if my ability to please you only prove equal to my inclination, you will not have much cause to complain."

A faint smile of something like satisfaction flitted across Lady Chillington's face. "Very good, Miss Hope," she said, in a more gracious tone than she had yet used. "I am



pleased to find that you have taken so sensible a view of the matter, and that you understand so thoroughly your position under my roof. How soon shall you be prepared to begin your new duties?"

"I am ready at this moment."

"Come to me an hour hence, and I will then instruct you."



Page 2

In this second interview, brief though it was, Janet could not avoid being struck by Lady Chillington's stately dignity of manner. Her tone and style were those of a high-bred gentlewoman. It seemed scarcely possible that she and the querulous, shrivelled-up old woman in the cashmere dressing-robe could be one and the same individual.

Unhappily, as Janet to her cost was not long in finding out, her ladyship's querulous moods were much more frequent than her moods of quiet dignity. At such times she was very difficult to please; sometimes, indeed, it was utterly impossible to please her: not even an angel could have done it. Then, indeed, Janet felt her duty weigh very hardly upon her. By nature her temper was quick and passionate—her impulses high and generous; but when Lady Chillington was in her worse moods, she had to curb the former as with an iron chain; while the latter were outraged continually by Lady Chillington's mean and miserly mode of life, and by a certain low and sordid tone of thought which at such times pervaded all she said and did. And yet, strange to say, she had rare fits of generosity and goodwill—times when her soul seemed to sit in sackcloth and ashes, as if in repentance for those other occasions when the "dark fit" was on her, and the things of this world claimed her too entirely as their own.

After her second interview with Lady Chillington, Janet at once hurried off to Sister Agnes to tell her the news. "On one point only, so far as I see at present, shall I require any special information," she said. "I shall need to know exactly the mode of procedure necessary to be observed when I pay my midnight visits to Sir John Chillington."

"It is not my intention that you should visit Sir John," said Sister Agnes. "That portion of my old duties will continue to be performed by me."

"Not until you are stronger—not until your health is better than it is now," said Janet earnestly. "I am young and strong; it is merely a part of what I have undertaken to do, and you must please let me do it. I have outgrown my childish fears, and could visit the Black Room now without the quiver of a nerve."

"You think so by daylight, but wait until the house is dark and silent, and then say the same conscientiously, if you can do so."

But Janet was determined not to yield the point, nor could Sister Agnes move her from her decision. Ultimately a compromise was entered into by which it was agreed that for one evening at least they should visit the Black Room together, and that the settlement of the question should be left until the following day.

Precisely as midnight struck they set out together up the wide, old-fashioned staircase, past the door of Janet's old room, up the narrower staircase beyond, until the streak of light came into view and the grim, nail-studded door itself was reached. Janet was secretly glad that she was not there alone; so much she acknowledged to herself as they halted for a moment while Sister Agnes unlocked the door. But when the latter

asked her if she were not afraid, if she would not much rather be snug in bed, Janet only said: "Give me the key; tell me what I have to do inside the room, and then leave me."



Page 3

But Sister Agnes would not consent to that, and they entered the room together. Instead of seven years, it seemed to Janet only seven hours since she had been there last, so vividly was the recollection of her first visit still impressed upon her mind. Everything was unchanged in that chamber of the dead, except, perhaps, the sprawling cupids on the ceiling, which looked a shade dingier than of old, and more in need of soap and water than ever. But the black draperies on the walls, the huge candles in the silver tripods, the pall-covered coffin in the middle of the room, were all as Janet had seen them last. There, too, was the oaken *prie-dieu* a yard or two away from the head of the coffin. Sister Agnes knelt on it for a few moments, and bent her head in silent prayer.

“My visit to this room every midnight,” said Sister Agnes, “is made for the simple purpose of renewing the candles, and of seeing that everything is as it should be. That the visit should be made at midnight, and at no other time, is one of Lady Chillington’s whims—a whim that by process of time has crystallised into a law. The room is never entered by day.”

“Was it whim or madness that caused Sir John Chillington to leave orders that his body should be kept above ground for twenty years?”

“Who shall tell by what motive he was influenced when he had that particular clause inserted in his will? Deepley Walls itself hangs on the proper fulfilment of the clause. If Lady Chillington were to cause her husband’s remains to be interred in the family vault before the expiry of the twenty years, the very day she did so the estate would pass from her to the present baronet, a distant cousin, between whom and her ladyship there has been a bitter feud of many years’ standing. Although Deepley Walls has been in the family for a hundred and fifty years, it has never been entailed. The entailed estate is in Yorkshire, and there Sir Mark, the present baronet, resides. Lady Chillington has the power of bequeathing Deepley Walls to whomsoever she may please, providing she carry out strictly the instructions contained in her husband’s will. It is possible that in a court of law the will might have been set aside on the ground of insanity, or the whole matter might have been thrown into Chancery. But Lady Chillington did not choose to submit to such an ordeal. All the courts of law in the kingdom could have given her no more than she possessed already—they could merely have given her permission to bury her husband’s body, and it did not seem to her that such a permission could compensate for turning into public gossip a private chapter of family history. So here Sir John Chillington has remained since his death, and here he will stay till the last of the twenty years has become a thing of the past. Two or three times every year Mr. Winter, Sir Mark’s lawyer, comes over to Deepley Walls to satisfy himself by ocular proof that Sir John’s instructions are being duly carried out. This he has a legal right to do in the interests of his client. Sometimes he is conducted to this room by Lady Chillington, sometimes by me; but even in his case her ladyship will not relax her rule of not having the room visited by day.”



Page 4

Sister Agnes then showed Janet that behind the black draperies there was a cupboard in the wall, which on being opened proved to contain a quantity of large candles. One by one Sister Agnes took out of the silver tripods what remained of the candles of the previous day, and filled up their places with fresh ones. Janet looked on attentively. Then, for the second time, Sister Agnes knelt on the *prie-dieu* for a few moments, and then she and Janet left the room.

Next day Sister Agnes was so ill, and Janet pressed so earnestly to be allowed to attend to the Black Room in place of her, and alone, that she was obliged to give a reluctant consent.

It was not without an inward tremor that Janet heard the clock strike twelve. Sister Agnes had insisted on accompanying her part of the way upstairs, and would, in fact, have gone the whole distance with her, had not Janet insisted on going forward alone. In a single breath, as it seemed to her, she ran up the remaining stairs, unlocked the door, and entered the room. Her nerves were not sufficiently composed to allow of her making use of the *prie-dieu*. All she cared for just then was to get through her duty as quickly as possible, and return in safety to the world of living beings downstairs. She set her teeth, and by a supreme effort of will went through the small duty that was required of her steadily but swiftly. Her face was never turned away from the coffin the whole time; and when she had finished her task she walked backwards to the door, opened it, walked backwards out, and in another breath was downstairs, and safe in the protecting arms of Sister Agnes.

Next night she insisted upon going entirely alone, and made so light of the matter that Sister Agnes no longer opposed her wish to make the midnight visit to the Black Room a part of her ordinary duty. But inwardly Janet could never quite overcome her secret awe of the room and its silent occupant. She always dreaded the coming of the hour that took her there, and when her task was over, she never closed the door without a feeling of relief. In this case, custom with her never bred familiarity. To the last occasion of her going there she went the prey of hidden fears—fears of she knew not what, which she derided to herself even while they made her their victim. There was a morbid thread running through the tissue of her nerves, which by intense force of will might be kept from growing and spreading, but which no effort of hers could quite pluck out or eradicate.

CHAPTER XIX.

The dawn of love.

Major Strickland did not forget his promise to Janet. On the eighth morning after his return from London he walked over from Eastbury to Deepley Walls, saw Lady Chillington, and obtained leave of absence for Miss Hope for the day. Then he paid a

flying visit to Sister Agnes, for whom he had a great reverence and admiration, and ended by carrying off Janet in triumph.



Page 5

The park of Deepley Walls extends almost to the suburbs of Eastbury, a town of eight thousand inhabitants, but of such small commercial importance that the nearest railway station is three miles away across country and nearly five miles from Deepley Walls.

Major Strickland no longer resided at Rose Cottage, but at a pretty little villa just outside Eastbury. Some small accession of fortune had come to him by the death of a relative; and an addition to his family in the person of Aunt Felicite, a lady old and nearly blind, the widow of a kinsman of the Major. Besides its tiny lawn and flower-beds in front, the Lindens had a long stretch of garden ground behind, otherwise the Major would scarcely have been happy in his new home. He was secretary to the Eastbury Horticultural Society, and his fame as a grower of prize roses and geraniums was in these latter days far sweeter to him than any fame that had ever accrued to him as a soldier.

Janet found Aunt Felicite a most quaint and charming old lady, as cheerful and full of vivacity as many a girl of seventeen. She kissed Janet on both cheeks when the Major introduced her; asked whether she was fiancee; complimented her on her French; declaimed a passage from Racine; put her poodle through a variety of amusing tricks; and pressed Janet to assist at her luncheon of cream cheese, French roll, strawberries and white wine.

A slight sense of disappointment swept across Janet's mind, like the shadow of a cloud across a sunny field. She had been two hours at the Lindens without having seen Captain George. In vain she told herself that she had come to spend the day with Major Strickland, and to be introduced to Aunt Felicite, and that nothing more was wanting to her complete contentment. That something more was needed she knew quite well, but she would not acknowledge it even to herself. *He* knew of her coming; he had been with Aunt Felicite only half an hour before—so much she learned within five minutes of her arrival; yet now, at the end of two hours, he had not condescended even to come and speak to her. She roused herself from the sense of despondency that was creeping over her and put on a gaiety that she was far from feeling. A very bitter sense of self-contempt was just then at work in her heart; she felt that never before had she despised herself so utterly. She took her hat in her hand, and put her arm within the Major's and walked with him round his little demesne. It was a walk that took up an hour or more, for there was much to see and learn, and Janet was bent this morning on having a long lesson in botany; and the old soldier was only too happy in having secured a listener so enthusiastic and appreciative to whom he could dilate on his favourite hobby.

But all this time Janet's eyes and ears were on the alert in a double sense of which the Major knew nothing. He was busy with a description of the last spring flower show, and how the Duke of Cheltenham's auriculas were by no means equal to those of Major Strickland, when Janet gave a little start as though a gnat had stung her, and bent to smell a sweet blush-rose, whose tints were rivalled by the sudden delicate glow that flushed her cheek.



Page 6

“Yes, yes!” she said, hurriedly, as the Major paused for a moment; “and so the Duke’s gardener was jealous because you carried away the prize?”

“I never saw a man more put out in my life,” said the Major. “He shook his fist at my flowers and said before everybody, ‘Let the old Major only wait till autumn and then see if my dahlias don’t—’ But yonder comes Geordie. Bless my heart! what has he been doing at Eastbury all this time?”

Janet’s instinct had not deceived her; she had heard and recognised his footstep a full minute before the Major knew that he was near. She gave one quick, shy glance round as he opened the gate, and then she wandered a yard or two further down the path.

“Good-morning, uncle,” said Captain George, as he came up. “You set out for Deepley Walls so early this morning that I did not see you before you started. I am glad to find that you did not come back alone.”

Janet had turned as he began to speak, but did not come back to the Major’s side. Captain George advanced a few steps and lifted his hat.

“Good-morning, Miss Hope,” he said, with outstretched hand. “I need hardly say how pleased I am to see you at the Lindens. My uncle has succeeded so well on his first embassy that we must send him again, and often, on the same errand.”

Janet murmured a few words in reply—what, she could not afterwards have told; but as her eyes met his for a moment, she read in them something that made her forgive him on the spot, even while she declared to herself that she had nothing to forgive, and that brought to her cheek a second blush more vivid than the first.

“All very well, young gentleman,” said the Major; “but you have not yet explained your four hours’ absence. We shall order you under arrest unless you have some reasonable excuse to submit.”

“The best of all excuses—that of urgent business,” said the Captain.

“You! business!” said the laughing Major. “Why, it was only last night that you were bewailing your lot as being one of those unhappy mortals who have no work to do.”

“To those they love, the gods lend patient hearing. I forget the Latin, but that does not matter just now. What I wish to convey is this—that I need no longer be idle unless I choose. I have found some work to do. Lend me your ears, both of you. About an hour after you, sir, had started for Deepley Walls, I received a note from the editor of the *Eastbury Courier*, in which he requested me to give him an early call. My curiosity prompted me to look in upon him as soon as breakfast was over. I found that he was brother to the editor of one of the London magazines—a gentleman whom I met one evening at a party in town. The London editor remembered me, and had written to the



Eastbury editor to make arrangements with me for writing a series of magazine articles on India and my experiences there during the late mutiny. I need not bore you with details; it is sufficient to say that my objections were talked down one by one; and I left the office committed to a sixteen-page article by the sixth of next month.”



Page 7

“You an author!” exclaimed the Major. “I should as soon have thought of your enlisting in the Marines.”

“It will only be for a few months, uncle—only till my limited stock of experiences shall be exhausted. After that I shall be relegated to my natural obscurity, doubtless never to emerge again.”

“Hem,” said the Major, nervously. “Geordie, my boy, I have by me one or two little poems which I wrote when I was about nineteen—trifles flung off on the inspiration of the moment. Perhaps, when you come to know your friend the editor better than you do now, you might induce him to bring them out—to find an odd corner for them in his magazine. I shouldn’t want payment for them, you know. You might just mention that fact; and I assure you that I have seen many worse things than they are in print.”

“What, uncle, you an author! Oh, fie! I should as soon have thought of your wishing to dance on the tight-rope as to appear in print. But we must look over these little effusions—eh, Miss Hope. We must unearth this genius, and be the first to give his lucubrations to the world.”

“If you were younger, sir, or I not quite so old, I would box your ears,” said the Major, who seemed hardly to know whether to laugh or be angry. Finally he laughed, George and Janet chimed in, and all three went back indoors.

After an early dinner the Major took rod and line and set off to capture a few trout for supper. Aunt Felicite took her post-prandial nap discreetly, in an easy-chair, and Captain George and Miss Hope were left to their own devices. In Love’s sweet Castle of Indolence the hours that make up a summer afternoon pass like so many minutes. These two had blown the magic horn and had gone in. The gates of brass had closed behind them, shutting them up from the common outer world. Over all things was a glamour as of witchcraft. Soft music filled the air; soft breezes came to them as from fields of amaranth and asphodel. They walked ever in a magic circle, that widened before them as they went. Eros in passing had touched them with his golden dart. Each of them hid the sweet sting from the other, yet neither of them would have been whole again for anything the world could have offered. What need to tell the old story over again—the story of the dawn of love in two young hearts that had never loved before?

Janet went home that night in a flutter of happiness—a happiness so sweet and strange and yet so vague that she could not have analysed it even had she been casuist enough to try to do so. But she was content to accept the fact as a fact; beyond that she cared nothing. No syllable of love had been spoken between her and George: they had passed what to an outsider would have seemed a very common-place afternoon. They had talked together—not sentiment, but every-day topics of the world around them; they had read together—poetry, but nothing more passionate than “Aurora Leigh;”

they had walked together—rather a silent and stupid walk, our friendly outsider would have urged; but if they were content, no one else had any right to complain. And so the day had worn itself away—a red-letter day for ever in the calendar of their young lives.



Page 8

CHAPTER XX.

The narrative of Sergeant Nicholas.

One morning when Janet had been about three weeks at Deepley Walls, she was summoned to the door by one of the servants, and found there a tall, thin, middle-aged man, dressed in plain clothes, and having all the appearance of a discharged soldier.

"I have come a long way, miss," he said to Janet, carrying a finger to his forehead, "in order to see Lady Chillington and have a little private talk with her."

"I am afraid that her ladyship will scarcely see you, unless you can give her some idea of the business that you have called upon."

"My name, miss, is Sergeant John Nicholas. I served formerly in India, where I was body-servant to her ladyship's son, Captain Charles Chillington, who died there of cholera nearly twenty years ago, and I have something of importance to communicate."

Janet made the old soldier come in and sit down in the hall while she took his message to Lady Chillington. Her ladyship was not yet up, but was taking her chocolate in bed, with a faded Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders. She began to tremble violently the moment Janet delivered the old soldier's message, and could scarcely set down her cup and saucer. Then she began to cry, and to kiss the hem of the Indian shawl. Janet went softly out of the room and waited. She had never even heard of this Captain Charles Chillington, and yet no mere empty name could have thus affected the stern mistress of Deepley Walls. Those few tears opened up quite a new view of Lady Chillington's character. Janet began to see that there might be elements of tragedy in the old woman's life of which she knew nothing: that many of the moods which seemed to her so strange and inexplicable might be so merely for want of the key by which alone they could be rightly read.

Presently her ladyship's gong sounded. Janet went back into the room, and found her still sitting up in bed, sipping her chocolate with a steady hand. All traces of tears had vanished: she looked even more stern and repressed than usual.

"Request the person of whom you spoke to me a while ago to wait," she said. "I will see him at eleven in my private sitting-room."

So Sergeant Nicholas was sent to get his breakfast in the servants' room, and wait till Lady Chillington was ready to receive him.

At eleven precisely he was summoned to her ladyship's presence. She received him with stately graciousness, and waved him to a chair a yard or two away. She was



dressed for the day in one of her stiff brocaded silks, and sat as upright as a dart, manipulating a small fan. Miss Hope stood close at the back of her chair.

“So, my good man, I understand that you were acquainted with my son, the late Captain Chillington, who died in India twenty years ago?”

“I was his body-servant for two years previous to his death.”



Page 9

“Were you with him when he died?”

“I was, your ladyship. These fingers closed his eyes.”

The hand that held the fan began to tremble again. She remained silent for a few moments, and by a strong effort overmastered her agitation.

“You have some communication which you wish to make to me respecting my dead son?”

“I have, your ladyship. A communication of a very singular kind.”

“Why has it not been made before now?”

“That your ladyship will learn in the course of what I have to say. But perhaps you will kindly allow me to tell my story my own way.”

“By all means. Pray begin: I am all attention.”

The Sergeant touched his forelock, gave a preliminary cough, fixed his clear grey eye on Lady Chillington, and began his narrative as under:—

“Your ladyship and miss: I, John Nicholas, a Staffordshire man born and bred, went out to India twenty-three years ago as lance corporal in the hundred-and-first regiment of foot. After I had been in India a few months, I got drunk and misbehaved myself, and was reduced to the ranks. Well, ma’am, Captain Chillington took a fancy to me, thought I was not such a bad dog after all, and got me appointed as his servant. And a better master no man need ever wish to have—kind, generous, and a perfect gentleman from top to toe. I loved him, and would have gone through fire and water to serve him.”

Her ladyship’s fan was trembling again. “Oblige me with my salts, Miss Hope,” she said. She pressed them to her nose, and motioned to the Sergeant to proceed.

“When I had been with the Captain a few months,” resumed the old soldier, “he got leave of absence for several weeks, and everybody knew that it was his intention to spend his holiday in a shooting excursion among the hills. I was to go with him, of course, and the usual troop of native servants; but besides himself there was only one European gentleman in the party, and he was not an Englishman. He was a Russian, and his name was Platzoff. He was a gentleman of fortune, and was travelling in India at the time, and had come to my master with letters of introduction. Well, Captain Chillington just took wonderfully to him, and the two were almost inseparable. Perhaps it hardly becomes one like me to offer an opinion on such a point; but, knowing what afterwards happened, I must say that I never either liked or trusted that Russian from the day I first set eyes on him. He seemed to me too double-faced and cunning for an honest English gentleman to have much to do with. But he had travelled a great deal,



and was very good company, which was perhaps the reason why Captain Chillington took so kindly to him. Be that as it may, however, it was decided that they should go on the hunting excursion together—not that the Russian was much of a shot, or cared a great deal about hunting, but because, as I heard him say, he liked to see all kinds of life, and tiger-stalking was something quite fresh to him.



Page 10

“He was a curious-looking gentleman, too, that Russian—just the sort of face that you would never forget after once seeing it, with skin that was dried and yellow like parchment; black hair that was trained into a heavy curl on the top of his forehead, and a big hooked nose.

“Well, your ladyship and miss, away we went with our elephants and train of servants, and very pleasantly we spent our two months’ leave of absence. The Captain he shot tigers, and the Russian he did his best at pig-sticking. Our last week had come, and in three more days we were to set off on our return, when that terrible misfortune happened which deprived me of the best of masters, and your ladyship of the best of sons.

“Early one morning I was roused by Rung Budruck, the Captain’s favourite sycee or groom. ‘Get up at once,’ he said, shaking me by the shoulder. ‘The sahib Captain is very ill. The black devil has seized him. He must have opium or he will die.’ I ran at once to the Captain’s tent, and as soon as I set eyes on him I saw that he had been seized with cholera. I went off at once and fetched M. Platzoff. We had nothing in the way of medicine with us except brandy and opium. Under the Russian’s directions these were given to my poor master in large quantities, but he grew gradually worse. Rung and I in everything obeyed M. Platzoff, who seemed to know quite well what ought to be done in such cases; and to tell the truth, your ladyship, he seemed as much put about as if the Captain had been his own brother. Well, the Captain grew weaker as the day went on, and towards evening it grew quite clear that he could not last much longer. The pain had left him by this time, but he was so frightfully reduced that we could not bring him round. He was lying in every respect like one already dead, except for his faint breathing, when the Russian left the tent for a moment, and I took his place at the head of the bed. Rung was standing with folded arms a yard or two away. None of the other native servants could be persuaded to enter the tent, so frightened were they of catching the complaint. Suddenly my poor master opened his eyes, and his lips moved. I put my ear to his mouth. ‘The diamond,’ he whispered. ‘Take it—mother—give my love.’ Not a word more on earth, your ladyship. His limbs stiffened; his head fell back; he gave a great sigh and died. I gently closed the eyes that could see no more, and left the tent crying.

“Your ladyship, we buried Captain Chillington by torchlight four hours later. We dug his grave deep in a corner of the jungle, and there we left him to his last sleep. Over his grave we piled a heap of stones, as I have read that they used to do in the old times over the grave of a chief. It was all we could do.

“About an hour later M. Platzoff came to me. ‘I shall start before daybreak for Chinapore,’ he said, ‘with one elephant and a couple of men. I will take with me the news of my poor friend’s untimely fate, and you can come on with the luggage and other effects in the ordinary way. You will find me at Chinapore when you reach there.’ Next morning I found that he was gone.



Page 11

“What my dear master had said with his last breath about a diamond puzzled me. I could only conclude that amongst his effects there must be some valuable stone of which he wished special care to be taken, and which he desired to be sent home to you, madam, in England. I knew nothing of any such stone, and I considered it beyond my position to search for it among his luggage. I decided that when I got to Chinapore I would give his message to the Colonel, and leave that gentleman to take such steps in the matter as he might think best.

“I had hardly settled all this in my mind when Rung Budruck came to me. ‘The Russian sahib has gone: I have something to tell you,’ he said, only he spoke in broken English. ‘Yesterday, just after the sahib Captain was dead, the Russian came back. You had left the tent, and I was sitting on the ground behind the Captain’s big trunk, the lid of which was open. I was sitting with my chin in my hand, very sad at heart, when the Russian came in. He looked carefully round the tent. Me he could not see, but I could see him through the opening between the hinges of the box. What did he do? He unfastened the bosom of the sahib Captain’s shirt, and then he drew over the Captain’s head the steel chain with the little gold box hanging to it that he always wore. He opened the box, and saw there was that in it which he expected to find there. Then he hid away both chain and box in one of his pockets, rebuttoned the dead man’s shirt, and left the tent.’ ‘But you have not told me what there was in the box,’ I said. He put the tips of his fingers together and smiled: ‘In that box was the Great Hara Diamond!’

“Your ladyship, I was so startled when Rung said this that the wind of a bullet would have knocked me down. A new light was all at once thrown on the Captain’s dying words. ‘But how do you know, Rung, that the box contained a diamond?’ I asked when I had partly got over my surprise. He smiled again, with that strange slow smile which those fellows have. ‘It matters not how, but Rung knew that the diamond was there. He had seen the Captain open the box, and take it out and look at it many a time when the Captain thought no one could see him. He could have stolen it from him almost any night when he was asleep, but that was left for his friend to do.’ ‘Was the diamond you speak of a very valuable one?’ I asked. ‘It was a green diamond of immense value,’ answered Rung; ‘it was called *The Great Hara* because of its colour, and it was first worn by the terrible Aureng-Zebe himself, who had it set in the haft of his scimitar.’ ‘But by what means did Captain Chillington become possessed of so valuable a stone?’ Said he, ‘Two years ago, at the risk of his own life, he rescued the eldest son of the Rajah of Gondulpootra from a tiger who had carried away the child into the jungle. The Rajah is one of the richest men in India, and he showed his gratitude by secretly presenting the Great Hara Diamond to the man who had saved the



Page 12

life of his child.' 'But why should Captain Chillington carry so valuable a stone about his person?' I asked. 'Would it not have been wiser to deposit it in the bank at Bombay till such time as the Captain could take it with him to England?' 'The stone is a charmed stone,' said Rung, 'and it was the Rajah's particular wish that the sahib Chillington should always wear it about his person. So long as he did so he could not come to his death by fire by water, or by sword thrust.' Said I, 'But how did the Russian know that Captain Chillington carried the diamond about his person?' 'One night when the Captain had had too much wine he showed the diamond to his friend,' answered Rung. Said I, 'But how does it happen, Rung, that you know this?' Rung, smiling and putting his finger tips together, replied, 'How does it happen that I know so much about you?' And then he told me a lot of things about myself that I thought no soul in India knew. It was just wonderful how he did it. 'So it is: let that be sufficient,' he finished by saying. 'Why did you not tell me till after the Russian had gone away that you saw him steal the diamond?' said I. 'If you had told me at the time I could have charged him with it.' 'You are ignorant,' said Rung; 'you are little more than a child. The Russian sahib had the evil eye. Had I crossed his purpose before his face he would have cursed me while he looked at me, and I should have withered away and died. He has got the diamond, and only by magic can it ever be recovered from him.'

"Your ladyship and miss, I hope I am not tedious nor wandering from the point. It will be sufficient to say that when I got down to Chinapore I found that M. Platzoff had indeed been there, but only just long enough to see the Colonel and give him an account of Captain Chillington's death, after which he had at once engaged a palanquin and bearers and set out with all speed for Bombay. It was now my turn to see the Colonel, and after I had given over into his hands all my dead master's property that I had brought with me from the Hills, I told him the story of the diamond as Rung had told it to me. He was much struck by it, and ordered me to take Rung to him the next morning. But that very night Rung disappeared, and was never seen in the camp again. Whether he was frightened at what he called the Russian's evil eye—frightened that Platzoff could blight him even from a distance, I have no means of knowing. In any case, gone he was; and from that day to this I have never set eyes on him. Well, the Colonel said he would take a note of what I had told him about the diamond, and that I must leave the matter entirely in his hands.

"Your ladyship, a fortnight after that the Colonel shot himself.

Page 13

“To make short a long story—we got a fresh Colonel, and were removed to another part of the country; and there, a few weeks later, I was knocked down by fever, and was a long time before I thoroughly recovered my strength. A year or two later our regiment was ordered back to England, but a day or two before we should have sailed I had a letter telling me that my old sweetheart was dead. This news seemed to take all care for life out of me, and on the spur of the moment I volunteered into a regiment bound for China, in which country war was just breaking out. There, and at other places abroad, I stopped till just four months ago, when I was finally discharged, with my pension, and a bullet in my pocket that had been taken out of my skull. I only landed in England nine days ago, and as soon as it was possible for me to do so, I came to see your ladyship. And I think that is all.” The Sergeant’s forefinger went to his forehead again as he brought his narrative to an end.

Lady Chillington kept on fanning herself in silence for a little while after the old soldier had done speaking. Her features wore the proud, impassive look that they generally put on when before strangers: in the present case they were no index to the feelings at work underneath. At length she spoke.

“After the suicide of your Colonel did you mention the supposed robbery of the diamond to anyone else?”

“To no one else, your ladyship. For several reasons. I was unaware what steps he might have taken between the time of my telling him and the time of his death to prove or disprove the truth of the story. In the second place, Rung had disappeared. I could only tell the story at secondhand. It had been told me by an eye-witness, but that witness was a native, and the word of a native does not go for much in those parts. In the third place, the Russian had also disappeared, and had left no trace behind. What could I do? Had I told the story to my new Colonel, I should mayhap only have been scouted as a liar or a madman. Besides, we were every day expecting to be ordered home, and I had made up my mind that I would at once come and see your ladyship. At that time I had no intention of going to China, and when once I got there it was too late to speak out. But through all the years I have been away my poor dear master’s last words have lived in my memory. Many a thousand times have I thought of them both day and night, and prayed that I might live to get back to Old England, if it was only to give your ladyship the message with which I had been charged.”

“But why could you not write to me?” asked Lady Chillington.

“Your ladyship, I am no scholar,” answered the old soldier, with a vivid blush. “What I have told you to-day in half-an-hour would have taken me years to set down—in fact, I could never have done it.”

“So be it,” said Lady Chillington. “My obligation to you is all the greater for bearing in mind for so many years my poor boy’s last message, and for being at so much trouble



to deliver it.” She sighed deeply and rose from her chair. The Sergeant rose too, thinking that his interview was at an end, but at her ladyship’s request he reseated himself.



Page 14

Rejecting Janet's proffered arm, which she was in the habit of leaning on in her perambulations about the house and grounds, Lady Chillington walked slowly and painfully out of the room. Presently she returned, carrying an open letter in her hand. Both the ink and the paper on which it was written were faded and yellow with age.

"This is the last letter I ever received from my son," said her ladyship. "I have preserved it religiously, and it bears out very singularly what you, Sergeant, have just told me respecting the message which my darling sent me with his dying breath. In a few lines at the end he makes mention of a something of great value which he is going to bring home with him; but he writes about it in such guarded terms that I never could satisfy myself as to the precise meaning of what he intended to convey. You, Miss Hope, will perhaps be good enough to read the lines in question aloud. They are contained in a postscript."

Janet took the letter with reverent tenderness. Lady Chillington's trembling fingers pointed out the lines she was to read. Janet read as under:—

"P.S.—I have reserved my most important bit of news till the last, as lady correspondents are said to do. Observe, I write 'are said to do,' because in this matter I have very little personal experience of my own to go upon. You, dear mum, are my solitary lady correspondent, and postscripts are a luxury in which you rarely indulge. But to proceed, as the novelists say. Some two years ago it was my good fortune to rescue a little yellow-skinned princekin from the clutches of a very fine young tiger (my feet are on his hide at this present writing), who was carrying him off as a tit-bit for his supper. He was terribly mauled, you may be sure, but his people followed my advice in their mode of doctoring him, and he gradually got round again. The lad's father is a Rajah, immensely rich, and a direct descendant of that ancient Mogul dynasty which once ruled this country with a rod of iron. The Rajah has daughters innumerable, but only this one son. His gratitude for what I had done was unbounded. A few weeks ago he gave me a most astounding proof of it. By a secret and trusty messenger he sent me—But no, dear mum, I will not tell you what the Rajah sent me. This letter might chance to fall into other hands than yours (Indian letters do *sometimes* miscarry), and the secret is one which had better be kept in the family—at least for the present. So, mother mine, your curiosity must rest unsatisfied for a little while to come. I hope to be with you before many months are over, and then you shall know everything."The value of the Rajah's present is something immense. I shall sell it when I get to England, and out of the proceeds I shall—well, I don't exactly know what I shall do. Purchase my next step for one thing, but that will cost a mere trifle. Then, perhaps, buy a comfortable estate in the country,



Page 15

or a house in Park Lane. Your six weeks every season in London lodgings was always inexplicable to me. "Or shall I not sell the Rajah's present, but offer myself in marriage to some fair princess, with my heart in one hand and the G.H.D. in the other? Madder things than that are recorded in history. In any case, don't forget to pray for the safe arrival of your son, and (if such a petition is allowable) that he may not fail to bring with him the G.H.D.

"C.C."

"I never could understand before to-day what the letters G.H.D. were meant for," said Lady Chillington, as Janet gave her back the letter. "It is now quite evident that they were intended for *Great Hara Diamond*; all of which, as I said before, is confirmatory of the story you have just told me. Of course, after the lapse of so many years, there is not the remotest possibility of recovering the diamond; but my obligation to you, Sergeant Nicholas, is in no wise lessened by that fact. What are your engagements? Are you obliged to leave here immediately, or can you remain a short time in the neighbourhood?"

"I can give your ladyship a week, or even a fortnight, if you wish it."

"I am greatly obliged to you. I do wish it—I wish to talk to you respecting my son, and you are the only one now living who can tell me about him. You shall find that I am not ungrateful for what you have done for me. In the meantime, you will stop at the King's Arms, in Eastbury. Miss Hope will give you a note to the landlord. Come up here to-morrow at eleven. And now I must say good-morning. I am not very strong, and your news has shaken me a little. Will you do me the honour of shaking hands with me? It was your hands that closed my poor boy's eyes—that touched him last on earth; let those hands now be touched by his mother."

Lady Chillington stood up and extended both her withered hands. The old soldier came forward with a blush and took them respectfully, tenderly. He bent his head and touched each of them in turn with his lips. Tears stood in his eyes.

"God bless you, Sergeant Nicholas! You are a good man and a true gentleman," said Lady Chillington. Then she turned and slowly left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

COUNSEL TAKEN WITH MR. MADGIN.

After her interview with Sergeant Nicholas, Lady Chillington dismissed Janet for the day, and retired to her own rooms, nor was she seen out of them till the following morning.

No one was admitted to see her save Dance. Janet, after sitting with Sister Agnes all the afternoon, went down at dusk to the housekeeper's room.



Page 16

“Whatever did you do to her ladyship this morning?” asked Dance as soon as she entered. “She has tasted neither bit nor sup since breakfast, but ever since that old shabby-looking fellow went away she has lain on the sofa, staring at the wall as if there was some writing on it she was trying to read but didn’t know how. I thought she was ill, and asked her if I should send for the doctor. She laughed at me without taking her eyes off the wall, and bade me begone for an old fool. If there’s not a change by morning, I shall just send for the doctor without asking her leave. Surely you and that old fellow have bewitched her ladyship between you.”

Janet in reply told Dance all that had passed at the morning’s interview, feeling quite sure that in doing so she was violating no confidence, and that Lady Chillington herself would be the first to tell everything to her faithful old servant as soon as she should be sufficiently composed to do so. As a matter of course Dance was full of wonder.

“Did you know Captain Chillington?” asked Janet, as soon as the old dame’s surprise had in some measure toned itself down.

“Did I know curly-pated, black-eyed Master Charley?” asked the old woman. “Ay—who better? These arms, withered and yellow now, then plump and strong, held him before he had been an hour in the world. The day he left England I went with her ladyship to see him aboard ship. As he shook me by the hand for the last time he said, ‘You will never leave my mother, will you, Dance?’ And I said, ‘Never, while I live, dear Master Charles,’ and I’ve kept my word.”

“Her ladyship has never been like the same woman since she heard the news of his death,” resumed Dance after a pause. “It seemed to sour her and harden her, and make her altogether different. There had been a great deal of unhappiness at home for some years before he went away. He and his father, Sir John—he that now lies so quiet upstairs—had a terrible quarrel just after Master Charles went into the army, and it was a quarrel that was never made up in this world. He was an awful man—Sir John—a wicked man: pray that such a one may never cross your path. The only happiness he seemed to have on earth was in making those over whom he had any power miserable. It was impossible for my lady to love him, but she tried to do her duty by him till he and Master Charles fell out. What the quarrel was about I never rightly understood, but my lady would have it that Master Charles was in the right and her husband in the wrong. One result was that Sir John stopped the income that he had always allowed his son, and took a frightful oath that if Master Charles were dying of starvation before his eyes he would not give him as much as a penny to buy bread with. But her ladyship, who had money in her own right, said that Master Charles’s income should go on as usual. Then she and Sir John quarrelled; and she left him and came to live at Deepley



Page 17

Walls, leaving him at Dene Folly; and here she stayed till Sir John was taken with his last illness and sent for her. He sent for her, not to make up the quarrel, but to jibe and sneer at her, and to make her wait on him day and night, as if she were a paid nurse from a hospital. While this was going on, and after Sir John had been quite given up by the doctors, news came from India of Master Charles's death. Well, her ladyship went nigh distracted; but as for the baronet, it was said, though I won't vouch for the truth of it, that he only laughed when the news was told him, and said that if he was plagued as much with corns in the next world as he had been in this, he should find Master Charles's arm very useful to lean upon. Two days later he died, and the title, and Dene Folly with it, went to a far-away cousin, whom neither Sir John nor his wife had ever seen. Then it was found how the baronet had contrived that his spite should outlive him—for only out of spite and mean cruelty could he have made such a will as he did make: that Deepley Walls should not become her ladyship's absolute property till the end of twenty years, during the whole of which time his body was to remain unburied, and to be kept under the same roof with his widow, wherever she might live. The mean, paltry scoundrel! Perhaps her ladyship might have had the will set aside, but she would not go to law about it. Thank Heaven! the twenty years are nearly at an end. Deepley Walls has been a haunted house ever since that midnight when Sir John was borne in on the shoulders of six strong men. And now tell me whether her ladyship is not a woman to be pitied."

* * * * *

At a quarter before eleven next morning, Mr. Solomon Madgin, Lady Chillington's agent and general man-of-business, arrived by appointment at Deepley Walls. Mr. Madgin was indispensable to her ladyship, who had a considerable quantity of house property in and around Eastbury, consisting chiefly of small tenements, the rents of which had to be collected weekly. Then Mr. Madgin was bailiff for the Deepley Walls estate, in connection with which were several small farms or "holdings" which required to be well looked after in many ways. Besides all this, her ladyship, having a few spare thousands, had taken of late years to dabbling in scrip and shares in a small way, and under the skilful pilotage of Mr. Madgin had hitherto contrived to steer clear of those rocks and shoals of speculation on which so many gallant argosies are wrecked. In short, everything except the law-business of the estate filtered through Mr. Madgin's hands, and as he did his work cheaply and well, and put up with her ladyship's ill-temper without a murmur, the mistress of Deepley Walls could hardly have found anyone who would have suited her better.



Page 18

Mr. Solomon Madgin was a little dried-up man, about sixty years old. His tail-coat and vest of rusty black were of the fashion of twenty years ago. He wore drab trousers, and shoes tied with bows of black ribbon. His head, bald on the crown, had an ample fringe of white hair at the back and sides, and was covered, when he went abroad, with a beaver hat, very fluffy and much too tall for him, and which, once upon a time, had probably been nearly as white as his hair, but was now time-worn and weather-stained to one uniform and consistent drab. Round his neck he always wore a voluminous cravat of unstarched muslin fastened in front with an old-fashioned pearl brooch, above which protruded the two spiked points of a very stiff and pugnacious-looking collar. A strong alpaca umbrella, unfashionably corpulent, was his constant companion. Mr. Madgin's whiskers were shaved off in an exact line with the end of his nose. His eyebrows were very white and bushy, and could serve on occasion as a screen to the greenish, crafty-looking eyes below them, which never liked to be peered into too closely. The ordinary expression of his thin, dried-up face was one of hard, worldly shrewdness; but there was a lurking bonhommie in his smile which seemed to imply that, away from business, he might possibly mellow into a boon companion.

Mr. Madgin had to wait a few minutes this morning before Lady Chillington could receive him. When he was ushered into her sitting-room he was surprised to find that she and Miss Hope were not alone; that a plainly-dressed man, who looked almost as old as Mr. Madgin himself, was seated at the table. After one suspicious glance at the stranger, Mr. Madgin made his bow to the ladies and walked up to the table with his bag of papers.

"You can put all those things away for the day, Mr. Madgin," said her ladyship. "A far more important matter claims our attention just now. In the first place I must introduce to you Sergeant Nicholas, many years ago servant to my son, Captain Chillington, who died in India. (Sergeant, this is Mr. Madgin, my man of business.) The Sergeant, who has only just returned to England, told me yesterday a very curious story which I am desirous that he should repeat in your presence to-day. The story relates to a diamond of great value, said to have been stolen from the body of my son immediately after death, and I shall require you to give me your opinion as to the feasibility of its recovery. You will take such notes of the narrative as you may think necessary, and the Sergeant will afterwards answer, to the best of his ability, any questions you may choose to put to him." Then turning to the old soldier, she added: "You will be good enough, Sergeant, to repeat to Mr. Madgin such parts of your narrative of yesterday as have any reference to the diamond. Begin with my son's dying message. Repeat, word for word, as closely as you can remember, all that was told you by the sycee Rung. Describe as minutely as possible the personal appearance of M. Platzoff; and detail any other points that bear on the loss of the diamond."



Page 19

So the Sergeant began, but the repetition of a long narrative not learnt by heart is by no means an easy matter, especially when they to whom it was first told hear it for the second time, but rather as critics than as ordinary listeners. Besides, the taking of notes was a process that smacked of a court-martial and tended to flurry the narrator, making him feel as if he were upon his oath and liable to be browbeat by the counsel for the other side. He was heartily glad when he got to the end of what he had to tell. The postscript to Captain Chillington's letter was then read by Miss Hope.

Mr. Madgin took copious notes as the Sergeant went on, and afterwards put a few questions to him on different points which he thought not sufficiently clear. Then he laid down his pen, rubbed his hands, and ran his fingers through his scanty hair. Lady Chillington rang for her butler, and gave the Sergeant into his keeping, knowing that he could not be in better hands. Then she said: "I will leave you, Mr. Madgin, for half-an-hour. Go carefully through your notes, and let me have your opinion when I come back as to whether, after so long a time, you think it worth while to institute any proceedings for the recovery of the diamond."

So Mr. Madgin was left alone with what he called his "considering cap." As soon as the door was closed behind her ladyship, he tilted back his chair, stuck his feet on the table, buried his hands deep in his pockets and shut his eyes, and so remained for full five-and-twenty minutes. He was busy consulting his notes when Lady Chillington re-entered the room. Mr. Madgin began at once.

"I must confess," he said, "that the case which your ladyship has submitted to me seems, from what I can see of it at present, to be surrounded with difficulties. Still, I am far from counselling your ladyship to despair entirely. The few points which, at the first glance, present themselves as requiring solution are these:—Who was the M. Platzoff who is said to have stolen the diamond? and what position in life did he really occupy? Is he alive or dead? If alive, where is he now living? If he did really steal the diamond, are not the chances as a hundred to one that he disposed of it long ago? But even granting that we were in a position to answer all these questions; suppose, even, that this M. Platzoff were living in Eastbury at the present moment, and that fact were known to us, how much nearer should we be to the recovery of the diamond than we are now? Your ladyship must please to bear in mind that as the case is now we have not an inch of legal ground to stand upon. We have no evidence that would be worth a rush in a court of law that M. Platzoff really purloined the diamond. We have no trustworthy evidence that the diamond itself ever had an existence."

"Surely, Mr. Madgin, my son's letter is sufficient to prove that fact."



Page 20

“Sufficient, perhaps, in conjunction with the other evidence, to prove it in a moral sense, but certainly not in a legal one,” said Mr. Madgin, quietly but decisively. “Your ladyship must please to bear in mind that Captain Chillington in his letter makes no absolute mention of the diamond by name; he merely writes of it vaguely under certain initials, and, if called upon, how could you prove that he intended those initials to stand for the words *Great Hara Diamond*, and not for something altogether different? If M. Platzoff were your ladyship’s next-door neighbour, and you knew for certain that he had the diamond still in his possession, you could only get it from him as he himself got it from your son—by subterfuge and artifice. Your ladyship will please to observe that I have put forward no opinion on the case. I have merely offered a statement of plain facts as they show themselves on the surface. With those facts before you it rests with your ladyship to decide what further steps you wish taken in the matter.”

“My good Madgin, do you know what it is to hate?” demanded Lady Chillington. “To hate with a hatred that dwarfs all other passions of the soul, and makes them pigmies by comparison? If you know this, you know the feeling with which I regard M. Platzoff. If you want the key to the feeling, you have it in the fact that his accursed hands robbed my dead son: even then you must have a mother’s heart to feel all that I feel.” She paused for a moment as if to recover breath; then she resumed. “See you, Mr. Solomon Madgin; I have a conviction, an intuition, call it what you will, that this Russian scoundrel is still alive. That is the first fact you have to find out. The next is, where he is now residing. Then you will have to ascertain whether he has the diamond still in his possession, and if so, by what means it can be recovered. Only recover it for me—I ask not how or by what means—only put into my hands the diamond that was stolen off my son’s breast as he lay dead; and the day you do that, my good Madgin, I will present you with a cheque for five thousand pounds!”

Mr. Madgin sat as one astounded; the power of reply seemed taken from him.

“Go, now,” said Lady Chillington, after a few moments. “Ordinary business is out of the question to-day. Go home and carefully digest what I have just said to you. That you are a man of resources, I know well; had you not been so, I would not have employed you in this matter. Come to me to-morrow, next day, next week—when you like; only don’t come barren of ideas; don’t come without a plan, likely or unlikely, of some sort of a campaign.”

Mr. Madgin rose and swept his papers mechanically into his bag. “Your ladyship said five thousand pounds, if I mistake not?” he stammered out.

“A cheque for five thousand pounds shall be yours on the day you bring me the diamond. Is not my word sufficient, or do you wish to have it under bond and seal?” she asked with some hauteur.



Page 21

“Your ladyship’s word is an all-sufficient bond,” answered Mr. Madgin, with sweet humility. He paused, with the handle of the door in his hand. “Supposing I were to see my way to carrying out your ladyship’s wishes in this respect,” he said deferentially, “or even to carrying out a portion of them only, still it could not be done without expense—not without considerable expense, maybe.”

“I give you carte-blanche as regards expenses,” said her ladyship with decision.

Then Mr. Madgin gave a farewell duck of the head and went. He took his way homeward through the park like a man walking in his sleep. With wide-open eyes and hat well set on the back of his head, with his blue bag in one hand and his umbrella under his arm, he trudged onward, even after he had reached the busy streets of the little town, without seeing anything or anyone. What he saw, he saw introspectively. On the one hand glittered the tempting bait held out by Lady Chillington; on the other loomed the dark problem that had to be solved before he could call the golden apple his.

“The most arrant wild-goose chase that ever I heard of in all my life,” he muttered to himself, as he halted at his own door. “Not a single ray of light anywhere—not one.”

“Popsey,” he called out to his daughter, when he was inside, “bring me the decanter of whisky, some cold water, my tobacco-jar and a new churchwarden into the office; and don’t let me be disturbed by anyone for four hours.”

(To be continued.)

ON LETTER-WRITING.

It is a matter of common remark that the epistolary art has been killed by the penny post, not to speak of post-cards.

This is a result which was hardly anticipated by Sir Rowland Hill, when, in the face of many obstacles, he carried his great scheme; and certainly it did not dwell very vividly before the mind of Mr. Elihu Burritt, the learned blacksmith, when he travelled over England, speaking there, as he had already done in America, in favour of an ocean penny postage.

It is urged that in the old days when postage was dear, and “franks” were difficult to procure, and when the poor did not correspond at all, writers were very careful to write well and to say the very best they could in the best possible way—to make their letters, in a word, worthy of the expense incurred. But those who argue on this ground leave out of consideration one little fact.



The classes to whom English literature is indebted for the epistolary samples on which reliance is placed for proof of this proposition, very seldom indeed paid for the conveyance of the letters in question. The system of “franking”—by which the privileged classes got not only their letters carried, but a great deal too often their dressing-cases and bandboxes as well—grew into a most serious grievance; so serious indeed that the opposition for a long period carried on against cheap postage arose solely from over nice regard to the vested interests of those who could command a little favour from a Peer, a Member of Parliament, or an official of high rank, not to speak of those patriotic worthies themselves.



Page 22

The fact may thus be made to cut two ways.

From our point of view, it may be cited in direct denial of the conclusion that people wrote well in past days simply because the conveyance of their letters was costly. We believe that the mass wrote just as badly and loosely then as the mass do now, in fact that they were rather loose on rules of spelling; and that the specimens preserved and presented to us in type are exceptional, and escaped destruction with the mass precisely because they were exceptional.

Other circumstances may be taken to account for the loose epistolary style or rather no-style now so common; and this refers us to the general question of education—more especially the education of women. In those days the few were educated; and to be educated was regarded as the distinctive mark of a leisured and cultivated class: now, education is general, but, like many other things, it has suffered in the process of diffusion, whether or not it may in the long run suffer by the diffusion itself.

The truth is, time alone can tell whether among the select nowadays the epistolary art is not simply as perfect as it was in days past; at all events we believe so, and proceed to set down a few reflections on letter-writing.

To write a really good letter, two things in especial are demanded. The first is, that you write only of that which is either familiar to you or in which you have some interest; and in the next, that you can write with ease, and on a footing of freedom as regards your correspondent. “The pen,” says Cervantes, “is the tongue of the mind,” and in no form of composition is this more strictly true than of letters. In a certain degree a letter should share the characteristics of good conversation: the writer must realise the presence and the mood of the person for whom the letter is destined. Just as good-breeding suggests that you must have the tastes and sentiments of your interlocutor before you for ends of enjoyable conversation, and that, within the limits of propriety and self-respect, you should at once humour them and use them; so in good letter-writing you must write for your correspondent’s pleasure as well as please, by merely communicating, yourself.

Here comes in the delightful element of vicarious sympathy, or dramatic transference, which, brought into play successfully, with some degree of wit and sprightliness of expression, may raise letter-writing to the level of a fine art.

And this allowed, it is clear that letters may just be as good now as at any former period, and accidental circumstances have really little to do with it. Humboldt has well said that “A letter is a conversation between the present and the absent. Its fate is that it cannot last, but must pass away like the sound of the voice.”

And just as in conversation all attempt at eloquence and personal celebration in this kind is rigidly proscribed, so in letter-writing are all kinds of fine-writing and rhetoric.

“Brilliant speakers and writers,” it has been well said, “should remember that coach wheels are better than Catherine wheels to travel on.” One’s first business, in letter-writing is to say what one has to say, and the second to say it well and with taste and ease.



Page 23

A.H. JAPP, LL.D.

THE SILENT CHIMES.

SILENT FOR EVER.

Breakfast was on the table in Mr. Hamlyn's house in Bryanstone Square, and Mrs. Hamlyn waited, all impatience, for her lord and master. Not in any particular impatience for the meal itself, but that she might "have it out with him"—the phrase was hers, not mine, as you will see presently—in regard to the perplexity existing in her mind connected with the strange appearance of the damsel watching the house, in her beauty and her pale golden hair.

Why had Philip Hamlyn turned sick and faint—to judge by his changing countenance—when she had charged him at dinner, the previous evening, with knowing something of this mysterious woman? Mysterious in her actions, at all events; probably in herself. Mrs. Hamlyn wanted to know that. No further opportunity had then been given for pursuing the subject. Japhet had returned to the room, and before the dinner was at an end, some acquaintance of Mr. Hamlyn had fetched him out for the evening. And he came home with so fearful a headache that he had lain groaning and turning all through the night. Mrs. Hamlyn was not a model of patience, but in all her life she had never felt so impatient as now.

He came into the room looking pale and shivery; a sure sign that he was suffering; that it was not an invented excuse. Yes, the pain was better, he said, in answer to his wife's question; and might be much better after a strong cup of tea; he could not imagine what had brought it on. *She* could have told him though, had she been gifted with the magical power of reading minds, and have seen the nervous apprehension that was making havoc with his.

Mrs. Hamlyn gave him his tea in silence, and buttered a dainty bit of toast to tempt him to eat. But he shook his head.

"I cannot, Eliza. Nothing but tea this morning."

"I am sorry you are ill," she said, by-and-by. "I fear it hurts you to talk; but I want to have it out with you."

"Have it out with me!" cried he, in real or feigned surprise. "Have what out with me?"

"Oh, you know, Philip. About that woman who has been watching the house these two days; evidently watching for you."



“But I told you I knew nothing about her: who she is, or what she is, or what she wants. I really do not know.”

Well, so far that was true. But all the while a sick fear lay on his heart that he did know; or, rather, that he was destined to know very shortly.

“When I told you her hair was like threads of fine, pale gold, you seemed to start, Philip, as if you knew some girl or woman with such hair, or had known her.”

“I daresay I have known a score of women with such hair. My dear little sister who died, for instance.”

“Do not attempt to evade the subject,” was the haughty reprimand. “If—”



Page 24

Mrs. Hamlyn's sharp speech was interrupted by the entrance of Japhet, bringing in the morning letters. Only one letter, however, for they were not as numerous in those days as they are in these.

"It seems to be important, ma'am," Japhet remarked, with the privilege of an old servant, as he handed it to his mistress. She saw it was from Leet Hall, in Mrs. Carradyne's handwriting, and bore the words: "In haste," above the address.

Tearing it open, Eliza Hamlyn read the short, sad news it contained. Captain Monk had been taken suddenly ill with inward inflammation. Mr. Speck feared the worst, and the Captain had asked for Eliza. Would she come down at once?

"Oh, Philip, I must not lose a minute," she exclaimed, passing the letter to him, and forgetting the pale gold hair and its owner. "Do you know anything about the Worcestershire trains?"

"No," he answered. "The better plan will be to get to the station as soon as possible, and then you will be ready for the first train that starts."

"Will you go down with me, Philip?"

"I cannot. I will take you to the station."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I cannot just now leave London. My dear, you may believe me, for it is the truth. I *cannot do so*. I wish I could."

And she saw it was true: for his tone was so earnest as to tell of pain.

Making what haste she could, kissing her boy a hundred times, and recommending him to the special care of his nurse and of his father during her absence, she drove with her husband to the station, and was just in time for a train. Mr. Hamlyn watched it steam out of the station, and then looked up at the clock.

"I suppose it's not too early to see him," he muttered. "I'll chance it, at any rate. Hope he will be less suffering than he was yesterday, and less crusty, too."

Dismissing his carriage, for he felt more inclined to walk than to drive, he went through the park to Pimlico, and gained the house of Major Pratt.

This was Friday. On the previous Wednesday evening a note had been brought to Mr. Hamlyn by Major Pratt's servant, a sentence in which, as the reader may remember, ran as follows:



"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?"

This puzzled Philip Hamlyn: perhaps somewhat troubled him in a hazy kind of way. For he could only suppose that the ship alluded to must be the sailing vessel in which his first wife, false and faithless, and his little son of a twelvemonth old had been lost some five or six years ago—the *Clipper of the Seas*. And the next day, (Thursday) he had gone to Major Pratt's, as requested, to carry the prescription for gout he had asked for, and also to inquire of the Major what he meant.

But the visit was a fruitless one. Major Pratt was in bed with an attack of gout, so ill and so "crusty" that nothing could be got out of him excepting a few bad words and as many groans. Mr. Hamlyn then questioned Saul—of whom he used to see a good deal in India, for he had been the Major's servant for years and years.



Page 25

“Do you happen to know, Saul, whether the Major wanted me for anything in particular? He asked me to call here this morning.”

Saul began to consider. He was a tall, thin, cautious, slow-speaking man, honest as the day, and very much attached to his master.

“Well, sir, he got a letter yesterday morning that seemed to put him out, for I found him swearing over it. And he said he’d like you to see it.”

“Who was the letter from? What was it about?”

“It looked like Miss Caroline’s writing, sir, and the postmark was Essex. As to what it was about—well, the Major didn’t directly tell me, but I gathered that it might be about —”

“About what?” questioned Mr Hamlyn, for the man had come to a dead standstill.

“Speak out, Saul.”

“Then, sir,” said Saul, slowly rubbing the top of his head, and the few grey hairs left on it, “I thought—as you tell me to speak—it must be something concerning that ship you know of; she that went down on her voyage home, Mr. Philip.”

“The *Clipper of the Seas*?”

“Just so, sir; the *Clipper of the Seas*. I thought it by this,” added Saul: “that pretty nigh all day afterwards he talked of nothing but that ship, asking me if I should suppose it possible that the ship had not gone down and every soul on board, leastways of her passengers, with her. ‘Master,’ said I, in answer, ‘had that ship not gone down and all her passengers with her, rely upon it, they’d have turned up long before this.’ ‘Ay, ay,’ stormed he, ‘and Caroline’s a fool’—Which of course meant his sister, you know, sir.”

Philip Hamlyn could not make much of this. So many years had elapsed now since news came out to the world that the unfortunate ship, *Clipper of the Seas*, went down off the coast of Spain on her homeward voyage, and all her passengers with her, as to be a fact of the past. Never a doubt had been cast upon any part of the tidings, so far as he knew.

With an uneasy feeling at his heart, he went off to the city, to call upon the brokers, or agents, of the ship: remembering quite well who they were, and that they lived in Fenchurch Street. An elderly man, clerk in the house for many years, and now a partner, received him.

“The *Clipper of the Seas*?” repeated the old gentleman, after listening to what Mr. Hamlyn had to say. “No, sir, we don’t know that any of her passengers were saved;



always supposed they were not. But lately we have had some little cause to doubt whether one or two might not have been.”

Philip Hamlyn’s heart beat faster.

“Will you tell me why you think this?”



Page 26

“It isn’t that we think it; at best ’tis but a doubt,” was the reply. “One of our own ships, getting in last month from Madras, had a sailor on board who chanced to remark to me, when he was up here getting his pay, that it was not the first time he had served in our employ: he had been in that ship that was lost, the *Clipper of the Seas*. And he went on to say, in answer to a remark of mine about all the passengers having been lost, that that was not quite correct, for that one of them had certainly been saved—a lady or a nurse, he didn’t know which, and also a little child that she was in charge of. He was positive about it, he added, upon my expressing my doubts, for they got to shore in the same small boat that he did.”

“Is it true, think you?” gasped Mr. Hamlyn.

“Sir, we are inclined to think it is not true,” emphatically spoke the old gentleman. “Upon inquiring about this man’s character, we found that he is given to drinking, so that what he says cannot always be relied upon. Again, it seems next to an impossibility that if any passenger were saved we should not have heard of it. Altogether we feel inclined to judge that the man, though evidently believing he spoke truth, was but labouring under an hallucination.”

“Can you tell me where I can find the man?” asked Mr. Hamlyn, after a pause.

“Not anywhere at present, sir. He has sailed again.”

So that ended it for the day. Philip Hamlyn went home and sat down to dinner with his wife, as already spoken of. And when she told him that the mysterious lady waiting outside must be waiting for him—probably some acquaintance of his of the years gone by—it set his brain working and his pulses throbbing, for he suddenly connected her with what he had that day heard. No wonder his head ached!

To-day, after seeing his wife off by train, he went to find Major Pratt. The Major was better, and could talk, swearing a great deal over the gout, and the letter.

“It was from Caroline,” he said, alluding to his sister, Miss Pratt, who had been with him in India. “She lives in Essex, you know, Philip.”

“Oh, yes, I know,” answered Philip Hamlyn. “But what is it that Caroline says in her letter?”

“You shall hear,” said the Major, producing his sister’s letter and opening it. “Listen. Here it is. ’The strangest thing has happened, brother! Susan went to London yesterday to get my fronts recurled at the hairdresser’s, and she was waiting in the shop, when a lady came out of the back room, having been in there to get a little boy’s hair cut. Susan was quite struck dumb when she saw her: *She thinks it was poor erring Dolly*; never saw such a likeness before, she says; could almost swear to her by



the lovely pale gold hair. The lady pulled her veil over her face when she saw Susan staring at her, and went away with great speed. Susan asked the hairdresser's people if they knew the lady's name, or who



Page 27

she was, but they told her she was a stranger to them; had never been in the shop before. Dear Richard, this is troubling me; I could not sleep all last night for thinking of it. Do you suppose it is possible that Dolly and the boy were not drowned? Your affectionate sister, Caroline.' Now, did you ever read such a letter?" stormed the Major. "If that Susan went home and said she'd seen St. Paul's blown up, Caroline would believe it. Who's Susan, d'ye say? Why, you've lost your memory, Philip. Susan was the English maid we had with us in Calcutta."

"It cannot possibly be true," cried Mr. Hamlyn with quivering lips.

"True, no! of course it can't be, hang it! Or else what would you do?"

That might be logical though not satisfactory reasoning. And Mr. Hamlyn thought of the woman said to be watching for him, and her pale gold hair.

"She was a cunning jade, if ever there was one, mark you, Philip Hamlyn; that false wife of yours and kin of mine; came of a cunning family on the mother's side. Put it that she was saved: if it suited her to let us suppose she was drowned, why, she'd do it. I know Dolly."

And poor Philip Hamlyn, assenting to the truth of this with all his heart, went out to face the battle that might be coming upon him, lacking the courage for it.

II.

The cold, clear afternoon air touching their healthy faces, and Jack Frost nipping their noses, raced Miss West and Kate Dancox up and down the hawthorn walk. It had pleased that arbitrary young damsel, who was still very childish, to enter a protest against going beyond the grounds that fine winter's day; she would be in the hawthorn walk, or nowhere; and she would run races there. As Miss West gave in to her whims for peace' sake in things not important, and as she was young enough herself not to dislike running, to the hawthorn walk they went.

Captain Monk was recovering rapidly. His sudden illness had been caused by drinking some cold cider when some out-door exercise had made him dangerously hot. The alarm and apprehension had now subsided; and Mrs. Hamlyn, arriving three days ago in answer to the hasty summons, was thinking of returning to London.

"You are cheating!" called out Kate, flying off at a tangent to cross her governess's path. "You've no right to get before me!"

"Gently," corrected Miss West. "My dear, we have run enough for to-day."



“We haven’t, you ugly, cross old thing! Aunt Eliza says you *are* ugly. And—”

The young lady’s amenities were cut short by finding herself suddenly lifted off her feet by Mr. Harry Carradyne, who had come behind them.

“Let me alone, Harry! You are always coming where you are not wanted. Aunt Eliza says so.”

A sudden light, as of mirth, illumined Harry Carradyne’s fresh, frank countenance. “Aunt Eliza says all those things, does she? Well, Miss Kate, she also says something else—that you are now to go indoors.”



Page 28

“What for? I shan’t go in.”

“Oh, very well. Then that dandified silk frock for the new year that the dressmaker is waiting to try on can be put aside until midsummer.”

Kate dearly loved new silk frocks, and she raced away. The governess followed more slowly, Mr. Carradyne talking by her side.

For some months now their love dream had been going on; aye, and the love-making too. Not altogether surreptitiously; neither of them would have liked that. Though not expedient to proclaim it yet to Captain Monk and the world, Mrs. Carradyne knew of it and tacitly sanctioned it.

Alice West turned her face, blushing uncomfortably, to him as they walked. “I am glad to have this opportunity of saying something to you,” she spoke with hesitation. “Are you not upon rather bad terms with Mrs. Hamlyn?”

“She is with me,” replied Harry.

“And—am I the cause?” continued Alice, feeling as if her fears were confirmed.

“Not at all. She has not fathomed the truth yet, with all her penetration, though she may have some suspicion of it. Eliza wants to bend me to her will in the matter of the house, and I won’t be bent. Old Peveril wishes to resign the lease of Peacock Range to me; I wish to take it from him, and Eliza objects. She says Peveril promised her the house until the seven years’ lease was out, and that she means to keep him to his bargain.”

“Do you quarrel?”

“Quarrel! no,” laughed Harry Carradyne. “I joke with her, rather than quarrel. But I don’t give in. She pays me some left-handed compliments, telling me that I am no gentleman, that I’m a bear, and so on; to which I make my bow.”

Alice West was gazing straight before her, a troubled look in her eyes. “Then you see that I *am* the remote cause of the quarrel, Harry. But for thinking of me, you would not care to take the house on your own hands.”

“I don’t know that. Be very sure of one thing, Alice: that I shall not stay an hour longer under the roof here if my uncle disinherits me. That he, a man of indomitable will, should be so long making up his mind is a proof that he shrinks from committing the injustice. The suspense it keeps me in is the worst of all. I told him so the other evening when we were sitting together and he was in an amiable mood. I said that any decision he might come to would be more tolerable than this prolonged suspense.”

Alice drew a long breath at his temerity.



Harry laughed. "Indeed, I quite expected to be ordered out of the room in a storm. Instead of that, he took it quietly, civilly telling me to have a little more patience; and then began to speak of the annual new year's dinner, which is not far off now."

"Mrs. Carradyne is thinking that he may not hold the dinner this year, as he has been so ill," remarked the young lady.

"He will never give that up, Alice, as long as he can hold anything; and he is almost well again, you know. Oh, yes; we shall have the dinner and the chimes also."



Page 29

“I have never heard the chimes,” she said. “They have not played since I came to Church Leet.”

“They are to play this year,” said Harry Carradyne. “But I don’t think my mother knows it.”

“Is it true that Mrs. Carradyne does not like to hear the chimes? I seem to have gathered the idea, somehow,” added Alice. But she received no answer.

Kate Dancox was changeable as the ever-shifting sea. Delighted with the frock that was in process, she extended her approbation to its maker; and when Mrs. Ram, a homely workwoman, departed with her small bundle in her arms, it pleased the young lady to say she would attend her to her home. This involved the attendance of Miss West, who now found herself summoned to the charge.

Having escorted Mrs. Ram to her lowly door, and had innumerable intricate questions answered touching trimmings and fringes, Miss Kate Dancox, disregarding her governess altogether, flew back along the road with all the speed of her active limbs, and disappeared within the churchyard. At first Alice, who was growing tired and followed slowly, could not see her; presently, a desperate shriek guided her to an unfrequented corner where the graves were crowded. Miss Kate had come to grief in jumping over a tombstone, and bruised both her knees.

“There!” exclaimed Alice, sitting down on the stump of an old tree, close to the low wall. “You’ve hurt yourself now.”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” returned Kate, who did not make much of smarts. And she went limping away to Mr. Grame, then doing some light work in his garden.

Alice sat on where she was, reading the inscription on the tombstones; some of them so faint with time as to be hardly discernible. While standing up to make out one that seemed of a rather better class than the rest, she observed Nancy Cale, the clerk’s wife, sitting in the church-porch and watching her attentively. The poor old woman had been ill for a long time, and Alice was surprised to see her out. Leaving the inscriptions, she went across the churchyard.

“Ay, my dear young lady, I be up again, and thankful enough to say it; and I thought as the day’s so fine, I’d step out a bit,” she said, in answer to the salutation. An intelligent woman, and quite sufficiently cultivated for her work—cleaning the church and washing the parson’s surplices. “I thought John was in the church here, and came to speak to him; but he’s not, I find; the door’s locked.”



“I saw John down by Mrs. Ram’s just now; he was talking to Nott, the carpenter,” observed Alice. “Nancy, I was trying to make out some of those old names; but it is difficult to do so,” she added, pointing to the crowded corner.

“Ay, I see, my dear,” nodded Nancy. “*His* be worn a’most right off. I think I’d have it done again, an’ I was you.”

“Have what done again?”

“The name upon your poor papa’s gravestone.”

“The *what?*” exclaimed Alice. And Nancy repeated her words.



Page 30

Alice stared at her. Had Mrs. Cale's wits vanished in her illness? "Do you know what you are saying, Nancy?" she cried; "I don't. What had papa to do with this place? I think you must be wandering."

Nancy stared in her turn. "Sure, it's not possible," she said slowly, beginning to put two and two together, "that you don't know who you are, Miss West? That your papa died here? and lies buried here?"

Alice West turned white, and sat down on the opposite bench to Nancy. She did know that her father had died at some small country living he held; but she never suspected that it was at Church Leet. Her mother had gone to London after his death, and set up a school—which succeeded well. But soon she died, and the ladies who took to the school before her death took to Alice with it. The child was still too young to be told by her mother of the serious past—or Mrs. West deemed her to be so. And she had grown up in ignorance of her father's fate and of where he died.

"When we heard, me and John, that it was a Miss West who had come to the Hall to be governess to Parson Dancox's child, the name struck us both," went on Nancy. "Next we looked at your face, my dear, to trace any likeness there might be, and we thought we saw it—for you've got your papa's eyes for certain. Then, one day when I was dusting in here, I let fall a hymn-book from the Hall pew; in picking it up it came open, and the name writ in it stared me in the face, 'Alice West.' After that, we had no manner of doubt, him and me, and I've often wished to talk with you and tell you so. My dear, I've had you on my knee many a time when you were a little one."

Alice burst into tears of agitation. "I never knew it! I never knew it. Dear Nancy, what did papa die of?"

"Ah, that was a sad piece of business—he was killed," said Nancy. And forthwith, rightly or wrongly, she, garrulous with old age, told all the history.

It was an exciting interview, lasting until the shades of evening surprised them. Miss Kate Dancox might have gone roving to the other end of the globe, for all the attention given her just then. Poor Alice cried and sighed, and trembled inwardly and outwardly. "To think that it should just be to this place that I should come as governess, and to the house of Captain Monk!" she wailed. "Surely he did not *kill* papa!—intentionally!"

"No, no; nobody has ever thought that," disclaimed Nancy. "The Captain is a passionate man, as is well known, and they quarrelled, and a hot blow, not intentional, must have been struck between 'em. And all through them blessed chimes, Miss Alice! Not but that they be sweet to listen to—and they be going to ring again this New Year's Eve."



Drawing her warm cloak about her, Nancy Cale set off towards her cottage. Alice West sat on in the sheltered porch, utterly bewildered. Never in her life had she felt so agitated, so incapable of sound and sober thought. *Now* it was explained why the bow-windowed sitting-room at the Vicarage would always strike her as being familiar to her memory; as though she had at some time known one that resembled it, or perhaps seen one like it in a dream.



Page 31

“Well, I’m sure!”

The jesting salutation came from Harry Carradyne. Despatched in search of the truants, he had found Kate at the Vicarage, making much of the last new baby there, and devouring a sumptuous tea of cakes and jam. Miss West? Oh, Miss West was sitting in the church porch, talking to old Nancy Cale, she said to Harry.

“Why! What is it?” he exclaimed in dismay, finding that the burst of emotion which he had taken to be laughter, meant tears. “What has happened, Alice?”

She could no more have kept the tears in than she could help—presently—telling him the news. He sat down by her and held her close to him, and pressed for it. She was the daughter of George West, who had died in the dispute with Captain Monk in the dining-room at the Hall so many years before, and who was lying here in the corner of the churchyard; and she had never, never known it!

Mr. Carradyne was somewhat taken to; there was no denying it; chiefly by surprise.

“I thought your father was a soldier, Alice—Colonel West; and died when serving in India. I’m sure it was said so when you came.”

“Oh, no, that could not have been said,” she cried; “unless Mrs. Moffit, the agent, made the mistake. It was my uncle who died in India. No one here ever questioned me about my parents, knowing they were dead. Oh, dear,” she went on in agitation, after a silent pause, “what am I to do now? I cannot stay at the Hall. Captain Monk would not allow it either.”

“No need to tell him,” quoth Mr. Harry.

“And—of course—we must part. You and I.”

“Indeed! Who says so?”

“I am not sure that it would be right to—to—you know.”

“To what? Go on, my dear.”

Alice sighed; her eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the fast falling twilight. “Mrs. Carradyne will not care for me when she knows who I am,” she said in low tones.

“My dear, shall I tell you how it strikes me?” returned Harry: “that my mother will be only the more anxious to have you connected with us by closer and dearer ties, so as to atone to you, in even a small degree, for the cruel wrong which fell upon your father. As to me—it shall be made my life’s best and dearest privilege.”



But when a climax such as this takes place, the right or the wrong thing to be done cannot be settled in a moment. Alice West did not see her way quite clearly, and for the present she neither said nor did anything.

This little matter occurred on the Friday in Christmas week; on the following day, Saturday, Mrs. Hamlyn was returning to London. Christmas Day this year had fallen on a Monday. Some old wives hold a superstition that when that happens, it inaugurates but small luck for the following year, either for communities or for individuals. Not that that fancy has anything to do with the present history. Captain Monk's banquet would not be held until the Monday night: as was customary when New Year's Eve fell on a Sunday. He had urged his daughter to remain over New Year's Day; but she declined, on the plea that as she had been away from her husband on Christmas Day, she would like to pass New Year's Day with him. The truth being that she wanted to get to London to see after that yellow-haired lady who was supposed to be peeping after Philip Hamlyn.



Page 32

On the Saturday morning, Mrs. Hamlyn was driven to Evesham in the close carriage, and took the train to London. Her husband, ever kind and attentive, met her at the Paddington terminus. He was looking haggard, and seemed to be thinner than when she left him nine days ago.

“Are you well, Philip?” she asked anxiously.

“Oh, quite well,” quickly answered poor Philip Hamlyn, smiling a warm smile, that he meant to look like a gay one. “Nothing ever ails me.”

No, nothing might ail him bodily; but mentally—ah, how much! That awful terror lay upon him thick and threefold; it had not yet come to any solution, one way or the other. Major Pratt had taken up the very worst view of it; and spent his days pitching hard names at misbehaving syrens, gifted with “the deuce’s own cunning” and with mermaids’ shining hair.

“And how have things been going, Penelope?” asked Mrs. Hamlyn of the nurse, as she sat in the nursery with her boy upon her knee. “All right?”

“Quite so, ma’am. Master Walter has been just as good as gold.”

“Mamma’s darling!” murmured the doting mother, burying her face in his. “I have been thinking, Penelope, that your master does not look well,” she added after a minute.

“No, ma’am? I’ve not noticed it. We have not seen much of him up here; he has been at his club a good deal—and dined three or four times with old Major Pratt.”

“As if she would notice it!—servants never notice anything!” thought Eliza Hamlyn in her imperious way of judging the world. “By the way, Penelope,” she said aloud in light and careless tones, “has that woman with the yellow hair been seen about much?—has she presumed again to accost my little son?”

“The woman with the yellow hair?” repeated Penelope, looking at her mistress, for the girl had quite forgotten the episode. “Oh, I remember—she that stood outside there and came to us in the square-garden. No, ma’am, I’ve seen nothing at all of her since that day.”

“For there are wicked people who prowl about to kidnap children,” continued Mrs. Hamlyn, as if she would condescend to explain her inquiry, “and that woman looked like one. Never suffer her to approach my darling again. Mind that, Penelope.”

The jealous heart is not easily reassured. And Mrs. Hamlyn, restless and suspicious, put the same question to her husband. It was whilst they were waiting in the drawing-room for dinner to be announced, and she had come down from changing her apparel after her journey. How handsome she looked! a right regal woman! as she stood there



arrayed in dark blue velvet, the fire-light playing upon her proud face, and upon the diamond earrings and brooch she wore.

“Philip, has that woman been prowling about here again?”

Just for an imperceptible second, for thought is quick, it occurred to Philip Hamlyn to temporise, to affect ignorance, and say, *What woman?* just as if his mind were not full of the woman, and of nothing else. But he abandoned it as useless.



Page 33

"I have not seen her since; not at all," he answered: and though his words were purposely indifferent, his wife, knowing all his tones and ways by heart, was not deceived. "He is afraid of that woman," she whispered to herself; "or else afraid of *me*." But she said no more.

"Have you come to any definite understanding with Mr. Carradyne in regard to Peacock's Range, Eliza?"

"He will not come to any; he is civilly obstinate over it. Laughs in my face with the most perfect impudence, and tells me: 'A man must be allowed to put in his own claim to his own house, when he wants to do so.'"

"Well, Eliza, that seems to be only right and fair. Percival made no positive agreement with us, remember."

"/s it right and fair! That may be your opinion, Philip, but it is not mine. We shall see, Mr. Harry Carradyne!"

"Dinner is served, ma'am," announced the old butler.

That evening passed. Sunday passed, the last day of the dying year; and Monday morning, New Year's day, dawned.

* * * * *

New Year's Day. Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn were seated at the breakfast-table. It was a bright, cold, sunny morning, showing plenty of blue sky. Young Master Walter, in consideration of the day, was breakfasting at their table, seated in his high chair.

"Me to have dinner wid mamma to-day! Me have pudding!"

"That you shall, my sweetest; and everything that's good," assented his mother.

In came Japhet at this juncture. "There's a little boy in the hall, sir, asking to see you," said he to his master. "He—"

"Oh, we shall have plenty of boys here to-day, asking for a new year's gift," interposed Mrs. Hamlyn, rather impatiently. "Send him a shilling, Philip."

"It's not a poor boy, ma'am," answered Japhet, "but a little gentleman: six or seven years old, he looks. He says he particularly wants to see master."

Philip Hamlyn smiled. "Particularly wants a shilling, I expect. Send him in, Japhet."



The lad came in. A well-dressed beautiful boy, refined in looks and demeanour, bearing in his face a strange likeness to Mr. Hamlyn. He looked about timidly.

Eliza, struck with the resemblance, gazed at him. Her husband spoke. "What do you want with me, my lad?"

"If you please, sir, are you Mr. Hamlyn?" asked the child, going forward with hesitating steps. "Are you my papa?"

Every drop of blood seemed to leave Philip Hamlyn's face and fly to his heart. He could not speak, and looked white as a ghost.

"Who are you? What is your name?" imperiously demanded Philip's wife.

"It is Walter Hamlyn," replied the lad, in clear, pretty tones.

And now it was Mrs. Hamlyn's turn to look white. Walter Hamlyn?—the name of her own dear son! when she had expected him to say Sam Smith, or John Jones! What insolence some people had!



Page 34

"Where do you come from, boy? Who sent you here?" she reiterated.

"I come from mamma. She would have sent me before, but I caught cold, and was in bed all last week."

Mr. Hamlyn rose. It was a momentous predicament, but he must do the best he could in it. He was a man of nice honour, and he wished with all his heart that the earth would open and engulf him. "Eliza, my love, allow me to deal with this matter," he said, his voice taking a low, tender, considerate tone. "I will question the boy in another room. Some mistake, I reckon."

"No, Philip, you must put your questions before me," she said, resolute in her anger. "What is it you are fearing? Better tell me all, however disreputable it may be."

"I dare not tell you," he gasped; "it is not—I fear—the disreputable thing you may be fancying."

"Not dare! By what right do you call this gentleman 'papa'?" she passionately demanded of the child.

"Mamma told me to. She would never let me come home to him before because of not wishing to part from me."

Mrs. Hamlyn gazed at him. "Where were you born?"

"At Calcutta; that's in India. Mamma brought me home in the *Clipper of the Seas*, and the ship went down, but quite everybody was not lost in it, though papa thought so."

The boy had evidently been well instructed. Eliza Hamlyn, grasping the whole truth now, staggered back in terror.

"Philip! Philip! is it true? Was it *this* you feared?"

He made a motion of assent and covered his face. "Heaven knows I would rather have died."

He stood back against the window-curtains, that they might shade his pain. She fell into a chair and wished he *had* died, years before.

But what was to be the end of it all? Though Eliza Hamlyn went straight out and despatched that syren of the golden hair with a poison-tipped bodkin (and possibly her will might be good to do it), it could not make things any the better for herself.



III.

New Year's Night at Leet Hall, and the banquet in full swing—but not, as usual, New Year's Eve.

Captain Monk headed his table, the parson, Robert Grame, at his right hand, Harry Carradyne on his left. Whether it might be that the world, even that out-of-the-way part of it, Church Leet, was improving in manners and morals; or whether the Captain himself was changing: certain it was that the board was not the free board it used to be. Mrs. Carradyne herself might have sat at it now, and never once blushed by as much as the pink of a sea-shell.

It was known that the chimes were to play this year; and, when midnight was close at hand, Captain Monk volunteered a statement which astonished his hearers. Rimmer, the butler, had come into the room to open the windows.

"I am getting tired of the chimes, and all people have not liked them," spoke the Captain in slow, distinct tones. "I have made up my mind to do away with them, and you will hear them to-night, gentlemen, for the last time."



Page 35

"Really, Uncle Godfrey!" cried Harry Carradyne, in most intense surprise.

"I hope they'll bring us no ill-luck to-night!" continued Captain Monk as a grim joke, disregarding Harry's remark. "Perhaps they will, though, out of sheer spite, knowing they'll never have another chance of it. Well, well, they're welcome. Fill your glasses, gentlemen."

Rimmer was throwing up the windows. In another minute the church clock boomed out the first stroke of twelve, and the room fell into a dead silence. With the last stroke the Captain rose, glass in hand.

"A happy New Year to you, gentlemen! A happy New Year to us all. May it bring to us health and prosperity!"

"And God's blessing," reverently added Robert Grame aloud, as if to remedy an omission.

Ring, ring, ring! Ah, there it came, the soft harmony of the chimes, stealing up through the midnight air. Not quite as loudly heard, perhaps, as usual, for there was no wind to waft it, but in tones wondrously clear and sweet. Never had the strains of the "Bay of Biscay" brought to the ear more charming melody. How soothing it was to those enrapt listeners; seeming to tell of peace.

But soon another sound arose to mingle with it. A harsh, grating sound, like the noise of wheels passing over gravel. Heads were lifted; glances expressed surprise. With the last strains of the chimes dying away in the distance, a carriage of some kind galloped up to the hall door.

Eliza Hamlyn alighted from it—with her child and its nurse. As quickly as she could make opportunity after that scene enacted in her breakfast-room in London in the morning, that is, as soon as her husband's back was turned, she had quitted the house with the maid and child, to take the train for home, bringing with her—it was what she phrased it—her shameful tale.

A tale that distressed Mrs. Carradyne to sickness. A tale that so abjectly terrified Captain Monk, when it was imparted to him on Tuesday morning, as to take every atom of fierceness out of his composition.

"Not Hamlyn's wife!" he gasped. "Eliza!"

"No, not his wife," she retorted, a great deal too angry herself to be anything but fierce and fiery. "That other woman, that false first wife of his, was not drowned, as was set forth, and she has come to claim him, with their son."



“His wife; their son,” muttered the Captain as if he were bewildered. “Then what are you?—what is your son? Oh, my poor Eliza.”

“Yes, what are we? Papa, I will bring him to answer for it before his country’s tribunal—- if there be law in the land.”

No one spoke to this. It may have occurred to them to remember that Mr. Hamlyn could not legally be punished for what he did in innocence. Captain Monk opened the glass doors and walked on to the terrace, as if the air of the room were oppressive. Eliza went out after him.

“Papa,” she said, “there now exists all the more reason for your making my darling *your* heir. Let it be settled without delay. He must succeed to Leet Hall.”



Page 36

Captain Monk looked at his daughter as if not understanding her. “No, no, no,” he said. “My child, you forget; trouble must be obscuring your faculties. None but a *legal* descendant of the Monks could be allowed to have Leet Hall. Besides, apart from this, it is already settled. I have seen for some little time now how unjust it would be to supplant Henry Carradyne.”

“Is *he* to be your heir? Is it so ordered?”

“Irrevocably. I have told him so this morning.”

“What am I to do?” she wailed in bitter despair. “Papa, what is to become of me—and of my unoffending child?”

“I don’t know: I wish I did know. It will be a cruel blight upon us all. You will have to live it down, Eliza. Ah, child, if you and Katherine had only listened to me, and not made those rebellious marriages!”

He turned away as he spoke in the direction of the church, to see that his orders were being executed there. Harry Carradyne ran after him. The clock was striking midday as they entered the churchyard.

Yes, the workmen were at their work—taking down the bells.

“If the time were to come over again, Harry,” began Captain Monk as they were walking homeward, he leaning upon his nephew’s arm, “I wouldn’t have them put up. They don’t seem to have brought luck somehow, as the parish has been free to say. Not but that must be utter nonsense.”

“Well, no they don’t, uncle,” assented Harry.

“As one grows in years, one gets to look at things differently, lad. Actions that seemed laudable enough when one’s blood was young and hot, crop up again then, wearing another aspect. But for those chimes, poor West would not have have died as he did. I have had him upon my mind a good bit lately.”

Surely Captain Monk was wonderfully changing! And he was leaning heavily upon Harry’s arm.

“Are you tired, uncle? Would you like to sit down on this bench and rest?”

“No, I’m not tired. It’s West I’m thinking about. He lies on my mind sadly. And I never did anything for the wife or child to atone to them! It’s too late now—and has been this many a year.”



Harry Carradyne's heart began to beat a little. Should he say what he had been hoping to say sometime? He might never have a better opportunity than this.

"Uncle Godfrey," he spoke in low tones, "would you—would you like to see Mr. West's daughter? His wife has been dead a long while; but—would you like to see her—Alice?"

"Ay," fervently spoke the old man. "If she be in the land of the living, bring her to me. I'll tell her how sorry I am, and how I would undo the past if I could. And I'll ask her if she'll be to me as a daughter."

So then Harry Carradyne told him all. It was Alice West who was already under his roof, and who, fate and fortune permitting, *Heaven* permitting, would sometime be Alice Carradyne.



Page 37

Down sat Captain Monk on a bench of his own accord. Tears rose to his eyes. The sudden revulsion of feeling was great: and truly he was a changed man.

“You spoke of Heaven, Harry. I shall begin to think it has forgiven me. Let us be thankful.”

But Captain Monk found he had more to thank Heaven for ere many minutes had elapsed. As Harry Carradyne sat by him in silence, marvelling at the change, yet knowing that the grievous blow which was making havoc of Eliza had effected the completeness of the subduing, he caught sight of an approaching fly. Another fly from the railway station at Evesham.

“How dare you come here, you villain!” shouted Captain Monk, rising in threatening anger, as the fly’s inmate called to the driver to stop and began to get out of it. “Are you not ashamed to show your face to me, after the evil you have inflicted upon my daughter?”

Philip Hamlyn, smiling kindly and calmly, caught Captain Monk’s lifted hands. “No evil, sir,” he said, soothingly. “It was all a mistake. Eliza is my true and lawful wife.”

“Eh? What’s that?” said the Captain quite in a whisper, his lips trembling.

Quietly Philip Hamlyn explained. He had taken the previous day to investigate the matter, and had followed his wife down by a night train. His first wife *was* dead. She had been drowned in the *Clipper of the Seas*, as was supposed. The child was saved, with his nurse: the only two passengers who were saved. The nurse made her way to a place in the south of France, where, as she knew, her late mistress’s sister lived, Mrs. O’Connett, formerly Miss Sophia Pratt. Mrs. O’Connett, a young widow, had just lost her only child, a boy about the age of the little one rescued from the cruel seas. She seized on him with feverish avidity, adopted him as her own, quitted the place for another Anglo-French town where she was not previously known, taught the child to call her “Mamma,” and had never let it transpire that the boy was not hers. But now, after the lapse of a few years, Mrs. O’Connett was on the eve of marriage with an Irish Major. To him she told the truth; and, as he did not want to marry the child as well as herself, he persuaded her to return him to his father. Mrs. O’Connett brought the child to London, ascertained Mr. Hamlyn’s address, and all about him, and watched about to speak to him, alone if possible, unknown to his wife. Remembering what had been the behaviour of the child’s mother, she was by no means sure of a good reception from Philip himself, or what adverse influence might be brought to bear by the new ties he had formed. Mrs. O’Connett had the same remarkable and lovely hair that her sister had had, whom she very much resembled; she had also a talent for underhand ways.

That was the truth—and I have had to tell it in a nutshell, space growing limited. Philip Hamlyn had ascertained it all beyond possibility of dispute, had seen Mrs. O'Connett, and had brought down the good tidings.



Page 38

Of all the curious sights this record has afforded, perhaps the most surprising was to see Captain Monk pass his arm lovingly within that of Philip Hamlyn and march off with him to Leet Hall as if he were a prize to be coveted. "Here he is, Eliza," said he; "he has come to cheer both you and me."

For once in her life Eliza Hamlyn was subdued to meekness. She kissed her husband and shed happy tears. She was his lawful wife, and the little one was his lawful child. True, there was an elder son; but, compared with what had been feared, that was a slight evil.

"We must make them true brothers, Eliza," whispered Philip Hamlyn. "They shall share alike all I have and all I leave behind me. And our own little one must be called James in future."

"And you and I will be good friends from henceforth," cried Captain Monk warmly, clasping Philip Hamlyn's ready hand. "I have been to blame in more ways than one, giving the reins unduly to my arbitrary temper. It seems to me, however, that life holds enough of real angles for us without creating any for ourselves."

And surely it did seem, as Mrs. Carradyne would have liked to point out aloud, that those chimes had been fraught with messages of evil. For had not all these blessings set in with their removal?—even in the very hour that saw the bells taken down!

Harry Carradyne had drawn his uncle from the room; he now came in again, bringing Alice West. Her face was a picture of agitation, for she had been made known to Captain Monk. Harry led her up to Mrs. Hamlyn, with a beaming smile and a whisper.

"Eliza, as we seem to be going in generally for amenities, won't you give just a little corner of your heart to *her*? We owe her some reparation for the past. It is her father who lies in that grave at the north end of the churchyard."

Eliza started. "Her father! Poor George West her father?"

"Even so."

Just a moment's struggle with her rebellious spirit and Mrs. Hamlyn stooped to kiss the trembling girl. "Yes, Alice, we do owe you reparation amongst us, and we must try to make it," she said heartily. "I see how it is: you will reign here with Harry; and I think he will be able, after all, to let us keep Peacock's Range."

There came a grand wedding, Captain Monk himself giving Alice away. But Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn did not retain Peacock's Range; they and their boys, the two Walters, had to look out for another local residence; for Mrs. Carradyne retired to Peacock's Range herself. Now that Leet Hall had a young mistress, she deemed it policy to quit it; though



it should have as much of her as it pleased as a visitor. And Captain Godfrey Monk made himself happier in these peaceful days than he had ever been in his stormy ones.

And that's the history. If I had to begin it again, I don't think I should write it; for I have had to take its details from other people—chiefly from the Squire and old Mr. Sterling, of the Court. There's nothing of mine in it, so to say, and it has been only a bother.



Page 39

And those unfortunate chimes have nearly passed out of memory with the lapse of years. The "Silent Chimes" they are always called when, by chance, allusion is made to them, and will be so called for ever.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE BRETONS AT HOME.

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

Still we had not visited le Folgoet, and it had to be done.

"No one ever leaves our neighbourhood without having seen le Folgoet," said M. Hellard. "Or if he does so he loses the best thing we can offer him in the way of excursions. Also, he must expect no luck in his future travels through Brittany."

[Illustration: MORLAIX.]

"And he must be looked upon in the light of a *barbare*," chimed in Madame. "Not to do le Folgoet would be almost as bad as not going to confession in Lent."

"My dear, did *you* go to confession in Lent?" asked Monsieur, slyly.

"Monsieur Hellard," laughed Madame, blushing furiously, "I am a good Catholic. Ask no questions. We were speaking of Folgoet. Everyone should go there."

"Is the excursion, then, to be looked upon as a pilgrimage, or a penance?" we asked. "Will it absolve us from our sins, or grant us indulgences? Is there some charm in its stones, or can we drink of its waters and return to our first youth?"

"The magic spring!" laughed *Mme.* Hellard. "You will find it at the back of the church. I have drunk of its waters, certainly; on a very hot day last summer. They refreshed me, but I still feel myself mortal."

"Ah, yes," cried Monsieur, "the waters of Lethe and the elixir vitae have equally to be discovered. I imagine that they belong to Paradise—and we have lost Paradise, you know: though I have found my Eve," added Monsieur, with a gallant bow to his *cara sposa*; "and have been in Paradise ever since."

"*You*, apparently, have found and drunk of the waters of Lethe," laughed Madame. "You forget all our numerous quarrels and disagreements."



“Thunderstorms are said to clear the air,” returned Monsieur; “but ours have been mere summer lightning. That, you know, is not dangerous, and beautifies the horizon.”

It was the day of our visit to St. Jean du Doigt, and we had seriously fallen out with our coachman by the way. St. Jean had so charmed us that we felt reluctant to leave it. The little inn, quiet and solitary, with its windows open to the sunshine, its snow-white cloth, its wealth of creeper and blossom trailing up the walls and sunning over the roof, invited us to enter and be happy; to revel in the outer scene, sylvan, rustic, ecclesiastical, an overflow of the beauties of earth, sky, sunshine and ancient architecture. Here was an earthly paradise; it might still be ours for some golden moments. Yet we threw away our opportunity; as we so often do in life in far weightier matters than taking luncheon at a village inn.

Page 40

We hesitated very much, but we had to see Plougasnou, and our driver, for reasons of his own, declared that Plougasnou was far more beautiful than St. Jean du Doigt, whilst its inn was renowned in Brittany. So, having watched the funeral wind picturesquely down the hill-side, pause at the beautiful gateway, and disappear into the church, we departed.

It was very charming to drive about the hills and valleys, the narrow country lanes that were full of the beauty of summer. Finally, a steep ascent brought us to our destination with a rude awakening. We had left Paradise for very earthly quarters. There was no beauty about the spot, which, placed on a hill, was bleak, bare, and exposed. The inn was the incarnation of ugliness, and everything about it was rough and rude. In the kitchen two women were at work. The one was brewing coffee, which sent forth a delicious aroma, the other, with weeping eyes, was peeling onions for the pot-au-feu.

We were served with a modest luncheon in a room behind the kitchen. Madame prepared our food, and we had the privilege of assisting at the ceremony. We were initiated into the mystery of frying an omelette-au-naturel, the safest thing to order, no matter where you may be in France, for the humblest cottage knows how to send up its omelette to perfection. The handmaiden waited upon us, but she was heavy and not intelligent, and she walked about in wooden shoes that clattered and echoed and shocked one's nerves. But this did not affect the omelette, or the modest ragout that concluded the banquet.

We lunched almost al fresco. The window was wide open and looked on to a large yard, surrounded by outbuildings. Hens raced about, and without ceremony flew up to the window and demanded their share of the feast. Several cats came in; so that, as far as animals were concerned, we might still consider ourselves in Paradise.

Then we passed out by way of the window, and immense dogs bade us defiance and woke the echoes of the neighbourhood. Luckily they were chained, and H.C.'s "Cave canem!" was superfluous. The church struck out the hour. Placed in a sort of three-cornered square above the inn, the tower stood out boldly against the background of sky, but it possessed no beauty or merit. Away out of sight and hearing, we imagined the glorious sea breaking and frothing over the rocks, and the points of land that stretched out ruggedly towards the horizon; but we did not go down to it. We felt out of tune with our surroundings, and only cared for the moment when we should commence the long drive homeward. Had we possessed some special anathema, some charm that would have placed our driver under a mild punishment for twenty-four hours, I believe that we should not have spared him.

So, on the whole, we were glad that our excursion to le Folgoet would have to be done in part by train. We arranged it for the morrow, making the most of our blue skies.



Page 41

"You will have a charming day," said Madame Hellard, as we prepared to set out the next morning. "I do not even recommend umbrellas. It is the sort of wind that in Brittany never brings rain."

Our only objection was that there was rather too much of it.

Declining the omnibus, which rattled over the stones and was more or less of a sarcophagus, without its repose, we mounted the interminable Jacob's Ladder, and glanced in at our Antiquarian's. He was absent this morning; had gone a little way into the country, where he had heard of some Louis XIV. furniture that was to be sold by the Prior of an old Abbey: though how so much that was luxurious and worldly had ever entered an abbey seemed a mystery.

We were soon en route for Landerneau, our destination as far as the train was concerned. The line, picturesque and diversified, passed through a narrow wooded valley where ran the river Elorn. On the left was the extensive forest of Brezal; and in the small wood of *Pont-Christ*, an interesting sixteenth century chapel faced an ancient and romantic windmill. Close to this was a large pond, surrounded by rugged rocks and firs; altogether a wild and beautiful scene. Soon after, through the trees, we discerned the graceful open spire of the Church of La Roche, and then, upon rugged height above the railway, the ruins of the ancient Castle of la Roche-Maurice, called by the Breton peasants round about, in their broad dialect, "la Ro'ch Morvan." It was founded by Maurice, King of the Bretons, about the year 800, and was demolished about 1490, during the war Charles VIII. waged against Anne of Brittany. Very little of the ruin remains, excepting a square donjon and a portion of the exterior walls and the four towers.

Finally came Landerneau, and the train continued its way towards Brest without us.

We found the old town well worth exploring. It is situated on the Elorn, or the river of Landerneau, as it is more often called. The stream is fairly broad here, and divides the town into two parts. It is spanned by an old bridge, bordered by a double row of ancient and gabled houses; and rising out of the stream, like a small island or a moated grange, is an old Gothic water mill, remarkably beautiful and picturesque. This little scene alone is worth a journey to Landerneau. A Gothic inscription, which has been placed in a house not far off, declares that the old mill was built by the Rohans in 1510; and was no doubt devoted to higher uses than the grinding of corn.

There are many old houses, many quaint and curious bits of architecture in Landerneau. On one of these, bearing the date of 1694, we found two curious sculptures: a lion rampant and a man armed with a drawn sword; and, between them, the inscription: TIRE, TVE. We might, indeed, have gone up and down the street armed with sword, gun, or any other murderous weapon, with impunity—there was nothing to fight but the air. We had it all to

Page 42

ourselves, on this side the river. Yet Landerneau is a flourishing place of some ten thousand inhabitants, with extensive manufactories, saw mills, and large timber yards. Vessels come up the river and load and unload; and, on bright days when the sunshine pours upon the flashing water, and warms the wood lying about in huge stacks, and a delicious pine-scent goes forth upon the air, it is a very pleasant scene, and a very fitting spot for a short sojourn.

It also deals extensively in strawberries, exporting to England many thousand boxes of the delicious fruit that grows so largely in the neighbourhood. The hotel this morning seemed full of them, and we had but to ask, and to receive in abundance. The place was full of their fragrance: a fragrance that seemed so allied to the smell of the pine wood in the timber yards.

The town is of great antiquity, and appears to have succeeded a Roman Settlement. It is said to owe its name to St. Ernec, a Breton prince, the son, says tradition, of Judicael, King of the Domnomee. This prince, about the year 669, turned monk, and built himself a cell on the banks of the Elorn, a river which divided in those days the sees of Leon and Cornouaille. Where the cell was is now the village of St. Ernec, and a chapel which preceded the church of the Recollets.

In time Landerneau became the chief town of the Vicomte of Leon; and was raised to a Principality in 1572 in favour of Henri, Vicomte de Rohan and his brother Rene, Lord of Soubise, who founded the dukedom of Rohan-Chabot. It remained in possession of Lords of Landerneau until the Revolution. Fontenelle pillaged the town in 1592, and in the seventeenth century its famous castle was destroyed.

[Illustration: CALVARY, GUIMILIAU.]

“There will be noise in Landerneau,” has become a Breton proverb, employed whenever any social event is stirring up the populace. It owes its origin to a bygone custom of the town, of serenading widows on the evening of their second marriage, with drums, trumpets, kettles, and every kind of unmusical instrument that could be pressed into the service of the uproarious ceremony.

Of this we had no evidence. The town was quiet to the verge of deadly dulness; if there were widows rash enough to contemplate a second marriage, we knew nothing about it; they were discreet, and kept their secret to themselves.

There are many monasteries and nunneries in the neighbourhood. Some are in ruins; some have become destined to other purposes; and if their walls could speak, probably would cry aloud: “To such base uses do we come!” Sitting on the banks of the river, you watch its calm flowing waters, and a vessel moored to the side, where a Breton woman



is hanging out clothes to dry, and a man on deck is lazily smoking his pipe. Behind you is a timber yard, sending forth its strawberry-pine perfume. There is always some attractions in a timber yard. Whether you will or not it fascinates you; you enter for a moment, and stroll about through the little alleys between the stacks, as numerous and complicated as the twistings and turnings of a maze. You imagine yourself once more a boy playing at hide-and-seek, and revel in the hot sunshine that is pouring down upon you and bringing out the perfume of the wood.



Page 43

Returning to the river, your eye wanders far down the stream, until a large building upon its banks arrests your attention. It looks the emblem and abode of peace; perhaps is so. It is the ancient Couvent des Cordeliers, founded by Jean de Rohan, in 1488. But monks no longer tread its corridors and offer up the midnight mass in its small chapel. It is now occupied by ladies—les Dames du Calvaire, as they are called. If the monks were to arise from their little graveyard, would they rush back horrified and affrighted at such desecration? and if the walls had voices, would *they*, too, be ungallant enough to cry “To such base uses do we come?” The ancient convent of the Ursulines has been turned into a Penitentiary, thus in a measure fulfilling its original destiny.

Not far from Landerneau, also, on the banks of the Elorn, is the Avenue of the Chateau de la Joyeuse Garde, celebrated as being the rendezvous of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Nothing now remains but the ruins of a subterranean vault and a romantic Gothic Gateway of the twelfth century, covered with ivy and creeping shrubs. The whole surroundings are beautiful and romantic; undulations, here wooded and rocky, there richly cultivated; laughing and fertile slopes running down into warm and sheltered valleys, through which the river winds its graceful course.

Having made a slight acquaintance with the old streets and ancient houses, we went back to the inn, where we found the carriage ready to take us to le Folgoet.

A strong wind had suddenly arisen and clouds of dust accompanied us. Under ordinary circumstances the drive would have been pleasant, though uneventful. The road is somewhat monotonous, and very little attracts the attention beyond small, well-wooded estates, breaking in upon the long stretches of richly cultivated country, where life ought to run in a very even tenor.

After awhile we turned into a by-road, and presently descending between high hedges, the object of our excursion suddenly and unexpectedly opened up before our astonished vision.

It would be difficult to forget the effect of that first view of le Folgoet. The high hedges on either side had concealed everything. These fell away, and within a few yards of us, in a barren and dreary plain uprose the wonderful church.

A few poor houses and cottages comprise the village, and here nearly a thousand inhabitants manage to stow themselves away. But nothing strikes you more in these Breton villages than their silent and apparently deserted condition, even at midday. Nine times out of ten, there is scarcely a creature to be seen in the streets, the house doors are for the most part closed, no face peers curiously from the windows, and no sound breaks upon the stillness of the air.

So was it to-day. The tramp of our horses, the rumbling of wheels alone startled the silence as we approached the church. The small houses forming the village in no way took from its grandeur or interfered with its solitude and solemnity.



Page 44

There in the desolate plain it rose, "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever." Its charm fell upon us in the first moment, its wonderful tone and colouring held us spellbound. Our first wonder was to find a building so perfect in the midst of this desolate plain, so far away from the world and civilization. It was our first wonder; and when presently we turned away from it I think it was our last. But this solitude and desolation add infinitely to its charm; just as the mystery and romance that enshroud the far-off monasteries in their desolate mountain retreats would fall away as "the baseless fabric of a vision" if they were brought into the crowded and commonplace atmosphere of town life.

The legend of le Folgoet is a curious one:

Towards the middle of the fourteenth century, there lived in a neighbouring forest a poor idiot named Soloman, or Salaun, as it is written in the Breton tongue. This idiot was known as the Fool of the wood—le Folgoet.

There, in the quiet solitude, his voice might constantly be heard singing, in his own strange way, hymns to the Virgin; and often during the night, chanting an Ave Maria. Daily he begged his bread in the neighbouring town of Lesneven, always using the same form of words: Ave Maria: adding in Breton, "Salaun a zebre bara." "Soloman would eat some bread."

Thus for forty years he lived, never having injured anyone, or made an enemy. Then he fell ill, and one morning was found dead in the wood, near the little spring from which he had drunk daily and the hollow tree that had been his nightly shelter.

Soloman the fool was already fading from men's minds, when a miracle happened. Above the little grave in the wood where he had been buried there suddenly sprang a white lily, remarkable for its beauty and the exquisite perfume it shed abroad. But what made it more wonderful was that upon every leaf, in gold letters, appeared the words "Ave Maria!"

This apparent miracle was soon noised abroad, and people flocked from far and near to see the flower, which remained perfect for six weeks and then began to fade. All the priests and ecclesiastics of the neighbourhood, the nobles and the officers of the Duc de Rohan, decided that they should dig about the root of the lily and discover its source. This was done, and it was found to spring from the mouth of Salaun the idiot.

Of course such a miracle could not remain uncommemorated. Jean de Langoueznon, Abbot of Landevennec, one of the witnesses of the miracle, wrote an elaborate account of it in Latin. Pilgrimages were constantly made to the grave, and at last a church was built over the spring of the poor idiot, whose faith and blameless life had been so strangely rewarded. Such is the origin of one of Brittany's finest and most remarkable churches.



Page 45

It is in the second Pointed Gothic style, and is built of a mixture of granite and dark Kersanton stone. The tone is singularly beautiful, and harmonises well with the dreary plain. It is at once sombre, dignified and impressive, relieved by great richness of sculpture. Kersanton stone lends itself to carving, as we have seen, and here many parts will be found in perfect preservation. Some of the rich mouldings in the doorways have worn away, and some of the small statues have been mutilated by time or have altogether disappeared, but the tone chiefly marks the age of the church. This is not always the case, and even not generally, with the buildings for which Kersanton stone has been used; but le Folgoet is exposed to the elements which sweep across the dreary plain without resistance; these have done their kindly work, and given to the old walls a beauty that no mortal hand could fashion.

We stood before it in mute admiration, having expected much, but finding far more. The tall trees near it bent and murmured to the fierce blast that blew, as if they, too, would add their homage to the charm of the sacred edifice.

Its solitary spire rose to a height of one hundred and sixty feet, full of grace and elegance. Every portion of the exterior bore minute inspection, it was so elaborately sculptured, so well preserved. Time has spared it more than the hand of man.

The towers are unequal. The higher possesses the exquisite open spire, a landmark for all the country round. The other is crowned by a small Renaissance lantern and roof, the work of the Duchess Anne. The beautiful west portal is no longer perfect. Its porch or canopy fell in 1824, and has never been replaced; and better so. The porch of the south doorway is large, and so magnificent that it alone would be worth a pilgrimage. It is called the Apostles' porch, and is also supposed to have been the work of the good Duchess. Not far from it are the remains of what must have been a very lovely cross. The carving of the porch is of great delicacy and refinement; and, less exposed to the elements than the west doorway, is in far better preservation. Here are graceful scrolls and mouldings of vine leaves and other devices curiously interwoven; the leaves so minutely carved that you may trace their veins and fringes. The arms of Brittany and France are also cunningly intertwined. Round the west doorway are wreaths of vines and thistles, with birds and serpents introduced amongst fruit and flowers. Above the doorway is an elaborate sculpture of the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi. Joseph is represented—it is often the case in Breton carvings—as a Breton peasant, wearing the clumsy wooden shoes of the country. He would have found himself somewhat embarrassed in them when crossing the desert. But the Bretons, behind the rest of the world, had no ideas beyond those that came to them from practical experience, and the picturesque dignity of an Eastern dress was far beyond their imagination. The centre pier of the doorway is formed into a niche enclosing the basin for holy water, protected by a carved canopy of great beauty; but time and exposure have worn away much of the sharpness of the work.

Page 46

[Illustration: LANDERNEAU.]

The gables of the transept are decorated with open parapets; and at the east end, below a rose window remarkable for its tracery, an arched niche protects the water of the fountain of Solomon the idiot: the actual spring itself being beneath the high altar.

These waters, like those of the lovely fountain of St. Jean du Doigt, are supposed to be miraculous, and are the object of many a pilgrimage, though fortunately for the village, the day of its *Pardon* is not the chief occasion for the assembling together of the blind, halt, maimed and withered folk of Brittany. But the pilgrims bathe in the waters, which are said to possess the gift of healing, and we know that faith alone will often perform miracles. As we looked upon the clear, transparent water, we felt at least the innocence of the charm, and therein a great virtue.

The interior of the church has been much praised by competent judges, and very justly so, for in its way it is very perfect. Yet, to us, its beauty was marked by a certain heaviness; and the "dim religious light" that adds so much to the effect of many an interior, here brought with it no sense of mystery. Perhaps it was not sufficiently subdued; or the heaviness of the stone may have had something to do with it. Also, it looked singularly small, in comparison with the exterior. It has been much altered since it was first built, and has lost nearly all its arches, which have been replaced by Gothic canopies in the form of ornamental projections.

Much of the interior is beautifully and elaborately sculptured, and will bear long and close inspection. The nave and aisles are under one roof, like the church of St. Jean du Doigt: an arrangement not always effective. The choir is short, as also are the aisles, the south transept being the longest of all. A very effective rood screen separates the choir from the nave. It is constructed of Kersanton stone, and consists of three round arches, above which are canopies supporting a gallery of open work decorated with quatrefoils. The effect is extremely rich and imposing; and the foliage of the screen is a perfect study of complications.

At the end of the south transept is the Fool's Chapel. The frescoes are a history of his life, which is yet further carried out in the windows and on the bas reliefs of the pulpit. The high altar under the rose window is very finely moulded, with its canopied niches and beautiful tracery. There are many statues of saints in the church, dressed in Breton costumes, that would no doubt astonish them if they came back to life and saw themselves in effigy. Many parts of the church are decorated with wonderful carvings of vegetables, fruit and flowers.

But the general impression is heavy and sombre, the true Kersanton effect and colour. Time and the elements have softened, subdued and beautified the exterior; but the tone of the interior, unexposed to the elements, remains what it originally was: wanting in refinement and romance; it is the beauty of elaborate execution that imposes upon one.

All the windows are remarkable for their lovely Flamboyant tracery, that of the rose window being especially fine and delicate.



Page 47

The exterior is far finer, far more wonderful. One never grew tired of gazing; of examining it from every point of view. It was a dream picture and a marvel. Nothing we saw in Brittany compared with it, excepting the Cathedral of Quimper. Before it stretched the dreary plain; behind it were the humble houses composing the village, very much out of sight and not at all aggressive.

On the south side was the Gothic college built by Anne of Brittany; and here she and Francis the First lodged, when they came on a pilgrimage to le Folgoet. It is a Gothic building of the fifteenth century, with an octagonal turret of rare design; but its beauty is of the past. We found it in the hands of the restorers, who were doing their best to ruin it. Originally it harmonised wonderfully with the church, but soon the harmony will have disappeared for ever.

Our carriage had gone on to the neighbouring town of Lesneven, to rest the horses and await our arrival, leaving us free to examine and loiter as we pleased. No one troubled us. The inhabitants were all away; or sleeping; or eating and drinking; the scene was as quiet and desolate as if the church had been in the midst of a desert.

But the time came when we must leave it to its solitude and go back into the world—the small but interesting world of Brittany; the world of slow-moving people and sleepy ways, and ancient towns full of wonderful outlines and mediaeval reminiscences.

We took a last look round. We seemed alone in the world, no sight or sound of humanity anywhere; the very workmen despoiling the Gothic college had disappeared, leaving the mute witnesses of their vandalism in the form of scaffolding and very modern bricks and mortar. Beyond was a village street and small houses well closed and apparently deserted. Nearer to us rose the magnificent church, with its towers and spire, all its rich carving fringed against the background of the sky. The longer we looked, the more wonderful seemed its solemn and exquisite tone. The trees beneath which we stood waved and bent and rustled in the strong wind that blew; and beyond all stretched the dreary plain; dreary and desolate, but adding much to the charm of the picture. It was a scene never to be forgotten; but it was, after all, a scene appealing only to certain temperaments: to those who delight in the highest forms of architecture; in walls time-honoured and lichen-stained; who find beauty and charm ever in the blue sky and the waving trees; a charm that is chiefly spiritual.

Leaving the church behind us, and the dreary plain to our left, we passed into a country road with high hedges. This soon led us to a pathway across the fields. About a mile in the distance the steeples of Lesneven rose up and served us as beacons. The day was still young and the sun was high in the heavens. Small white clouds chased each other rapidly, driven by the strong wind that blew. We soon reached the quiet town and found it quiet

Page 48

with a vengeance. Not knowing the way to the inn where our coachman had put up, it was some time before we could discover an inhabitant to direct us. At length we found a human being who had evidently come abroad under some mistaken impression, or in a fit of absence of mind. At the same time a child issued from a doorway. We felt quite in a small crowd. It was a humble child, but with a very charming and innocent expression; one of those faces that take possession of you at once and for ever. For it does not require days or weeks or months to know some people; moments will place you in intimate communion with them. You meet and suddenly feel that you must have known each other in some previous existence, so mutual is the recognition. But it is not so, for we have had no previous existence. It is nothing but the freemasonry of the spirit; soul going out to soul. For this reason the “love at first sight” that the poets have raved about in all the ages, and in all the ages mankind has laughed at, is probably as real as anything we know of; as real as our existence, the air we breathe, the heaven above us.

But we were at Lesneven, in the midst of the little crowd of two—we must not keep it waiting. And although the day is still young, yet the golden moments will fly, and the sun sinks rapidly westward.

So we inquired our way and were politely directed, and the little child declared it would be her pleasure to accompany us: “*il etoit si facile de s’egarer,*” she declared, in very grown-up tones, and in her peculiar patois. *Il etoit.* We had not heard the old-fashioned expression since our childhood, in the villages of our native land.

We accepted the escort, and the little maiden chatted as freely as if we had been very old acquaintances. “She supposed that, like all strangers, we had been to see le Folgoet? It was a fine church, but its miraculous fountain was the best of all. Once, when she hurt her foot, grandpere carried her across the fields to the fountain. She bathed her foot in the water and said a prayer and offered a candle, and—vite, vite!—the foot was well. In three days she could run about. But that was two years ago, when she was a very little girl; now she was quite big.”

“How old was she now?”

“She was twelve, and very soon would do her first communion, dressed all in white, with a beautiful veil over her head. Should we not like to see her?”

“We should, very much.”

“Could we not come again next year, when it would take place? She should so much like us to see her. La! voila l’hotel!” she cried, passing rapidly from one subject to

another, after the manner of childhood. "Now she must run back home. And we were to be sure and come again next year."

And before we could turn, the child had darted away, evidently to prevent the possibility of reward: a refined instinct for which we should scarcely have given her credit. She may have been a Bretonne, but not a true Bretonne; her gracefulness and intelligence almost forbade it. Yet there are exceptions to every rule, and Nature herself delights in occasional surprises.



Page 49

[Illustration: LE FOLGOET.]

We found Lesneven very dull and sleepy, but picturesque. There was a singular old market-house of timber work, the quaintest we had ever seen; and some of the houses formed ancient and interesting groups. Our coachman had made an excellent dejeuner, if we were to judge by the self-satisfied expression of his face, which resembled the sun at mid-day seen through a red fog. He was now sitting in the courtyard under a very lovely creeper, drinking his coffee out of a tall glass, and of course smoking the pipe of peace. The creeper distinctly lent enchantment to the view: the coachman did not.

We wandered about whilst he made his preparations for starting. The market-place was broken and diversified in its outlines; one or two of the streets turning out of it looked quite gabled and mediaeval. The covered market-house, with its curious roof and ancient timbers, gave it a very distinctive and very individual appearance; so that it now rises up in the memory as one of the many Breton pictures which make one's experience of the little country a very exceptional pleasure.

Out of the College poured a small stream of boys, startling the silence of the sleepy little town. We were mutually surprised at seeing each other. They looked and gazed, and walked around and about us—at a certain distance—and seemed as interested and perplexed as if we had been visitants from other regions clothed in unknown forms. But they manifested none of the delicacy of our little guide, and were not half so interesting. Yet probably the roughest and rudest boy amongst them might be the maiden's brother; for we have just said that Nature delights in surprises, and not infrequently in contradictions. The building they poured out of, now the College, was an ancient convent of the Recollets, dating from 1645.

A commotion in the courtyard of the "Grande Maison," which was just opposite the timber market-house, and the appearance of the driver on his box, in all the dignity of office, was our signal for departure. We looked back after leaving the town, and there in the distance, uprising towards the sky, was the lovely spire of le Folgoet, a monument to departed greatness, superstition, and religious fervour; a dream of beauty which will last, we may hope, for many ages to come.

We soon re-entered the road we had travelled earlier in the day; and in due time, after one or two narrow escapes of being overturned, so high was the wind, so blinding the dust, we re-entered Landerneau, a haven of refuge from the boisterous gale.

Our host had prepared us a sumptuous repast, of which the crowning glory was a pyramid of strawberries flanked on one side by a ewer of the freshest cream, and on the other by a quaint old sugar basin of chased silver, of the First Empire period. Could mortals have desired more, even on Olympus—even in the Amaranthine fields of Elysium?

Page 50

It was not yet the dinner-hour and we had it all to ourselves, with the waiter's undivided attention, who hoped we had not been disappointed in our little excursion. "He had been five years in Landerneau, but had never yet seen le Folgoet. Dame! he had no time for pilgrimages, and doubted whether, after all, they did much good. For his part, he didn't believe in miracles. Du reste, he had nothing the matter with him; was neither blind, lame, nor stupid—grace au ciel, for he had his living to get. As for the church, to him one church was very much like another: and he would rather arrange a pyramid of strawberries than contemplate the spires of his native Quimper."

So true is it that water will not rise above its own level—and perhaps so merciful.

In due course we returned once more to our now old and familiar haunt, Morlaix. We came back to it each time with our affection and admiration heightened. Its old streets seem to grow more and more picturesque; and more and more we appeared to absorb into our "inner consciousness" this mediaeval atmosphere. We seemed to be living in a perpetual romance of the past; and the men and women who surrounded us were so many puppets animated by invisible threads. It was the perfection of existence, in its particular way and for a short time.

The shades of evening had fallen when we once more found ourselves descending Jacob's Ladder. The Antiquarian's door was closed, but a light gleamed through the crevices of the shutters, as antiquated as some of his cherished possessions. We would not disturb him, though we felt sorely inclined to lift the latch and look in upon the picturesque interior. We imagined him perhaps telling his beads, his grey head bowed before the crucifix which, artistically and religiously, was the object of his veneration; mentally we saw the son bending over a plain piece of wood, which gradually assumed a form and design that would make it a thing of beauty for ever. By lifting the latch, all this would be revealed, delight our eyes and refresh our spirit. But what more might we see? The cherub probably was in bed, but the rift within the lute? Ah, that was uncertain; we could not tell. So we thought we would leave the picture to our imagination, where at least it was perfect.

So we went on without lifting the latch; and H.C. fell into raptures over the rising moon and the quaint gables that stood out so gloriously and mysteriously in the pale light. A warmer glow illumined many a lattice. We were surrounded by deep lights and shadows, and felt ourselves steeped in a world of the past, holding familiar intercourse with ghosts that haunted every nook and crevice, every doorway, every niche and archway of this old-world town.

At the hotel, we found Madame Hellard taking the air at her doorway, her hands calmly folded in her favourite attitude of rest and contentment—or was it expectation?

"Was I not a prophet?" was her first greeting. "Did I not say this morning 'No umbrellas?' Have we not had a glorious day!"



Page 51

“But the dust?” we objected.

“Ah!” cried Madame, “on oublie toujours le chat dans le coin, as they say in the Morbihan. Yet there must always be a drawback; you cannot have perfection; and I maintain that dust is better than rain. But what did you think of le Folgoet, messieurs?”

We declared that we could not give expression to our thoughts and emotions.

“A la bonne heure! Did I not tell you that we had nothing like it in our neighbourhood—or in any other, for all I know? Did I in the least exaggerate?”

We assured Madame that she had undercoloured her picture. The reality surpassed her ideal description.

“Ah!” cried Madame sentimentally, “our beau-ideals—when do we ever see them? But personally I cannot complain. I have a husband in ten thousand, and that, after all, should be a woman’s beau-ideal, for it is her vocation. Oh!” with a little scream, pretending not to have heard her husband come up quietly behind her; “you did not hear me paying you compliments behind your back, Eugene? I assure you I meant the very opposite of what I said.”

“If you are perverse, I shall not take you to the Regatta next Sunday,” threatened Monsieur, in deep tones that very thinly veiled the affection lurking behind them.

“The Regatta!” cried Madame. “Where should I find the time to go jaunting off to the Regatta? We have a wedding order to execute for that morning—my hands will be more than full. Figurez vous,” turning to us, “a silly old widow is marrying quite a young man. She is rich, of course; and he has nothing, equally of course. And what does she expect will be the end of it? I cannot imagine what these people do with their common sense and their experience of life. But I always say we gain experience for the benefit of our friends: it enables us to give excellent advice to others, but we never think of applying it to ourselves.”

“But the Regatta,” we interrupted, more interested in that than in the indiscretions of the widow. “We knew nothing about it, and thought of leaving you on Saturday. Is it worth staying for?”

“Distinctly,” replied Madame Hellard. “All Morlaix turns out for the occasion: all the world and his wife will be there. It is quite a pretty scene, and the boats with their white sails look charming. You must drive down by the river side to the coast, and if the afternoon is sunny and warm, I promise you that you will not regret prolonging your stay with us.”

[Illustration: INTERIOR OF LE FOLGOET, SHOWING SCREEN.]



This presented a favourable opportunity for a compliment, but at that moment Catherine's voice was heard in the ascendant; a passage-at-arms seemed to be in full play above; commotion was the order of the moment; and Madame rapidly disappeared to the rescue. The compliment was lost for ever, but a dead calm was the immediate consequence of her presence. Catherine's authority had been defied, and the daring damsel had to be threatened with dismissal if it occurred again.

Page 52

“Ma foi!” cried Catherine, as we met her on the staircase, “a pretty state of things we should have with two mistresses in the salle-a-manger! I should feel as much out of my element as a hen that has hatched duck’s eggs, and sees her brood taking to the water.”

“And apparently there would be as much clucking and commotion,” we slyly observed.

Catherine laughed. “Quite as much. I always say, whatever you have to do, do it thoroughly; and if you have to put people down, let there be no mistake about it. By that means it won’t occur again.”

And Catherine went off with a very determined step and expression, her cap streamers flying on the breeze, to order us a light repast suited to the lateness of the hour. She was certainly Madame’s right hand, and she ministered to our entertainment no less than to our necessities.

Sunday rose fair and promising; a whole week of sunshine and fine weather was a phenomenon in Brittany. Quite early in the morning the town was awake and astir, and it was evident that the good people of Morlaix were going in for the dissipation of a fete day.

The morning drew on, and everyone seemed to have turned out in their best apparel, though, to our sorrow, very few costumes made their appearance. The streets were crowded with sober Bretons, somewhat less sober than usual. Every vehicle in the town had been pressed into the service. Every omnibus was loaded inside and out; carts became objects of envy, and carriages were luxuries for which the drivers exacted their own terms. The river-side, to right and left, was lined with people, all hurrying towards the distant shore; for though many had secured seats in one or other of the delectable vehicles, they were few in comparison with the numbers that, from motives of economy or exercise, preferred to walk. It was a gay and lively scene, and, sober Bretons though they were, the air echoed with song and laughter. Rioting there was none.

The distance was about five miles; but something more than the last mile had to be taken on foot by everyone. We had secured a victoria which was not much larger than a bath chair, but in a crowd this had its advantage. True, we felt every moment as if the whole thing would fall to pieces, but in case of shipwreck there were plenty to come to the rescue.

Nothing happened, and we walked our last mile with sound wind and limbs. Much of the way lay on a hill-side. Cottages were built on the slopes, and we walked upon zigzag paths, through front gardens and back gardens, now level with the ground floor window, now looking into an attic; and now—if we wished—able to peer down the chimney or join the cats on the roof.



At last we came to the sea, which stretched away in all its beauty, shining and shimmering in the sunshine. In the bay formed by this and the opposite coast, the boats taking part in the races were flitting about like white-winged messengers, full of life and grace and buoyancy. Some of the races were over, some were in progress.



Page 53

Our side of the shore was beautifully backed by green slopes rising to wooded heights. In the select inclosure, for the privilege of entering which a franc was charged, the elite of Morlaix walked to and fro, or sat upon long rows of chairs placed just above the beach. We did not think very much of them and were disappointed. All round and about us, rich and poor alike were clothed in modern-day costumes, as ugly and ungainly and ill-worn as any that we see around us in our own fair, but—in this respect—by no means faultless isle.

The few costumes that formed the exception were not graceful; those at least worn by the men. Umbrellas were in full array, and as there was no rain they put them up for the sunshine. A large proportion of the crowd took no interest whatever in the races, which attracted attention and applause only from those either sitting or standing on the beach. The crowded green behind gave its attention to anything rather than the sea and the boats. More general interest was manifested in the sculling matches; especially in the race of the fish-women—tall, strong females, the very picture of health and vigour, becomingly dressed in caps and short blue petticoats, who started in a pair of eight-oared boats, and rowed valiantly in a very well-matched contest until it was lost and won. As the sixteen women, victors and vanquished, stepped ashore, the phlegmatic crowd was stirred in its emotions, and loud applause greeted them. They filed away, laughing and shaking their heads, or looking down modestly and smoothing their aprons, each according to her temperament, and were soon lost in the crowd.

On the slopes in sheltered spots, vendors of different wares, chiefly of a refreshing description, had installed themselves. The most popular and the most picturesque were the pancake women, who, on their knees, beat up the batter, held the frying pans over a charcoal fire, and tossed the pancakes with a skill worthy of Madame Hellard's chef. Their services were in full force, and it was certainly not a graceful exhibition to see the Breton boys and girls, of any age from ten to twenty, devouring these no doubt delicious delicacies with no other assistance than their own fairy fingers. After all, they were enjoying themselves in their own fashion and looked as if they could imagine no greater happiness in life.

We wandered away from the scene, round the point, where stretched another portion of the coast of Finistere. It was a lovely vision. The steep cliffs fell away at our feet to the beach, here quite deserted and out of sight of the crowd not very far off. Over the white sand rolled and swished the pale green water with most soothing sound. The sun shone and sparkled upon the surface. The bay was wide, and on the opposite coast rose the cliffs crowned by the little town of Roscoff, its grey towers sharply outlined against the sky. Our thoughts immediately went back to the day we had spent there; to the quiet streets of St. Pol de Leon, and its beautiful church, and the charming Countess who had exercised such rare hospitality and taken us to fairy-land.



Page 54

The vision faded as we turned our backs upon the sea and the crowd and entered upon our return journey. The zigzag was passed and the houses, where now we looked down the chimneys and now into the cellars. In due time we came to the high road. It was crowded with vehicles all waiting the end of the races and the return of the multitude. Apparently it was “first come, first served,” for we had our choice of all—a veritable *embarras de choix*. It was made and we started. Very soon, on the other side the river, we came in sight of our little auberge, *A la halte des Pecheurs*, where on a memorable occasion we had taken refuge from a second deluge. And there, at its door, stood Madame Mirmiton, anxiously looking down the road for the return of her husband from the Regatta. Whether he had recovered from his sprain, or had found a friendly conveyance to give him a seat, did not appear.

We went our way; the river separated us from the inn and there was no ferry at hand. Many like ourselves were returning; there was no want of movement and animation. It was not a picturesque crowd, for there were no costumes, and the *bourgeoisie* of Morlaix are not more interesting than others of their class.

At last loomed upon us the great viaduct, and a train rolled over as we rolled under it. The vessels in the little port had mounted their flags and looked gay, in honour of the occasion. We entered Morlaix for the last time, for we were to leave on the morrow. Madame Hellard was not taking the air; she and Monsieur were enjoying a moment's repose in the bureau. They now invariably greeted us as *habitues* of the house.

“But you have neither of you been to the Regatta,” we observed.

“I go nowhere without my wife,” gallantly responded our host.

“And I was too busy with our wedding breakfast to think of anything else,” said Madame. “And, to tell you the truth, I don't care for regattas. I can see no pleasure in watching which of two or which of half-a-dozen boats comes in first. The people interest me; but it is really almost as amusing to see them passing one's own door, and not half so tiring. I hope, messieurs, you have returned with good appetites: I have ordered you some *crepes*. Was it not funny to see the old women tossing them on the slopes?”

“Al fresco fetes,” chimed in Monsieur. “Ah, la jeunesse! la jeunesse! Youth is the time for enjoyment. *Donnez-moi vos vingt ans si vous n'en faites rien!* So says the old song—so say I. And now you are going to leave us, and to-morrow we shall be in total eclipse,” he added, determined not to leave us out in his compliments. “But you are right—you cannot stay here for ever. You have seen all that is of note in Morlaix and the neighbourhood, and you will be charmed with Quimper.”

“Quimper? I would rather live fifty years in Morlaix than a hundred in Quimper,” cried Catherine, who came in at that moment for the menus. “The river smells horribly, the

town is dirty and stuffy, and it always rains there. And as for the hotels—enfin, *you will see!*”



Page 55

[Illustration: MORLAIX.]

It was very certain that we should not alight upon another Catherine.

For the last time we wandered out that night when the moon had risen, to take our farewell of the old streets that had given us so much pleasure. We knew them well, and felt that we were communing with old friends. Their outlines, their gabled roofs, the deep shadows cast by the pale moonlight, the warmer reflections from the beautiful latticed windows—all charmed us. We moved in an ancient world, conversed with ghosts of a long-past age; the shades of those who had left behind them so much of the artistic and the excellent; who had, in their day and hour, lived and breathed and moved even as the world of to-day—had been animated with the same thoughts and emotions; in a word, had fulfilled their lot and passed through their birthright of sorrow and suffering.

It was late before we could turn away from the fascination. After the crowded scenes of the day, we seemed surrounded by the very silence and repose, the majesty of Death. Everyone had retired to rest; the curfew had long tolled, and the fires were nearly all out. Only here and there a lighted lattice spoke of a late watcher, who perhaps was searching for the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life, wherewith to turn the grey hairs of age to the flowing locks of youth—the feeble gait of one stricken in years to the vigour and comeliness of manhood. Vain wish! and needless; for why will they not look at life in its truer aspect, and feel that the nearer they approach to death the younger they are growing?

MY MAY-QUEEN

(*AEtat* 4).

Come, child, that I may make
A primrose wreath to crown thee Queen of Spring!
Of thee the glad birds sing;
For thee small flowers fling
Their lives abroad; for thee—for Dorothea's sake!

Hasten! For I must pay
Due homage to thee, have thy Royal kiss,
Our thrush shall sing of this;
—In many a bout of bliss
Tell how I crown'd thee Queen, Spring's Queen, this glad May-day.

JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.



SWEET NANCY.

Shenton was a dull and sleepy village at the best of times; but then it was situated so far from any town. Exboro' was the nearest, and that was ten miles away. To reach it you must traverse a range of pine-clad hills, descending now and again into cool valleys, full of sweet scents and sounds in summer, but dreary enough in winter, when the snow lay thick and the wind whistled through the leafless branches.

Shenton consisted of one long street, terminating in a green on which the church and school-house stood. After that there were no more houses till you reached Exboro', excepting a few scattered farms a mile or two away at Braley Brook. There was also a large farm, known as the Manor, half-a-mile in the opposite direction, occupied by one Jacob Hurst, who was the owner of the farms at Braley Brook.



Page 56

The last house in the long street, at the Green end of it, was occupied by Miss Michin, a milliner and dressmaker, as a card in the window informed the passer-by. Not that the card was necessary, as of course in so small a place everybody knew everybody else; but it was a sort of sign of office, and was always most carefully replaced when Sarah Ann, Miss Michin's Lilliputian maid, cleaned the window, which she did much oftener than was necessary—at least, Mrs. Dodd, the post-mistress, who lived opposite, said so. But then Mrs. Dodd had the shop and a young family to attend to, and did not find it possible to keep her own windows equally bright; so it was perhaps natural that she should find a comfort in remarking on her opposite neighbour in the manner we have described.

Miss Michin's front parlour window was draped with white muslin curtains, which covered it entirely, preventing the eyes of the curious from taking surreptitious glances at the finery therein displayed, and destined to be seen for the first time at church on the persons of the fortunate owners. Just now, a fortnight before Christmas, the array of gay dress material which lay about on tables and chairs was more than usual; and Miss Michin and Nancy Forest—her decidedly pretty apprentice—were working as if their lives depended upon it. Nancy was the only apprentice Miss Michin had, and she had taken her when she was fourteen without a premium, on condition that when she should be “out of her time” (that would be in three years) she should give six months' work in payment for the instruction she had received.

Nancy was now working out the six months, which fact shows her age to be between seventeen and eighteen. At that age a girl—above all, a pretty girl—likes to wear pretty things; and Nancy had many little refined tastes which other girls in her class of life have not—due, perhaps, to the fact that while a child she had been a sort of protegee of Miss Sabina Hurst's up at the Manor Farm. Miss Sabina, who was herself not quite a lady, was nevertheless far above the Forests, who were in their employ, and had charge of an old farmhouse at Braley Brook. She was Mr. Hurst's sister, and had been mistress at the Manor since Mrs. Hurst had died in giving birth to her little son Fred.

Mr. Hurst—a hard and relentless man in most things—was almost weak in his indulgence of his son. All his fancies must be gratified, and in this Miss Sabina concurred. One of Fred's fancies had been to make a playmate of little Nancy Forest. It followed, then, that she had been a great deal at the Manor; but when the children grew older, and Fred took what his aunt and father termed “an absurd fancy” to be a musician, as his mother had been, it occurred to them that possibly later on he might take a yet more absurd idea, and want to marry his old playmate. Nancy was therefore banished from the Manor Farm.

But Fred, who was not accustomed to be crossed, often met his old friend on the hills and in the valleys; and after she had become apprenticed, he would often walk home with her part way—not as a lover, however. For the last two months he had broken this habit, and Nancy had not seen him.



Page 57

But we were saying that girls of Nancy's age liked pretty things to wear. Nancy was no exception, but she had no pretty things; her clothes had, in fact, become deplorably shabby, though by dexterous "undoing" and "doing-up" she did manage to make the very most of her dark blue serge costume. The dress and rather coquettish little jacket were of the same material; and she had a felt hat of the same colour, which in some mysterious way altered its shape to suit the varying fashions. Last winter the wide brim was straight; this winter it was turned up at the back, with a bunch of dark blue ribbons on the crown. Altogether her appearance was picturesque, though the odd mingling of the rustic with the latest Paris fashion-plate might call up a smile to your lips. The smile which the costume provoked was sure to die, however, when you looked at the girl's face. You wondered at once why the lovely brown eyes looked so sad and appealing, and why the little mouth was so tremulous, and why the colour came and went so frequently on the finely-moulded cheeks, which were just a little thin for perfect beauty. And if you happened to be a student of human nature, you would read in one of Nancy's glances a story of conflicting emotions—disappointment, timid expectancy, hope, and a dawning despair: at least, this is what I read there when I looked at Nancy from the Vicar's pew one Sunday morning at Shenton church. I was on a visit at the Vicarage then.

Of course, it must not be supposed that Miss Michin read Nancy Forest's face in this way; but the little dressmaker had a warm heart, though worried by the making of garments, and more by making two ends meet which nature had apparently not intended for such close proximity; but she had certainly noticed that for the last few weeks Nancy had not looked well.

It was growing dark one Thursday evening, and Sarah Ann had just brought the lamp into her mistress's parlour. Miss Michin turned up the light slowly, remarking, as she did so, "I don't want this glass to crack. I might do nothing else but buy lamp-glasses if I left the turning-up of them to Sarah Ann. This one has been boiled, which, Mrs. Dodd says, is a good thing to make them stand heat." Then she broke off suddenly, and stared at her apprentice, exclaiming, "Nancy, child, how pale you look! You must leave off and go home. You shall have a nice cup of tea first. Where do you feel bad?"

The sympathetic tone brought the tears to Nancy's eyes, perhaps more than the words, but she answered hastily: "Oh, indeed, dear Miss Michin, I need not go home. I have a headache, that is all, and I must not leave off before my time. I ought to stop later, and you so busy."

"That frock of Emma Dodd's is just on finished, isn't it?" said Miss Michin, in answer.

"All but the hooks," replied Nancy.

"Then sew them on while I make some tea, and you can leave it at the post-office as you go."



Page 58

Nancy protested, but Miss Michin insisted, and in a short time the dress was pinned up in a dark cloth, and Nancy having drunk the tea, more to please her kind friend than because she thought it would cure her headache, donned the little jacket and fantastic hat, and went across to the post-office, which was also a shop of a general description.

Mrs. Dodd was engaged in lighting her shop-window when Nancy entered.

“I have brought Emma’s dress, Mrs. Dodd,” she began, when that lady had descended from the high stool on which she had mounted to place the lamps in the window. “Miss Michin told me to tell you there wasn’t enough of the plush to finish off the lappets to match the collar and cuffs, but she thinks you’ll like it just as well as it is.”

Mrs. Dodd examined the little dress, and, having approved of it, asked in a friendly way what Nancy herself was going to have new this Christmas.

“Oh, I don’t know yet,” answered Nancy, colouring deeply. “You see, I’m not earning yet, and father’s wages are small, you know.”

“Mr. Hurst is real mean, I know that,” exclaimed the post-mistress, decidedly. “None but a very mean man would have cut your poor father’s wages down after he was laid up with a bad leg so long.”

“But father says himself that he can’t do as much since his accident, and he doesn’t want to be paid beyond what he earns,” Nancy explained, hastily.

Mrs. Dodd began to fold up Emma’s dress, remarking, as she did so, “It’s a queer go as Mr. Hurst should have let young Mr. Fred do nothink but music; but, to be sure, he do play beautiful. My Benny, as blows the organ for him, says it’s ’eavenly what he makes up himself. He’s uncommon handsome, too; much like his mother, who was, poor young lady, a heap too good for the likes of Jacob Hurst. She used to play the church organ like the angel Gabriel.”

Mrs. Dodd glanced at Nancy to see the effect of this simile, which was quite an inspiration, but the girl was intent on smoothing the creases out of her very old and much-mended kid gloves.

“Folks do say, Miss Nancy,” went on Mrs. Dodd, “as young Mr. Fred had a fancy for you at one time, and as you sent him to the rightabouts. Now, I say as—”

“Oh, please don’t say anything about it, Mrs. Dodd,” broke out Nancy, excitedly. “It’s all a mistake—I am not his equal in any way—he never thought of anything like that.” She would have added, “Nor I;” but she was too truthful. An overwhelming sense of shame came over her. How could she have given her heart away unsought!



With a hasty good-night she left the shop, closing the door so sharply in her self-condemnation as to set the little bell upon it ringing as if it had gone mad. She could hear its metallic tinkle till she was close upon the church. Here other sounds filled her ears. There was a light in the church, and Fred Hurst was there playing one of Bach's Fugues.

Page 59

Nancy's heart fluttered like a captive bird. For a brief space she leaned against the cold railings, looking intently at a branch of ivy which the north wind was tossing against the diamond-shaped panes of the window—then she drew herself up hastily and proudly, and walked on rapidly towards the bleak hills which she must cross to reach her father's farm at Braley Brook.

"How I wish I was out of my time," she said to herself, as the crisp snow crackled beneath her small feet. "I could go away then and earn my living, where I could never see him—or hear him—. Oh, Fred!" she broke out in what was almost a cry, "*why* have you met me and walked with me so often, if you meant to leave off and say no more? It must be because my dress has grown so shabby—I don't look so—so nice as I did—yet if his father were not hard I might have more." And poor Nancy being now far from any habitation gave herself the relief of a good cry, knowing she could not be observed.

In the meantime the organ at the church had ceased playing, and the young man who was seated at it began turning over a pile of music which lay beside him. But this he did mechanically—he was not going to play again that evening, he did it as an accompaniment to perplexed thought. He remained so long silent that Benny Dodd, who had been "blowing" for him, ventured out from among the shadows cast by the organ pipes and asked, "Please, Mr. Fred, are you going to play any more?"

Fred Hurst looked up smiling, and feeling in his waistcoat pocket for the customary coin, said cheerfully, "I had quite forgotten you, Benny! No, I shall not play any more to-night."

The small boy clattered down the stone aisle noisily, and Fred Hurst began to push in the stops preparatory to closing the organ. In doing so he caught a glimpse of his face in the small mirror which hung at one side, and he burst out laughing.

"What a tragic look I have managed to put on," he thought. Then he locked the organ, and was about to blow out the candles, when he changed his mind and took out a scrap of printed paper from his pocket and read it by their light. It was a favourable review of a song he had composed, and which had just been published. "Though there is no genius displayed in this little composition, it is extremely pleasing; the air is catching, and the accompaniment is tuneful without ostentation. 'Winged Love' should become a popular favourite." This is what he read; and having read it (of course not for the first time), he seemed to form a sudden resolution on the strength of it. He looked at his watch; it marked a few minutes past six; he blew out the lights and left the church, hesitating a moment by the railings on which Nancy had leaned an hour before. "I think this justifies me," he meditated. "If 'Winged Love' is so well spoken of I am sure to get on, and in time make an income sufficient for us two: poor child, she hasn't been used to luxuries, and a simple home would content her. She must be part way home by now. Yes, I will follow Nancy, and explain why I have not met her for so long, and ask her to love me and wait till I can ask her to be my wife."



Page 60

But Nancy Forest had left Shenton early, as we have seen, so Fred Hurst did not overtake her. He went all the way to Braley Brook, however, and right up to the ruinous old farmhouse where the Forests lived, and waited in the orchard some time, hoping that Nancy would come out to bring in some linen which hung to bleach among the bare apple trees. He knew that Nancy always helped her mother in the evenings. But on this evening no errand seemed to bring her out of doors, and Fred Hurst went away without seeing her, meaning to meet her next day.

It would have been wiser if Fred had gone boldly to the farmhouse and asked to see Nancy; but we are none of us wise at all times, and we have generally to pay in pain for our lack of wisdom as well as for our actual faults, though perhaps not in the same degree.

II.

Fred Hurst's father was Nancy's father's master, as we have seen; and a hard enough master, as Mrs. Dodd had said. John Forest and his family—that is, his wife and Nancy—lived in the only habitable part of what had once been a considerable farmhouse. John worked on the “land,” took care of the horses and other live stock—there were not many—and his wife attended to the poultry, which were numerous enough. She also earned a little by mending the holes which the rats bit in the corn-sacks. In harvest-time she made gentian beer for the men, and a kind of harvest cake, originally made for a four o'clock meal, which explains the word known as “fourses.” But with all these little extras the Forests found it sufficiently hard to live, and of course Nancy was not yet earning.

“You ought to have sent that girl of yours to service,” Mr. Hurst would not infrequently say to Nancy's mother. He, moreover, said the same thing to his maiden sister Sabina, when Fred was present.

It was then that Fred's eyes opened to the fact that Nancy Forest was more to him than anything else in the world—far, far more than the old playmate he had thought her. Send Nancy to service! sweet, delicate, lady-like little Nancy, with her dimpled white hands. Perhaps Nancy had no business to have white hands, and dainty, refined ways; but she had, and that was Aunt Sabina's fault for having her so much at the Manor. It was partly nature's fault, too, certainly, for Nancy had always seemed like a changeling, she was so above her surroundings.

Fred Hurst having thus discovered his own love, proceeded to discover Nancy's. It was all clear to him now, he was sure she had given her pure childlike heart to him, perhaps unwittingly, as he had done. How blind he had been! With knowledge, caution came. Fred made up his mind that he must no more walk with Nancy till he was prepared to do so in his true character—that of a lover. This would be impossible till he could offer a

home to Nancy. It might be that his father would even turn the Forests away, if he suspected his son's affection for their only child. He could not risk that. So two months passed.



Page 61

Fred was organist at the parish church and had been composing songs, as we have seen. Most of them had come back to him accompanied by polite notes of refusal; one or two had come out and failed to attract any notice. Now, "Winged Love" was proving a success—so he had resolved to speak to Nancy herself, though not yet to the parents on either side.

It was a pity he didn't take the straightforward course—it pays best, did people but know it. Had Fred Hurst gone to the house boldly that night, it might, as I have said, have saved much misery. Had he glanced through the uncurtained window of the "house-place," I think he would certainly have gone in, for he would have seen Nancy in tears.

Mrs. Forest was a woman whose temper could not have been sweet under the best of conditions. It will be understood, then, that it developed into something very bad indeed under the worrying influence of a master like Mr. Hurst, who was never satisfied, and whose method of dealing with those he employed was one of incessant bullying. He was, moreover, subject to delusions about being cheated, and his suspiciousness was always in evidence.

This last fault was also one of Mrs. Forest's own, and if anything a worse one than her bad temper, and was not infrequently the occasion of an exhibition of the latter. When Nancy got home from Miss Michin's on the night when Fred Hurst tried to meet her, she found her mother in one of her worst moods. Mr. Hurst had been there all the morning, superintending the killing and packing of the turkeys for the London market. Nancy had made up her mind on her way home to ask her mother for a little money to buy herself some new gloves. She resolved to make her request at once on entering the house-place, where her mother was—partly from a desire to get what generally proved a disagreeable business over as soon as possible, and more, perhaps, because she saw her father sitting smoking his pipe in the chimney-corner. John Forest usually supported his daughter, who was a great favourite of his. He generally called her "Sweet Nancy," because she was so pretty and dainty, and, above all, so good-tempered—a quality he knew how to appreciate.

"I was wondering, mother," Nancy began hesitatingly, as she removed her hat and advanced towards the wood fire, above which Mrs. Forest was hooking-on a huge kettle of fowls' food—"I was wondering if I might have some new gloves for Christmas."

"And where, I should like to know, is the money for them to come from?" demanded the mother sharply. "I want lots of things I go without. It takes all I can scrape and spare to buy saucers for them chickens to break. It's a shame of the master not to buy proper drinking dishes for them; and when I asked him for some, he said your father could dig a hole and sink the old copper-boiler in it, and fill that with water for them, just as if he hadn't the sense to see as how every blessed chicken 'ud get drowned, and me be blamed for it, as usual."



Page 62

"Here is half-a-sovereign as the master gave me for you to pay for the sacks. Couldn't Nancy have some of that?" inquired John, fumbling in his pocket for the coin.

Mrs. Forest took the money from his hand and placed it upon the chimney-piece, intending to put it away presently in the tea-pot in the corner cupboard, which, however, she forgot to do, otherwise this story would never have been written.

"I want all that ten shillings to get a new cocoa-matting for the front room floor," she said, decidedly. "The bricks strike as cold as a grave since the old matting was took up."

"I must go and grind the turmits for the sheep, and move 'em into the other fold for the night," said John, knocking out the ashes from his pipe and rising to go. As he was closing the door behind him he called to his wife, "You let the cocoa-matting bide, and give Nan a shilling or two for her gloves."

"That I shall do nothing of the sort, then," shouted Mrs. Forest after her husband; then, turning on her daughter angrily, she asked: "What do you want gloves at all for, I should like to know? I don't wear gloves; and why should you, who do nothing to earn them?"

"I shall be out of my time soon," Nancy answered, beginning to cry; "and I will pay you back then all I have cost."

"I daresay," sneered her mother; "it'll take all you can earn to deck yourself out to catch young Mr. Fred's eyes. Don't you think as I'm not sharp enough to see which way the wind blows?"

"Mother!" cried Nancy, rising indignantly to her feet, her eyes flashing, her cheeks burning with shame and anger. "How dare you talk to me so? You have no right!"

"Haven't I no right?" almost shrieked Mrs. Forest. "I stand none of your impudence!" And with these words her passion so took possession of her that she leaned forward and with her open hand struck her daughter a stinging blow on one of her cheeks. "You are fond of crying," she said, "so take something to cry for—for once."

But Nancy did not cry: she stood still, staring in a bewildered way at the burning log upon the hearth, the flame from which danced upon her reddened cheek.

Had Fred remained a little longer in the orchard, trouble might have been prevented; for he would have seen Nancy, whom Mrs. Forest sent to bring in the new linen which was bleaching. Mrs. Forest gave her this to do, because she could not bear to see her stand so silent and dazed. She was, indeed, heartily ashamed of the act she had committed the moment it was over, but knew what was done couldn't be undone. She had never struck her daughter before, and resolved never to do so again; but it did not occur to her to tell Nancy so. Had she done so, the warm-hearted child would have responded at



once to such an advance; but she only said: "Well, well; have done staring in the fire, Nan; and run and fetch the linen from the orchard."

Nancy obeyed mechanically, little knowing who had just left the spot, and feeling in her young heart all the bitterness of utter desolation.



Page 63

III.

A night of sorrow is said to give place to a morning of joy. This would be a comforting thought were it not that the morning must likewise give place in its turn to another night.

The morning which followed the night of Nancy Forest's bitter humiliation was certainly a bright one—at least, by contrast; and, unfortunately, much so-called happiness is only such. Were the world not a dark and naughty one, a good deed might not shine so brightly. In the first place, Nancy was young and healthy; so the wintry sun, though it shone on a frozen ground, cheered her. Then Mrs. Forest was unusually amiable at breakfast, and paid some attention to her daughter, which she generally found herself too busy to do. Her father made much of her, as was his habit. He had apparently heard nothing of last night's episode.

The walk across the hills to Shenton was exhilarating, and at the end of it a pleasant surprise awaited Nancy. She found Miss Michin already at work on a dress for Miss Sabina Hurst when she arrived. The good-natured little woman greeted her apprentice brightly. "You are looking better, Nancy; the walk has given you a colour." Then she reached out her hand to a table near her, and took a little parcel from it and gave it to Nancy.

"It is nothing," she explained, as the girl looked at it curiously. "Open it, dear; it is a trifle for a Christmas gift. I wish it was more."

Nancy could only say "Oh, Miss Michin—how kind!" to begin with. Then she unwrapped the paper and saw a dainty pair of brown kid gloves with ever so many buttons. This matter of the buttons was not unimportant in Nancy's eyes. Had her mother given her the money, she thought, she could never have bought gloves with more than *two* buttons.

"This is just what I needed—oh, thank you so much," she exclaimed, when she had looked at them.

"That was what I thought," said the dressmaker; "so now we must set to work and get a good day."

And Nancy did work well that day, never looking up from her work, except once to glance across to the Post-office at the time she knew Benny Dodd usually came out to go to the church. She could not see Fred, so it was some pleasure to her to look at the small boy who blew the organ for him.

But Benny did not perform that office for the young musician on this day, for Fred Hurst had gone to London that morning, summoned thither by a letter from Messrs. Hermann and Scheiner, music publishers. The marked success of "Winged Love" had disposed



these gentlemen to make the young composer a good offer for his next song. The more immediate cause of their determination was the fact that Senor Flores had chosen to sing "Winged Love" at the last Saturday afternoon concert at St. James' Hall, and its reception had been such as to establish a certain sale for songs from the same hand. "Who is this Fred Hurst?" people in London were asking.



Page 64

Miss Sabina, in her showy drawing-room up at the Manor Farm, thought over the event all day in her own critical way, and predicted evil as the result. There was an old Broadwood grand piano in the room where she sat, covered with a pile of old music—Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Haydn, and all the composers whose music Miss Sabina disliked. This music had belonged to Fred's mother, a fair and unfortunate creature, whose own story I shall some day write. Miss Sabina's performances upon the pianoforte were limited to such compositions as the "Canary Birds' Quadrilles," "My Heart is Over the Sea," *etc.*, which she never played at all now. But she looked at the old piano, and recalled her sister-in-law's pretty baby looks and tragic end, and prophesied evil for Fred. Jacob Hurst laughed the whole business to scorn. The one being in Shenton who could have genuinely rejoiced at Fred's success knew nothing about it.

Nancy's thoughts were constantly with him, however, and when her work ended for the day, and she walked homeward across the hills to Braley Brook, she connected many an inanimate object she passed with some look or word of his. These looks and words had always been so kind, so gentle, that as the brook, where the forget-me-nots grew in summer, or the bank in the hollow where the primroses grew thickest in spring, or the fallen tree, which, as the weeks passed, would become golden with moss and lichen again—as all these would awaken to summer sunshine and gladness;—so would her heart. Fred's love for her—she felt sure he had loved her—was only hidden away like the flowers under the snow, to bloom forth again in spring. It was her winter, that was all, she told herself. She must wait as the flowers did.

When she reached home, her mind was filled with hope—hope which but too soon was to give place to despair. Last night Mrs. Forest had struck her—but then she had not looked nearly so angry as she did now when her daughter appeared before her.

"Where is my ten shillings?" she cried menacingly, as Nancy closed the kitchen-door behind her. "What have you done with it, you ungrateful, unnatural girl?" she repeated loudly.

"Indeed, mother, I know nothing of it," poor Nancy answered, trembling violently.

"Is it in that there teapot?" inquired the enraged mother, thrusting the article in question close to the frightened girl's face. Nancy glanced rapidly from the empty teapot to the chimney-piece.

"You needn't look there, you hussy," Mrs. Forest continued, seeing the direction Nancy's eyes were taking. "There's *nothing* on the chimney-piece—the money's gone, and you've took it, because your father said you were to—it wasn't his to give—did he mend the sacks? tell me that! I'll have my money back—every halfpenny, so you'd better give it me before I make you."

“Mother, I have not touched it; I know nothing about it, really I don’t,” said Nancy desperately.



Page 65

“What’s that you’ve got in your hand?” demanded Mrs. Forest, catching sight of the parcel containing the gloves.

Nancy did not answer; she was looking at the round table, which was covered with the shining brass ornaments which had been removed from the chimney-piece in the search for the missing coin. There they were—candlesticks, pans, snuffer-tray, and beer-warmer, articles she remembered from earliest childhood as never in use, and always highly polished. Now as the firelight flickered upon them they seemed to be looking at the distracted girl with countless fiery eyes which twinkled in malice. Nancy could not take her eyes from these other eyes, she could not think for the moment. She vaguely knew that her mother took away her parcel, and presently Mrs. Forest’s rasping voice recalled her from her stupefied reverie.

“So you spent it in gloves, did you? Six-buttoned ones, too—! Oh, you ungrateful, selfish, wasteful girl.”

“Mother, mother,” wailed Nancy, taking hold of Mrs. Forest’s gown with one hand convulsively, while she pressed the other to her brow, where her wavy locks of hair lay all damp and ruffled. “You *should* believe—you *must* believe me—Miss Michin gave me the gloves—I have never seen your money—oh, mother, I couldn’t have touched it—I *couldn’t*.”

“Don’t add lies to it,” broke out Mrs. Forest in a greater passion than ever.

Than this last remark, nothing could have easily been more unjust. Nancy had always been a very truthful child.

“If you can no longer trust me, it is perhaps better for me—to—to go away,” said Nancy, softly.

“Yes—go—go now,” replied her mother, who had arrived at that stage of rage when people use words little heeding their meaning.

Nancy buttoned her little jacket once more, and tied a silk handkerchief round her neck, and passed out at the door in a wild, hurried fashion.

Mrs. Forest looked at the door and smiled. “She’ll none go,” she said to herself; “where could she go *to*?”

But Nancy did not resemble her mother in hasty moods, she was rather the subject of permanent impressions. Her mother’s conduct had wounded her to the quick. She could no longer endure it, she thought. Hitherto, her father’s love had rendered it bearable—but now, even that seemed powerless to keep her under the same roof as her mother. Where could she go? She would walk on, no matter in what direction; then, when she could walk no more, she might perhaps be calm enough to think.



IV.

“Where is Nan?” asked John Forest, when he entered the house, an hour after Nancy had left it.

“Oh, she’ll be here presently,” replied the mother evasively. Of course Nancy would come soon, she thought to herself, and what was the use of rousing John?

Another hour passed. “Nan’s very late to-night,” said her father. “I’ve a mind to go and meet her.”



Page 66

"You bide by the fire, John," responded his wife. "Nancy's in a tantrum because I found out as she'd took that bag-money—she'll come in when she's a mind."

"The *bag-money!*" repeated John in a puzzled way. "Nan take it!—she never did, barring you give it her."

"She did then, and bought gloves with it, to do up with six buttons, and there they be now beside you on the settle," retorted Mrs. Forest. John looked in the place his wife had indicated, and there, sure enough, lay the brown kid gloves. This evidence did seem conclusive. John shook his grey head as he held the dainty gloves across his rough palm, and presently said, "You have kept her too short, wife—girls wants their bits of things." He paused and sighed heavily, and then added, "I'll go and look for her."

"It's all your fault, John," broke out his wife as he rose to go. "You as good as told her to do it."

"You ought to have given her some money, Eliza, and you've been nagging at her and driven her out this cold night; if harm comes of it—" said John as he went out.

"Fiddlesticks about harm; what harm can come to her, I should like to know?" retorted his wife, without allowing him to complete his sentence. Then the door closed and Eliza Forest was alone, with the ticking of the eight-day clock to bear her company.

Slowly the hand of the clock travelled on. A clock is a weird companion—above all, one that strikes the hour after a preliminary groaning sound as this clock did. Mrs. Forest tried to occupy herself with the stocking she was knitting, but she was uneasy and let her work fall in her lap while she reflected to the accompaniment of that metallic "Tick-tick" of the clock. "My mother always said that my temper would get me down and worry me," she meditated; "and I believe it *will* before it's done."

Ten o'clock struck—eleven o'clock, and Mrs. Forest grew really alarmed. She rose and placed her knitting on the high chimney-piece—she generally put it there out of the way of the cat, who played with the ball—and opened the door and peered out into the darkness. There was a sound of footsteps along the frozen high road. She listened intently, but the horses began to move about in the stable close by and she could no longer hear the footsteps.

The cold wind blew right against her, chilling her through and through. But she still stood there in the doorway. By-and-by there were unmistakable footsteps near at hand. A moment more and John was beside her. He was alone. "Wife," he began in a hollow voice, "Nan left Miss Michin as usual; has she been home?"

"I told you she had," gasped the mother. "I told you she and me had had a tiff about the money."



Page 67

John Forest made no comment, he was too desperate for that. He knew well enough that if his quiet, patient little Nan had gone away, she must be in a state of mind out of which tragedies come. He would go and rouse Jim Lincoln, who slept in the stable loft, and they would search for her. Mrs. Forest watched her husband disappear in the dim starlight, and then went back to the kitchen. Vague fears took possession of her. She dreaded she knew not what. All her unkindness to Nancy, culminating in last night's blow, seemed to rise up against her. Even as to the taking of the money, Nancy had had her father's sanction and might have thought that enough. But Nancy denied having touched the money; *what if, after all, she had spoken the truth!* She had always been particularly truthful in even the smallest matters. Mrs. Forest would try not to think any more; it was too painful. She would reach down her knitting and try to "do" a bit.

She rose and took down the half-knit stocking, but the spare needle was missing. She felt with her hand upon the chimney-piece, but could not find it. Then she mounted a chair and searched. It was nowhere to be seen. "It may have slipped into the nick at the back," she thought, and she got a skewer and poked it into the narrow groove. Out fell the needle—and something else which made a clinking sound as it fell upon the brick floor. She stooped to see what it was, *and there glittering in the firelight lay the missing half-sovereign.*

* * * * *

When Fred Hurst had seen Messrs. Hermann and Scheiner, he was in the highest possible spirits: a whole future seemed to open out before him.

It may appear that Fred was conceited, and "too sure;" but we must record that he went to a jeweller's and bought a little pearl ring for Nancy, meaning to place it on her third finger next day when her lips should have given him the promise he knew her heart had long since given. Having made his purchase he took train from Liverpool Street to Exboro', from which place he would have to walk to Shenton, where he could not arrive until one o'clock in the morning. He had performed some miles of his walk across the hills, and was within an appreciable distance of Braley Brook, when he observed a dark figure crouching on a fallen tree. He was at first a little startled, for it was most unusual to meet anyone in this place, above all at such an hour: it was after midnight. On coming nearer he saw that the figure was that of a woman. It might be one of the cottagers from Shenton—who had been to Exboro' and been taken ill on the way home—he would see.

He came close and touched the crouching figure, and asked gently, "Are you ill? Can I do anything for you?"

The figure started violently and looked up at him, and in the starlight he recognised the face of Nancy Forest.



In a moment he was seated on the fallen tree beside her, and had placed his arm about her. “Nancy, dearest Nancy,” he cried, pressing burning kisses on her cold cheek—the first he had ever given her. “Nancy, speak to me; tell me what is the meaning of your being here.”



Page 68

But she could not answer him then; she simply laid her cheek against his shoulder and wept bitterly. But she did tell him all presently; and he told her what he had long since wished to tell, and they walked together to the old farm, for, of course, Nancy must return to her parents for a little time—only a very little time, they decided. When they reached the farm, John Forest and his wife were standing by the round table in the house-place, where the half-sovereign lay. John was hard and relentless; his wife was sobbing aloud. And then the door opened, and Nancy and Fred stood before them.

With a wild cry, Eliza Forest clasped her daughter to her heart, imploring her forgiveness. “My temper ‘welly’ worried me this time, Nancy,” she said; “but after this I will worry *it*.”

So here the story properly ends, for Mr. Hurst, to the surprise of everyone, yielded a ready consent to the marriage, and even offered an allowance to the young couple and one of his small farms to live in. Miss Sabina allowed her old interest in Nancy to revive, and sent her the material for her wedding dress, which Miss Michin announced her intention of making up herself—every stitch. Nor was this all. Mrs. Dodd, the worthy post-mistress, with whom Nancy had always been a favourite, begged her acceptance of a prettily-furnished work-basket which she had made a journey to Exboro’ to buy.

And the half-sovereign?

It was never spent, but was always in sight under a wine-glass, to remind the owner—so she said—“of how her temper nearly worried her.”

JEANIE GWYNNE BETTANY.

PAUL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF “ADONAIS, Q.C.”

It was a great surprise and disappointment to me when Janet, the only child of my brother, Duncan Wright, wrote announcing her engagement to the Honourable Stephen Vandeleur.

I had always thought she would marry Paul. Paul was the only surviving son—four others had died—of my dead brother Alexander, and had made one of Duncan’s household from his boyhood. I had always loved Janet—and Paul was as the apple of my eye. When the two were mere children, and Duncan was still in comparatively humble circumstances, living in a semi-detached villa in the suburbs of Glasgow, I kept my brother’s house for some years, he being then a widower.



I cannot say I altogether liked doing so. Having independent means of my own, I did not require to fill such a position, and I had never got on very well with Duncan. However, I dearly loved the children, although I had enough to do with them, too. Janet was one of the prettiest, merriest, laughing little creatures—with eyes the colour of the sea in summer-time, and a complexion like a wild-rose—the sun ever shed its light upon; but she had a most distressing way of tearing her frocks and of never looking tidy, which Duncan seemed to think entirely my fault; and as for Paul, he certainly was a most awful boy.



Page 69

He was fair as Janet, though with a differently-shaped face; rather a long face, with a square, determined-looking chin; and, besides being one of the handsomest, was assuredly one of the cleverest boys I ever knew. He had a good, sound, strong Scotch intellect, and was as sharp as a needle, or any Yankee, into the bargain.

But he *would* have his own way, whatever it was, and was often mischievous as a fiend incarnate; and in his contradictory moods, would have gone on saying black was white all day on the chance of getting somebody to argue with him. Duncan paid no attention whatever to the lad, except, from time to time, to speculate what particular bad end he would come to.

But I loved Paul, and Paul loved me—and adored Janet.

The boy had one exceedingly beautiful feature in his face: sometimes I could not take my eyes from it; I used to wonder if it could be that which made me love him so much—his mouth. I have never seen another anything like it. The steady, strong, and yet delicate lips—so calm and serious when still, as to make one feel at rest merely to look at them; but when in motion extraordinarily sensitive, quivering, curving, and curling in sympathy with every thought.

I loved both children; but perhaps the reason that made me love Paul most was—that whilst I knew Janet's nature, out and in, to the core of her very loving little heart, Paul's often puzzled me.

There was not much in the way of landscape to be seen from that villa in the suburbs of Glasgow; but we did catch just one glimpse of sky which was not always obscured by smoke, and I have seen Paul, lost in thought, looking up at this patch of blue, with an expression on his face—at once sweet and sorrowful—so strange in one so young, that it made me instinctively move more quietly, not to disturb him, and set me wondering.

However, what with one thing and another, I was not by any means heart-broken when Duncan married again—one of the kindest women in the world; I can't think what she saw in him—and thus released me.

So the years flew on—and the wheel of fortune gave some strange turns for Duncan. By a series of wonderfully successful speculations he rapidly amassed a huge fortune.

They left Glasgow then, and built a colossal white brick mansion not far from London.

When Janet was eighteen and Paul twenty-one, I paid them a visit there. Except that Janet was now grown up, she was just the same—with her thriftless, thoughtless ways, and her laughing baby face, and her yellow head—a silly little head enough, perhaps, but a dear, dear little head to me.



She had the same admiration, almost awe, of the splendours of this world in any form; the same love of fine clothes—with the same carelessness as to how she used them. It gave me a good laugh, the first afternoon I was there, to see her come in with a new dress all soiled and torn by a holly-bush she had pushed her way through on the lawn. It made me think of the time when she had gone popping in and out to the little back garden at Glasgow, and singing and swinging about the stairs—a bonnie wee lassie with a dirty pink cotton gown, and, as often as not, dirtier face.



Page 70

Paul seemed to me, in looks at least, to have more than fulfilled the promise of his boyhood. A handsomer, more self-reliant-looking young fellow I had never seen; and I was not long in the house before I observed—with secret tears of amusement—that it was not only in looks he remained unchanged. The same dictatorialness and sharp tongue; the same thinly-veiled insolence to Duncan; the same swift smiles from his entrancing lips—thank Heaven undisfigured by any moustache—to myself; the same unalterable gentleness to Janet. His invariable courtesy to Duncan's wife made me very happy. It was as I said: there was much good in the boy.

Paul had a little money of his own to begin with, and I did think Duncan, with his fortune, might have sent an exceptionally clever lad like that to one of the Universities, and made something of him afterwards—a lawyer, say; but instead of that, Paul was put into business in London, and, I was glad to hear, was doing very well.

As for Duncan's hideous white brick castle, with its paltry half-dozen acres, entered by lodges of the utmost pretension, and his coach-houses full of flashy carriages, with the family coat-of-arms(!) upon each, I thought the whole place one of the most contemptible patches of snobbery on this fair earth; and I was glad my father's toil-bleared eyes were hid in the grave, so that they should not have the shame of resting upon it.

In spite of what I thought, however, I did my best to keep a solemn face at Paul's smart speeches, which were often amusing, and often simply impudence.

Duncan, as of yore, went as though he saw him not.

I had not been at Duncan's palace long before I came to the conclusion that there was some private understanding betwixt the two young people; and, at last, just before I left, my suspicions were confirmed.

Hastily pushing open the library door, which stood ajar, I saw Paul with his back to me, at the end of the room, looking into the conservatory. He had evidently just entered from the garden. "Janet," he called, in a voice the import of which there could be no mistaking; and with a rush, I heard several pots crash; Janet, who had no doubt happened to have her head turned the other way, sprang into view, and threw herself into his arms.

I quietly withdrew, and went away very, very happy. I knew Paul had a promise of a first-rate appointment abroad, by-and-by; and supposing I should hear more of this before long, I went placidly away home to the far north. Instead of that, in six months or so, Janet wrote announcing her engagement to the Honourable Stephen Vandeleur.

Of course I went south for Janet's wedding.



If I had thought she was being forced into this marriage (Duncan was snob enough) I should not have gone a step, but should have done my best to prevent it; but I could not think that from the tone of the letter; and Paul wrote as well all about it. I could but think I had been mistaken; that there had been no serious engagement between them, but only a flirtation, as they might call it, or something of that sort: a very reprehensible flirtation, with my Puritanical notions, it seemed to me. I need not say I was greatly disappointed.



Page 71

So in due course south I went.

Paul met me—handsomer and more dictatorial than ever; his blue eyes clear and piercing as before. He seemed quite pleased; said Stephen Vandeleur was a good fellow; was most impertinently sarcastic about Duncan's aristocratic guests; and altogether appeared in good spirits. Janet I did not think looking well. She seemed very nervous, and made the remark that she wished it were six months ago; but of course it was natural a girl should be a little hysterical on the eve of her wedding-day.

The morrow came, and the wedding with it. I thought it a very unpleasant one. Whatever might be Stephen Vandeleur's own feelings, he seemed, as Paul said, a very good fellow. It was evident his friends only countenanced it on consideration of the huge dowry Janet brought with her. Some of them were gentlepeople, as I understand the word, and some were not; but Duncan, who appeared really to think the mere accident of superior birth in itself a guarantee of personal merit, as Paul very truly put it, grovelled all round, until I was sick with shame. Paul, however, was at his best and wittiest and brightest, and kept everybody in tolerably good humour.

When the carriage came to take the bride and bridegroom away, I remembered some trifle of Janet's that had been left in the conservatory; and, as I was in the hall at the time, ran hastily outside and round by the gravel to the door opening from the lawn, which was my shortest way to the conservatory from there.

Suddenly I stood quite still. Paul was looking out of the library window, and Janet, ready for departure, came falteringly in and stood behind him. He did not look towards her. "Paul!" she whispered entreatingly; and although so low there was the utmost anguish in the tone: "Paul." As though not knowing what she did, she raised her arm, standing behind him there, as if to shake hands. Abruptly he wheeled round, with a face down which the great tears coursed, but awful in its pallor and sternness; and, taking no notice of her outstretched hand, pointed to the door. Weeping bitterly, she swiftly turned and went.

I cannot describe the shock this terrible scene gave me. It did not take half-a-dozen short moments to enact, but it represented, unmistakably, the blasting of two lives—the lives of those dearest in all the world to me.

I do not know, I never knew, whether Paul saw me. I think I must have become momentarily unconscious, and when I came to myself he was gone.

I sat where I was, weeping bitter tears—bitter as Janet's—and thought of the little lassie in the dirty pink frock that had sung and swung about the stairs, and of the boy who had stood day-dreaming, looking up into the blue sky. Sometimes I was wildly angry. Whose fault was it? Who was answerable for this? If it was the young people's own fault, someone ought to have looked after them better, ought to have prevented it. No

one, not even I, could help them now, that was the bitterest, bitterest part of it; no one and nothing—save time, or death.



Page 72

I wished that day I had never left my children.

II.

I must pass over a long period now—I suppose I should have said I was writing of a great many years ago, and come to the time, twenty years later, when Paul came home from abroad. He had not been home all these years, and neither had I been once in the south.

Janet, my poor Janet, was long since dead. She had died before she was quite two years married. It was an additional pang to my grief that I had never said good-bye to her at all; but no good-bye was better than that awful one I had witnessed of Paul.

What was the precise explanation of it I never knew. It was easy to divine that Janet had indeed been engaged to marry Paul, and had given him up; but whether this was the result of some quarrel, or whether she had deliberately done it, dazzled by the prospect of a union with an earl's son, I cannot say. Anyhow, I am sure she quickly regretted her determination. I am certain she loved only Paul. But the word had been spoken, and whatever Vandeleur may have been, Paul was not a man to give any woman a chance of trifling with him twice. So my poor Janet had to reap what her folly had sown, as best she might.

Janet left one little child, a daughter, called Janet, after her; and this child, becoming an orphan at an early age by the death, next, of Stephen Vandeleur, was brought up with his family in Ireland.

She was in Scotland once when she was about fourteen, and I saw her, and was not favourably impressed. She was quiet and prim and proper, as cold as an icicle: a very pretty little girl, I owned that; but then I had thought to find something of *my* Janet, and was disappointed. Her eyes were indeed blue, but looked one in the face calmly as though they had belonged to a woman of forty; and her hair and long eye-lashes were as dark as night. She had just this of my Janet, her pink and snow wild-rose complexion. She seemed to me, in all else, a Vandeleur to her finger-tips.

She occasionally paid Duncan long visits; and as she grew up, I heard that Duncan tried to make these visits as frequent and as lengthy as possible. She was immensely admired, it seemed, and Duncan liked her to stay with him because of the people she attracted to his house. I was sure this was true. It was so like one of Duncan's horrid ways. He still lived in that white brick edifice, and was richer then ever. A good deal of gossip drifted to me, in the far north as I was. I was told that Janet had a Manchester millionaire, an American railway king, and a real live lord, all madly in love with her—and she not yet quite nineteen!



Just then Paul returned home, and Duncan wrote inviting me to come down and see them. Paul was to stay with them—and Duncan was quite proud about it. His predictions had turned out all wrong; for Paul had come home a personage of importance, and a very rich man indeed. I was almost sorry that Janet's child happened to be at Duncan's just then, thinking her presence would revive old memories better forgotten. And then, if Paul were at all like what he used to be, I was sure her calmly superior, supercilious little ways would irritate him intensely. I had never seen her at Duncan's, but I could fancy how she would look there.



Page 73

When I saw Paul, just for the first minute or so I felt quite startled. He seemed so marvellously little changed. He was forty-one, and would have looked young for thirty. Of course by-and-by I saw there were lines in his face which had not before been there. I could not say, not talking of appearance but of character, that I thought him improved. He no longer spoke scornfully to or of Duncan, but was always coldly courteous; yet often I would see a sneer on his curving lips that was more biting and bitter than any words, and made them look evil. He was not dictatorial all round to everybody as he used to be, but I thought him harsh in particular instances. His smiles to myself were more rare; his eyes colder: he seemed to me cynical of all on earth; I feared, too, with keen sorrow, of all in Heaven.

Others spoke of the changes the wear and tear of life abroad had made on Paul, but I had seen his face as it looked—for the last time on earth—upon Janet that day, and had my own sad thoughts.

But although I speak of these changes, I do not mean to say that Paul was not as gentle and loving to me as he had ever been, and that I was not exquisitely happy to be with him again. Many a pleasant walk had we about Duncan's garden, I leaning on Paul's strong arm, a support which I felt the need of now. Twenty years had not come and gone without leaving plenty of traces on me. We neither of us ever mentioned Janet, *my Janet*, that is to say. Janet's daughter (Janet II., as I used to mentally designate her for convenience' sake) was here as I expected, and for a while, just as before, I did not take to her. I left her alone and she left me alone; that was her way.

She was lovely, certainly; ethereally lovely; almost too lovely for one's senses to grasp the fact that she was but common flesh and blood like all the rest of the world: a poem in human form if there ever was one. Gossip had spoken truly for once; there were the three distinguished lovers, and goodness knows how many more besides.

Paul and I never spoke of this girl, any more than we did of my Janet; but, at first, I often fancied I saw his gaze fastened on her; the same unpleasant sneer on his lips which disfigured them when he looked at Duncan. By and by I grew rather to like her. I believe I, at heart, resented Paul looking like that at my Janet's bairn. I began to fancy that, for all her apparent calmness, she was shy. If we met in the garden she would give me a swift glance to see if I were going to stop and speak to her, and, I thought, seemed pleased when I did. At last there came an odd little episode.

Paul was very fond of animals—that was always one of his good traits—and he one day found a little stray white kitten somewhere about the place, and brought it into the room where I sat alone at work. He began grimly to play with it. Just then Janet opened the door. She gave a delighted exclamation, and, coming eagerly forward, smilingly held out her arms for the kitten. She was dressed for the evening, and the little thing began clawing about her lovely gown, and in one instant had pulled to shreds a very expensive bit of trimming.



Page 74

I started up in distress; but Janet, putting the kitten gently back on the table, burst into laughter. I am very sure I had never heard Janet laugh before, and I don't think Paul ever had. A prettier, happier, more silvery little peal could not be imagined; but it was not so much that which struck home to my heart as the fact that if I had shut my eyes I could have thought *my* Janet stood in the room. The girl had her mother's laugh.

I returned hastily to my work, and did not dare to lift my head until Janet was gone—then I looked stealthily at Paul.

The sun was just setting—the sky a rolling roseate glory from end to end. Paul—my Paul—my Paul, with the old beautiful light in his face, stood, with arms crossed, looking up into it. All at once something came into my throat which almost stifled me, so that I could not have sat where I was for any consideration whatever. I slipped quietly away and left him.

From this day I loved the girl. Whether it was her carelessness about the dress—so like her mother—or the laugh—or what—I loved her now almost as much as I had loved her mother.

It seemed to me that from this day, too, Paul became more like his old self: a very much toned-down and softened old self; no longer so much the hard, cynical Paul of later years as the boyish Paul of old. Of course, no sooner had my feelings changed in this way than I became greatly interested in Janet's lovers. I thought the cotton millionaire vulgar; and the American railway king I could not make this or that of; but the lord seemed a very nice, simple-mannered young man; so that I hoped—for although I am a bit of a Radical, I lay claim to having some common-sense too—if it were to be one of these three, it would be he.

But the calm indifference with which this slip of a girl treated three such lovers was truly appalling. I can't think how they stood it: I shouldn't.

I cannot remember exactly when it was that I made a discovery. Opposite to the library, of which I have already spoken, now a venerable old room, was my bed-room; and there was no other room until you had gone along a passage and crossed a hall. It was my custom to go to bed very early, and I did so here at Duncan's, long before the rest of the household. I suppose they thought I went fair off to sleep, too; for this part of the house was always deserted after I had gone into my room.

It was thus I made the discovery that every night, before retiring herself, Janet came to the library and stayed a few minutes; and I could hear her sometimes moving about books on the table.

For a considerable time I felt hopelessly puzzled. All at once it struck me—girls are the same all over the world and in all ages—that she must come there to look at the



photograph of someone she cared for; to say good-night to it; perhaps to murmur a prayer over it. Girls are made so. Doubtless she would take it away with her altogether to some place more convenient for such oblations but that Duncan was much in the library, and had lynx-eyes.

Page 75

I grew troubled, these nocturnal visits continuing, and wished that I could help her. I thought if I could only find out whose the photograph was, perhaps I might.

One night I could bear it no longer. I am aware that I must seem a most prying old woman; but somehow or other this library was fated to be mixed up with my life. I rose and just peeped round the library door to see what she was doing. She was standing in the clear moonlight—not, as I had expected, with an open photograph album, but holding a little miniature, taken from its place on the table. I went back to bed, my heart bounding. I knew now! I did not sleep much that night.

Perhaps I acted rashly—but I thought I should apply to Paul for help. I was sure, from various signs, that he did not hate my Janet's bairn now. I told him of these stolen visits to the library, and tried to persuade him to conceal himself and watch there—for the purpose of finding out whose the portrait was. I did not tell him, deceitful woman that I was, that I myself already knew. Old people like him and me, I said, should help the child out of her trouble. I must have startled him terribly: he grew, at first, so white. Then he looked at me long and intently; and by-and-by began to cross-examine me. We were canny Scots, both of us, and fenced.

“You say it was a photograph you saw her with?”

“I did not say I saw her.”

“You have heard her open an album?”

“I have heard her move books.”

I have seen the time when I could have broken a lance with the best; but I was growing old, and he finished by getting me into rather a hobble—when he abruptly left me, a great flush sweeping over his face. He came back by-and-by, and took me out into the garden. If he never had been the real old Paul before—he was so now. He cut the pansies from my best cap, and decorated Duncan's coat-of-arms—which had broken out about the walls now-a-days—with them. But he might have cut the cap in two for all I cared just then.

That night—I hoped he had not forgotten—I hoped he would come. Presently I heard a quiet step which I knew to be his. Then I sat down and listened again. Swish, swish—here she was at last. I had listened too often to the soft rustle of her trailing gown to make any mistake now. In my excitement—you see I was an old habitue at prying and peering about the library by this time—I put one eye round the door, at her very back. She had gone a few steps into the room—and now stood, rooted to the spot, startled. There, with his face—and all that he would have it say—fair and bright in the moonlight, stood Paul. He opened his arms.

“Janet,” he said.

With a little cry, and a sob, the girl rushed into them.



Page 76

I went away back to my own room. I am sure it is superfluous to explain my little plot: that it was not a photograph, but an old miniature of Paul I had seen Janet with—an old miniature which I had painted on ivory myself in the far-distant days. I am sure Paul never had a photograph taken. Of course it was because I had recognised this that I wanted Paul to wait in the library; but he was a better fencer than I, and made me admit more than I intended. I sat down now, a world of old memories whirling through my brain. I mixed this that I had just seen—with something very like it in the long, long past—with the crash of pots, and another figure that had thrown itself into Paul's arms. There was the old room: *Janet* had been said there, too; and the lips through which the word had trembled were the same: and the voice was the same also. Only the figure that had darted forward—was different.

I did not go to bed at all that night; but sat looking out over the quiet, moon-lit garden and over the fields beyond, where the corn-crake was calling, calling; the river slipping like a silver thread at the far-away end of them; and patter, patter out and into the back-garden at Glasgow went the little feet again; and to and fro ran the fair-haired little lassie in the dirty pink cotton, tugging me this way and that by the hand; and such a singing and swinging went on about the stairs. Oh, how I wondered whether Paul would ever tell Janet her mother's story.

I was not going placidly away north *this* time, to wait to hear more about anything by-and-by. I did not leave that factory-like erection of Duncan's until I had seen them married.

THE CHURCH GARDEN.

"We cannot," said the people, "stand these children,
Always round us with their racketing and play;
Yon Church-garden set right down among our houses
Is really quite a nuisance in its way!

"True, their homes are very dull, and bare, and dismal,
And the narrow courts they live in dark and small,
And we think they love that sparsely-planted acre—
But we do not want to think of them at all!

"There are surely parks enough to make a play-ground,
And we might be spared these noisy little feet;
But the parks, the Clergy say, are all too distant,
And so they planned this garden in the street!

"No doubt the seats are pleasanter than curb-stones,
While the trees make quite a shelter from the sun,



And the grass does nicely for the crawling babies—
But somebody must think of Number One!

“And the air the children get of course is purer;
But then the noise they make is very great,
With their laughter and their shouting to each other,
And the everlasting banging of the gate!

“And the wailing of the sickly, puny babies
Is enough to fret one’s spirit through and through—
No doubt they cry as much in those dark alleys—
But then we never hear them if they do!



Page 77

“Half the Parish talks to us of self-denial,
Of kindly duties lying at the door,
And of One who says the Poor are always with us;
But we can't be always thinking of the Poor!

“We are older, we are richer, we are wiser;
Why should we be vexed and troubled in our ease?
Just because the children like the Vicar's garden,
With its faded grass and smoky London trees!

“Still we feel sometimes a little self-convicted,
When we hear the hard-worked kindly Clergy say
That it helps them often in their weary labours,
Just to see the children happy at their play!

“Yet we think they try to make the thing too solemn,
When they put aside our protests with the plea:
'Whatsoe'er ye did to such as these, my brethren,
To the least—ye did it even unto Me.'”

Thus the people murmured, but the children's Angels
Smiled rejoicing, and a richer blessing falls
On the Church that made a shelter for the children
Underneath the holy shadow of her walls.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.