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*"Laden with Golden Grain"*

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# THE ARGOSY.

EDITED BY  
**CHARLES W. WOOD.**

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**VOLUME LI.**  
*January to June, 1891.*

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**RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,**  
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## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
<b>THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND. Illustrated by M.L. Gow.</b>	
Chap. I. My Arrival at Deepley Walls	<a href="#">23</a>
II. The Mistress of Deepley Walls	<a href="#">29</a>
III. A Voyage of Discovery	<a href="#">35</a>
IV. Scarsdale Weir	<a href="#">40</a>
V. At Rose Cottage	Feb
VI. The Growth of a Mystery	Feb
VII. Exit Janet Hope	Feb
VIII. By the Scotch Express	Feb
IX. At "The Golden Griffin"	Mar
X. The Stolen Manuscript	Mar
XI. Bon Repos	Mar
XII. The Amsterdam Edition of 1698	Mar
XIII. M. Platzoff's Secret—Captain Ducie's Translation of M. Paul Platzoff's MS	Mar
XIV. Drashkil-Smoking	Apr
XV. The Diamond	Apr
XVI. Janet's Return	Apr
XVII. Deepley Walls after Seven Years	Apr
XVIII. Janet in a New Character	May
XIX. The Dawn of Love	May
XX. The Narrative of Sergeant Nicholas	May
XXI. Counsel taken with Mr. Madgin	May
XXII. Mr. Madgin at the Helm	Jun
XXIII. Mr. Madgin's Secret Journey	Jun
XXIV. Enter Madgin Junior	Jun
XXV. Madgin Junior's First Report	Jun
* * * * *	
<b>THE SILENT CHIMES. By JOHNNY LUDLOW (Mrs. HENRY WOOD).</b>	
Putting Them Up	<a href="#">1</a>
Playing Again	Feb
Ringling at Midday	Mar
Not Heard	Apr
Silent for Ever	May
* * * * *	
<b>THE BRETONS AT HOME. By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S. With 35 Illustrations</b>	<a href="#">48</a> , Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun
* * * * *	
About the Weather	Jun
Across the River. By HELEN M. BURNSIDE	Apr
After Twenty Years. By ADA M. TROTTER	Feb
A Memory. By GEORGE COTTERELL	Feb
A Modern Witch	<a href="#">73</a>
An April Folly. By GILBERT H. PAGE	Apr
A Philanthropist. By ANGUS GREY	Jun

Aunt Phœbe's Heirlooms: An Experience in Hypnotism	Feb
A Social Debut	Mar
A Song. By G.B. STUART	<a href="#">18</a>
Enlightenment. By E. NESBIT	Feb
In a Bernese Valley. By ALEXANDER LAMONT	Feb
Legend of an Ancient Minster. By JOHN GRÆME	Mar
Longevity. By W.F. AINSWORTH, F.S.A.	Apr
Mademoiselle Elise. By EDWARD FRANCIS	Jun
Mediums and Mysteries. By NARISSA ROSAVO	Feb
Miss Kate Marsden	<a href="#">19</a>
My May Queen. By JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.	May
Old China	Jun
On Letter-Writing. By A.H. JAPP, LL.D.	May
Paul. By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C."	May
"Proctorised"	Apr
Rondeau. By E. NESBIT	Mar
Saint or Satan? By A. BERESFORD	Feb
Sappho. By MARY GREY	Mar
Serenade. By E. NESBIT	Jun
Sonnets. By JULIA KAVANAGH	<a href="#">47</a> , Feb, Apr, Jun
So Very Unattractive!	Jun
Spes. By JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.	Apr
Sweet Nancy. By JEANIE GWYNNE BETTANY	May
The Church Garden. By CHRISTIAN BURKE	May
The Only Son of his Mother. By LETITIA McCLINTOCK	Mar
To my Soul. From the French of Victor Hugo	Jun
Unexplained. By LETITIA McCLINTOCK	Apr
Who Was the Third Maid?	<a href="#">69</a>
Winter in Absence	Feb

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***POETRY.***

Sonnets. By JULIA KAVANAGH	<a href="#">47</a> , Feb, Apr, Jun
A Song. By G.B. STUART	<a href="#">18</a>
Enlightenment. By E. NESBIT	Feb
Winter in Absence	Feb
A Memory. By GEORGE COTTERELL	Feb
In a Bernese Valley. By ALEXANDER LAMONT	Feb
Rondeau. By E. NESBIT	Mar
Spes. By JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.	Apr
Across the River. By HELEN M. BURNSIDE	Apr
My May Queen. By JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.	May
The Church Garden. By CHRISTIAN BURKE	May
Serenade. By E. NESBIT	Jun
To my Soul. From the French of Victor Hugo	Jun
Old China	Jun

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### ***ILLUSTRATIONS.***

**By M.L. Gow.**

"I advanced slowly up the room, stopped, and curtsied."

"I saw and recognised the mysterious midnight visitor."

"He came back in a few minutes, but so transformed in outward appearance that Ducie scarcely knew him."

"Behold!"

"Sister Agnes knelt for a few moments and bent her head in silent prayer."

"He put his hand to his side, and motioned Mirpah to open the letter."

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Illustrations to "The Bretons at Home."



I ADVANCED SLOWLY UP THE ROOM, STOPPED AND CURTSIED.  
PAGE [31](#).

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[Pg 1]

## THE ARGOSY.

*JANUARY, 1891.*

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### THE SILENT CHIMES.

#### PUTTING THEM UP.

I hardly know whether to write this history, or not; for its events did not occur within my own recollection, and I can only relate them at second-hand—from the Squire and others. They are curious enough; especially as regards the three parsons—one following upon another—in their connection with the Monk family, causing no end of talk in Church Leet parish, as well as in other parishes within ear-shot.

About three miles' distance from Church Dykely, going northwards across country, was the rural parish of Church Leet. It contained a few farmhouses and some labourers' cottages. The church, built of grey stone, stood in its large grave-yard; the parsonage, a commodious house, was close

by; both of them were covered with time-worn ivy. Nearly half a mile off, on a gentle eminence, rose the handsome mansion called Leet Hall, the abode of the Monk family. Nearly the whole of the parish—land, houses, church and all—belonged to them. At the time I am about to tell of they were the property of one man—Godfrey Monk.

The late owner of the place (except for one short twelvemonth) was old James Monk, Godfrey's father. Old James had three sons and one daughter—Emma—his wife dying early. The eldest son (mostly styled "young James") was about as wild a blade as ever figured in story; the second son, Raymond, was an invalid; the third, Godfrey, a reckless lad, ran away to sea when he was fourteen.

If the Monks were celebrated for one estimable quality more than another, it was temper: a cross-grained, imperious, obstinate temper. "Run away to sea, has he?" cried old James when he heard the news; "very well, at sea he shall stop." And at sea Godfrey did stop, not disliking the life, and perhaps not finding any other open to him. He worked his way up in the merchant service by degrees, until he became commander and was called Captain Monk.

[Pg 2]

The years went on. Young James died, and the other two sons grew to be middle-aged men. Old James, the father, found by signs and tokens that his own time was approaching; and he was the next to go. Save for a slender income bequeathed to Godfrey and to his daughter, the whole of the property was left to Raymond, and to Godfrey after him if Raymond had no son. The entail had been cut off in the past generation; for which act the reasons do not concern us.

So Raymond, ailing greatly always, entered into possession of his inheritance. He lived about a twelvemonth afterwards, and then died: died unmarried. Therefore Godfrey came into all.

People were curious, the Squire says, as to what sort of man Godfrey would turn out to be; for he had not troubled home much since he ran away. He was a widower; that much was known; his wife having been a native of Trinidad, in the West Indies.

A handsome man, with fair, curling hair (what was left of it); proud blue eyes; well-formed features with a chronic flush upon them, for he liked his glass, and took it; a commanding, imperious manner, and a temper uncompromising as the grave. Such was Captain Godfrey Monk; now in his forty-fifth year. Upon his arrival at Leet Hall after landing, with his children and one or two dusky attendants in their train, he was received by his sister Emma, Mrs. Carradyne. Major Carradyne had died fighting in India, and his wife, at the request of her brother Raymond, came then to live at Leet Hall. Not of necessity, for Mrs. Carradyne was well off and could have made her home where she pleased, but Raymond had liked to have her. Godfrey also expressed his pleasure that she should remain; she could act as mother to his children.

Godfrey's children were three: Katherine, aged seventeen; Hubert, aged ten; and Eliza, aged eight. The girls had their father's handsome features, but in their skin there ran a dusky tinge, hinting of other than pure Saxon blood; and they were every whit as haughtily self-willed as he was. The boy, Hubert, was extremely pretty, his face fair, his complexion delicately beautiful, his auburn hair bright, his manner winning; but he liked to exercise his own will, and appeared to have generally done it.

A day or two, and Mrs. Carradyne sat down aghast. "I never saw children so troublesome and self-willed in all my life, Godfrey," she said to her brother. "Have they ever been controlled at all?"

"Had their own way pretty much, I expect," answered the Captain. "I was not often at home, you know, and there's nobody else they'd obey."

"Well, Godfrey, if I am to remain here, you will have to help me manage them."

"That's as may be, Emma. When I deem it necessary to speak, I speak; otherwise I don't interfere. And you must not get into the habit of appealing to me, recollect."

[Pg 3]

Captain Monk's conversation was sometimes interspersed with sundry light words, not at all orthodox, and not necessarily delivered in anger. In those past days swearing was regarded as a gentleman's accomplishment; a sailor, it was believed, could not at all get along without it. Manners change. The present age prides itself upon its politeness: but what of its sincerity?

Mrs. Carradyne, mild and gentle, commenced her task of striving to tame her brother's rebellious children. She might as well have let it alone. The girls laughed at her one minute and set her at defiance the next. Hubert, who had good feeling, was more obedient; he did not openly defy her. At times, when her task pressed heavily upon her spirits, Mrs. Carradyne felt tempted to run away from Leet Hall, as Godfrey had run from it in the days gone by. Her own two children were frightened at their cousins, and she speedily sent both to school, lest they should catch their bad manners. Henry was ten, the age of Hubert; Lucy was between five and six.

Just before the death of Raymond Monk, the living of Church Leet became vacant, and the last act of his life was to present it to a worthy young clergyman named George West. This caused intense dissatisfaction to Godfrey. He had heard of the late incumbent's death, and when he arrived home and found the living filled up he proclaimed his anger loudly, lavishing abuse upon poor dead Raymond for his precipitancy. He had wanted to bestow it upon a friend of his, a Colonial chaplain, and had promised it to him. It was a checkmate there was no help for now, for Mr. West could not be turned out again; but Captain Monk was not accustomed to be checkmated, and resented it accordingly. He took up, for no other reason, a most inveterate dislike to George West, and showed it practically.

In every step the Vicar took, at every turn and thought, he found himself opposed by Captain Monk. Had he a suggestion to make for the welfare of the parish, his patron ridiculed it; did he venture to propose some wise measure at a vestry meeting, the Captain put him and his measure down. Not civilly either, but with a stinging contempt, semi-covert though it was, that made its impression on the farmers around. The Reverend George West was a man of humility, given to much self-disparagement, so he bore all in silence and hoped for better times.

---

The time went on; three years of it; Captain Monk had fully settled down in his ancestral home, and the neighbours had learnt what a domineering, self-willed man he was. But he had his virtues. He was kind in a general way, generous where it pleased him to be, inordinately attached to his children, and hospitable to a fault.

[Pg 4]

On the last day of every year, as the years came round, Captain Monk, following his late father's custom, gave a grand dinner to his tenants; and a very good custom it would have been, but that he and they got rather too jolly. The parson was always invited—and went; and sometimes a few of Captain Monk's personal friends were added.

Christmas came round this year as usual, and the invitations to the dinner went out. One came to Squire Todhetley, a youngish man then, and one to my father, William Ludlow, who was younger than the Squire. It was a green Christmas; the weather so warm and genial that the hearty farmers, flocking to Leet Hall, declared they saw signs of buds sprouting in the hedges, whilst the large fire in the Captain's dining-room was quite oppressive.

Looking from the window of the parsonage sitting-room in the twilight, while drawing on his gloves, preparatory to setting forth, stood Mr. West. His wife was bending over an easy-chair, in which their only child, little Alice, lay back, covered up. Her breathing was quick, her skin parched with fever. The wife looked sickly herself.

"Well, I suppose it is time to go," observed Mr. West, slowly. "I shall be late if I don't."

"I rather wonder you go at all, George," returned his wife. "Year after year, when you come back from this dinner, you invariably say you will not go to another."

"I know it, Mary. I dislike the drinking that goes on—and the free conversation—and the objectionable songs; I feel out of place in it all."

"And the Captain's contemptuous treatment of yourself, you might add."

"Yes, that is another unwelcome item in the evening's programme."

"Then, George, why *do* you go?"

"Well, I think you know why. I do not like to refuse the invitation; it would only increase Captain Monk's animosity and widen still further the breach between us. As patron he holds so

much in his power. Besides that, my presence at the table does act, I believe, as a mild restraint on some of them, keeping the drinking and the language somewhat within bounds. Yes, I suppose my duty lies in going. But I shall not stay late, Mary," added the parson, bending to look at the suffering child; "and if you see any real necessity for the doctor to be called in to-night, I will go for him."

"Dood-bye, pa-pa," lisped the little four-year-old maiden.

[Pg 5]

He kissed the little hot face, said adieu to his wife and went out, hoping that the child would recover without the doctor; for the living of Church Leet was but a poor one, though the parsonage house was so handsome. It was a hundred-and-sixty pounds a year, for which sum the tithes had been compounded, and Mr. West had not much money to spare for superfluities—especially as he had to substantially help his mother.

The twilight had deepened almost to night, and the lights in the mansion seemed to smile a cheerful welcome as he approached it. The pillared entrance, ascended to by broad steps, stood in the middle, and a raised terrace of stone ran along before the windows on either side. It was quite true that every year at the conclusion of these feasts, the Vicar resolved never to attend another; but he was essentially a man of peace, striving ever to lay oil upon troubled waters, after the example left by his Master.

Dinner. The board was full. Captain Monk presided, genial to-day; genial even to the parson. Squire Todhetley faced the Captain at the foot; Mr. West sat at the Squire's right hand, between him and Farmer Threpp, a quiet man and supposed to be a very substantial one. All went on pleasantly; but when the elaborate dinner gave place to dessert and wine-drinking, the company became rather noisy.

"I think it's about time you left us," cried the Squire by-and-by to young Hubert, who sat next him on the other side: and over and over again Mr. Todhetley has repeated to us in later years the very words that passed.

"By George, yes!" put in a bluff and hearty fox-hunter, the master of the hounds, bending forward to look at the lad, for he was in a line with him, and breaking short off an anecdote he was regaling the company with. "I forgot you were there, Master Hubert. Quite time you went to bed."

"I daresay!" laughed the boy. "Please let me alone, all of you. I don't want attention drawn to me."

But the slight commotion had attracted Captain Monk's notice. He saw his son.

"What's that?—Hubert! What brings you there now, you young pirate? I ordered you to go out with the cloth."

"I am not doing any harm, papa," said the boy, turning his fair and beautiful face towards his father.

Captain Monk pointed his stern finger at the door; a mandate which Hubert dared not disobey, and he went out.

The company sat on, an interminable period of time it seemed to the Vicar. He glanced stealthily at his watch. Eleven o'clock.

"Thinking of going, Parson?" said Mr. Threpp. "I'll go with you. My head's not one of the strongest, and I've had about as much as I ought to carry."

They rose quietly, not to disturb the table; intending to steal away, if possible, without being observed. Unluckily, Captain Monk chanced to be looking that way.

[Pg 6]

"Halloa! who's turning sneak?—Not you, surely, Parson!—" in a meaningly contemptuous tone. "And *you*, Threpp, of all men! Sit down again, both of you, if you don't want to quarrel with me. Odds fish! has my dining-room got sharks in it, that you'd run away? Winter, just lock the door, will you; you are close to it; and pass up the key to me."

Mr. Winter, a jovial old man and the largest tenant on the estate, rose to do the Captain's behest, and sent up the key.

"Nobody quits my room," said the host, as he took it, "until we have seen the old year out and the new one in. What else do you come for—eh, gentlemen?"

The revelry went on. The decanters circulated more quickly, the glasses clicked, the songs became louder, the Captain's sea stories broader. Mr. West perforce made the best of the situation, certain words of Holy Writ running through his memory:

*"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright!"*

Well, more than well, for Captain Monk, that he had not looked upon the red wine that night!

In the midst of all this, the hall clock began to strike twelve. The Captain rose, after filling his glass to the brim.

"Bumpers round, gentlemen. On your legs. Ready? Hooray! Here's to the shade of the year that's gone, and may it have buried all our cares with it! And here's good luck to the one setting-in. A happy New Year to you all; and may we never know a moment in it worse than the present! Three-times-three—and drain your glasses."

"But we have had the toast too soon!" called out one of the farmers, making the discovery close after the cheers had subsided. "It wants some minutes yet to midnight, Captain."

Captain Monk snatched out his watch—worn in those days in what was called the fob-pocket—its chain and bunch of seals at the end hanging down.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "Hang that butler of mine! He knew the hall clock was too fast, and I told him to put it back. If his memory serves him no better than this, he may ship himself off to a fresh berth.—Hark! Listen!"

It was the church clock striking twelve. The sound reached the dining-room very clearly, the wind setting that way. "Another bumper," cried the Captain, and his guests drank it.

"This day twelvemonth I was at a feast in Derbyshire; the bells of a neighbouring church rang in the year with pleasant melody; chimes they were," remarked a guest, who was a partial stranger. "Your church has no bells, I suppose?"

"It has one; an old ting-tang that calls us to service on a Sunday," said Mr. Winter.

"I like to hear those midnight chimes, for my part. I like to hear them chime-in the new year," went on the stranger.

"Chimes!" cried out Captain Monk, who was getting very considerably elated, "why should we not have chimes? Mr. West, why don't we have chimes?"

[Pg 7] "Our church does not possess any, sir—as this gentleman has just remarked," was Mr. West's answer.

"Egad, but that parson of ours is going to set us all ablaze with his wit!" jerked out the Captain ironically. "I asked, sir, why we should not get a set of chimes; I did not say we had got them. Is there any just cause or impediment why we should not, Mr. Vicar?"

"Only the expense," replied the Vicar, in a conciliatory tone.

"Oh, bother expense! That's what you are always wanting to groan over. Mr. Churchwarden Threpp, we will call a vestry meeting and make a rate."

"The parish could not bear it, Captain Monk," remonstrated the clergyman. "You know what dissatisfaction was caused by the last extra rate put on, and how low an ebb things are at just now."

"When I will a thing, I do it," retorted the Captain, with a meaning word or two. "We'll send out the rate and we'll get the chimes."

"It will, I fear, lie in my duty to protest against it," spoke the uneasy parson.

"It may lie in your duty to be a wet-blanket, but you won't protest me out of my will. Gentlemen, we will all meet here again this time twelvemonth, when the chimes shall ring-in



the new year for you.—Here, Dutton, you can unlock the door now," concluded the Captain, handing the key to the other churchwarden. "Our parson is upon thorns to be away from us."

Not the parson only, but several others availed themselves of the opportunity to escape.

## II.

It perhaps did not surprise the parish to find that its owner and master, Captain Monk, intended to persist in his resolution of embellishing the church-tower with a set of chiming-bells. They knew him too well to hope anything less. Why! two years ago, at the same annual feast, some remarks or other at table put it into his head to declare he would stop up the public path by the Rill; and his obstinate will carried it out, regardless of the inconvenience it caused.

A vestry meeting was called, and the rate (to obtain funds for the bells) was at length passed. Two or three voices were feebly lifted in opposition; Mr. West alone had courage to speak out; but the Captain put him down with his strong hand. It may be asked why Captain Monk did not provide the funds himself for this whim. But he would never touch his own pocket for the benefit of the parish if he could help it: and it was thought that his antagonism to the parson was the deterring motive.

[Pg 8]

To impose the rate was one thing, to collect it quite another. Some of the poorer ratepayers protested with tears in their eyes that they could not pay. Superfluous rates (really not necessary ones) were perpetually being inflicted upon them, they urged, and were bringing them, together with a succession of recent bad seasons, to the verge of ruin. They carried their remonstrances to their Vicar, and he in turn carried them to Captain Monk.

It only widened the breach. The more persistently, though gently, Mr. West pleaded the cause of his parishioners, asking the Captain to be considerate to them for humanity's sake, the greater grew the other's obstinacy in holding to his own will. To be thus opposed roused all the devil within him—it was his own expression; and he grew to hate Mr. West with an exceeding bitter hatred.

The chimes were ordered—to play one tune only. Mr. West asked, when the thing was absolutely inevitable, that at least some sweet and sacred melody, acceptable to church-going ears, might be chosen; but Captain Monk fixed on a sea-song that was a favourite of his own—"The Bay of Biscay." At the end of every hour, when the clock had struck, the Bay of Biscay was to burst forth to charm the parish.

The work was put in hand at once, Captain Monk finding the necessary funds, to be repaid by the proceeds of the rate. Other expenses were involved, such as the strengthening of the belfry. The rate was not collected quickly. It was, I say, one of those times of scarcity that people used to talk so much of years ago; and when the parish beadle, who was the parish collector, went round with the tax-paper in his hand, the poorer of the cottagers could not respond to it. Some of them had not paid the last levy, and Captain Monk threatened harsh measures. Altogether, what with one thing or another, Church Leet that year was kept in a state of ferment. But the work went on.

---

One windy day in September, Mr. West sat in his study writing a sermon, when a jarring crash rang out from the church close by. He leaped from his chair. The unusual noise had startled him; and it struck on every chord of vexation he possessed. He knew that workmen were busy in the tower, but this was the first essay of the chimes. The bells had clashed in some way one upon the other; not giving out *The Bay of Biscay* or any other melody, but a very discordant jangle indeed. It was the first and the last time that poor George West heard their sound.

He put the blotting-paper upon his sermon; he was in no mind to continue it then; took up his hat and went out. His wife spoke to him from the open window.

"Are you going out now, George? Tea is all but ready."

Turning back on the path, he passed into the sitting-room. A cup of tea might soothe his nerves. The tea-tray stood on the table, and Mrs. West, caddy in hand, was putting the tea into the tea-pot. Little Alice sat gravely by.

"Did you hear dat noise up in the church, papa?" she asked.

"Yes, I heard it, dear," sighed the Vicar.

[Pg 9] "A fine clashing it was!" cried Mrs. West. "I have heard something else this afternoon, George, worse than that: Bean's furniture is being taken away."

"What?" cried the Vicar.

"It's true. Sarah went out on an errand and passed the cottage. The chairs and tables were being put outside the door by two men, she says: brokers, I conclude."

Mr. West made short work of his tea and started for the scene. Thomas Bean was a very small farmer indeed, renting about thirty acres. What with the heavy rates, as he said, and other outgoings and bad seasons, and ill-luck altogether, he had been behind in his payments this long while; and now the ill-luck seemed to have come to a climax. Bean and his wife were old; their children were scattered abroad.

"Oh, sir," cried the old lady when she saw the Vicar, the tears raining from her eyes, "it cannot be right that this oppression should fall upon us! We had just managed—Heaven knows how, for I'm sure I don't—to pay the Midsummer rent; and now they've come upon us for the rates, and have took away things worth ten times the sum."

"For the rates!" mechanically spoke the Vicar.

She supposed it was a question. "Yes, sir; two of 'em we had in the house. One was for putting up the chimes; and the other—well, I can't just remember what the other was. The beadle, old Crow, comes in, sir, this afternoon. 'Where be the master?' says he. 'Gone over to t'other side of Church Dykely,' says I. 'Well,' says he, upon that, 'you be going to have some visitors presently, and it's a pity he's out.' 'Visitors, for what, Crow?' says I. 'Oh, you'll see,' says he; 'and then perhaps you'll wish you'd bestirred yourselves to pay your just dues. Captain Monk's patience have been running on for a goodish while, and at last it have run clean out.' Well, sir—"

She had to make a pause; unable to control her grief.

"Well, sir," she went on presently, "Crow's back was hardly turned, when up came two men, wheeling a truck. I saw 'em afar off, by the ricks yonder. One came in; t'other stayed outside with the truck. He asked me whether I was ready with the money for the taxes; and I told him I was not ready, and had but a couple of shillings in the house. 'Then I must take the value of it in kind,' says he. And without another word, he beckons in the outside man to help him. Our middle table, a mahogany, they seized; and the handsome oak chest, which had been our pride; and the master's arm-chair—But, there! I can't go on."

[Pg 10] Mr. West felt nearly as sorrowful as she, and far more angry. In his heart he believed that Captain Monk had done this oppressive thing in revenge. A great deal of ill-feeling had existed in the parish touching the rate made for the chimes; and the Captain assumed that the few who had not yet paid it *would* not pay—not that they could not.

Quitting the cottage in an impulse of anger, he walked swiftly to Leet Hall. It lay in his duty, as he fully deemed, to avow fearlessly to Captain Monk what he thought of this act of oppression, and to protest against it. The beams of the setting sun, sinking below the horizon in the still autumn evening, fell across the stubbled fields from which the corn had not long been reaped; all around seemed to speak of peace.

To accommodate two gentlemen who had come from Worcester that day to Leet Hall on business, and wished to quit it again before dark, the dinner had been served earlier than usual. The guests had left, but Captain Monk was seated still over his wine in the dining-room when Mr. West was shown in. In crossing the hall to it, he met Mrs. Carradyne, who shook hands with him cordially.

Captain Monk looked surprised. "Why, this is an unexpected pleasure—a visit from you, Mr. Vicar," he cried, in mocking jest. "Hope you have come to your senses! Sit down. Will you take port or sherry?"

"Captain Monk," returned the Vicar, gravely, as he took the chair the servant had placed, "I am obliged for your courtesy, but I did not intrude upon you this evening to drink wine. I have seen a very sad sight, and I am come hoping to induce you to repair it."

"Seen what?" cried the Captain, who, it is well to mention, had been taking his wine very freely, even for him. "A flaming sword in the sky?"

"Your tenants, poor Thomas Bean and his wife, are being turned out of house and home, or almost equivalent to it. Some of their furniture has been seized this afternoon to satisfy the demand for these disputed taxes."

"Who disputes the taxes?"

"The tax imposed for the chimes was always a disputed tax; and—"

"Tush!" interrupted the Captain; "Bean owes other things as well as taxes."

"It was the last feather, sir, which broke the camel's back."

"The last feather will not be taken off, whether it breaks backs or leaves them whole," retorted the Captain, draining his glass of port and filling it again. "Take you note of that, Mr. Parson."

"Others are in the same condition as the Beans—quite unable to pay these rates. I pray you, Captain Monk—I am here to *pray* you—not to proceed in the same manner against them. I would also pray you, sir, to redeem this act of oppression, by causing their goods to be returned to these two poor, honest, hard-working people."

[Pg 11]

"Hold your tongue!" retorted the Captain, aroused to anger. "A pretty example *you'd* set, let you have your way. Every one of the lot shall be made to pay to the last farthing. Who the devil is to pay, do you suppose, if they don't?"

"Rates are imposed upon the parish needlessly, Captain Monk; it has been so ever since my time here. Pardon me for saying that if you put up chimes to gratify yourself, you should bear the expense, and not throw it upon those who have a struggle to get bread to eat."

Captain Monk drank off another glass. "Any more treason, Parson?"

"Yes," said Mr. West, "if you like to call it so. My conscience tells me that the whole procedure in regard to setting up these chimes is so wrong, so manifestly unjust, that I have determined not to allow them to be heard until the rates levied for them are refunded to the poor and oppressed. I believe I have the power to close the belfry-tower, and I shall act upon it."

"By Jove! do you think *you* are going to stand between me and my will?" cried the Captain passionately. "Every individual who has not yet paid the rate shall be made to pay it to-morrow."

"There is another world, Captain Monk," interposed the mild voice of the minister, "to which, I hope, we are all—"

"If you attempt to preach to me—"

At this moment a spoon fell to the ground by the sideboard. The Vicar turned to look; his back was towards it; the Captain peered also at the end of the rapidly-darkening room: when both became aware that one of the servants—Michael, who had shown in Mr. West—stood there; had stood there all the time.

"What are you waiting for, sirrah?" roared his master. "We don't want *you*. Here! put this window open an inch or two before you go; the room's close."

"Shall I bring lights, sir?" asked Michael, after doing as he was directed.

"No: who wants lights? Stir the fire into a blaze."

Michael left them. It was from him that thus much of the conversation was subsequently known.

Not five minutes had elapsed when a commotion was heard in the dining-room. Then the bell rang violently, and the Captain opened the door—overturning a chair in his passage to it—and shouted out for a light. More than one servant flew to obey the order: in his hasty moods their master brooked not delay: and three separate candles were carried in.

"Good lack, master!" exclaimed the butler, John Rimmer, who was a native of Church Dykely, "what's amiss with the Parson?"

"Lift him up, and loosen his neck-cloth," said Captain Monk, his tone less imperious than usual.

[Pg 12]

Mr. West lay on the hearthrug near his chair, his head resting close to the fender. Rimmer raised his head, another servant took off his black neck-tie; for it was only on high days that the poor Vicar indulged in a white one. He gasped twice, struggled slightly, and then lay quietly in the butler's arms.

"Oh, sir!" burst forth the man in a horror-stricken voice to his master, "this is surely death!"

It surely was. George West, who had gone there but just before in the height of health and strength, had breathed his last.

How did it happen? How could it have happened? Ay, how indeed? It was a question which has never been entirely solved in Church Leet to this day.

Captain Monk's account, both privately and at the inquest, was this: As they talked further together, after Michael left the room, the Vicar went on to browbeat him shamefully about the new chimes, vowing they should never play, never be heard; at last, rising in an access of passion, the Parson struck him (the Captain) in the face. He returned the blow—who wouldn't return it?—and the Vicar fell. He believed his head must have struck against the iron fender in falling; if not, if the blow had been an unlucky one (it took effect just behind the left ear), it was only given in self-defence. The jury, composed of Captain Monk's tenants, expressed themselves satisfied, and returned a verdict of Accidental Death.

"A false account," pronounced poor Mrs. West, in her dire tribulation. "My husband never struck him—never; he was not one to be goaded into unbecoming anger, even by Captain Monk. *George struck no blow whatever*; I can answer for it. If ever a man was murdered, he has been."

Curious rumours arose. It was said that Mrs. Carradyne, taking the air on the terrace outside in the calmness of the autumn evening, heard the fatal quarrel through the open window; that she heard Mr. West, after he had received the death blow, wail forth a prophecy (or whatever it might be called) that those chimes would surely be accursed; that whenever their sound should be heard, so long as they were suffered to remain in the tower, it should be the signal of woe to the Monk family.

Mrs. Carradyne utterly denied this; she had not been on the terrace at all, she said. Upon which the onus was shifted to Michael: who, it was suspected, had stolen out to listen to the end of the quarrel, and had heard the ominous words. Michael, in his turn, also denied it; but he was not believed. Anyway, the covert whisper had gone abroad and would not be laid.

### III.

Captain Monk speedily filled up the vacant living, appointing to it the Reverend Thomas Dancox, an occasional visitor at Leet Hall, who was looking out for one.

[Pg 13]

The new Vicar turned out to be a man after the Captain's heart, a rollicking, jovial, fox-hunting young parson, as many a parson was in those days—and took small blame to himself for it. He was only a year or two past thirty, good-looking, of taking manners and hail-fellow-well-met with the parish in general, who liked him and called him to his face Tom Dancox.

All this pleased Captain Monk. But very soon something was to arrive that did not please him—a suspicion that the young parson and his daughter Katherine were on rather too good terms with one another.

One day in November he stalked into the drawing-room, where Katherine was sitting with her aunt. Hubert and Eliza were away at school, also Mrs. Carradyne's two children.

"Was Dancox here last night?" began Captain Monk.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Carradyne.

"And the evening before—Monday?"

Mrs. Carradyne felt half afraid to answer, the Captain's tone was becoming so threatening. "I—I think so," she rather hesitatingly said. "Was he not, Katherine?"

Katherine Monk, a dark, haughty young woman, twenty-one now, turned round with a flush on her handsome face. "Why do you ask, papa?"

"I ask to be answered," replied he, standing with his hands in the pockets of his velveteen shooting coat, a purple tinge of incipient anger rising in his cheeks.

"Then Mr. Dancox did spend Monday evening here."

"And I saw him walking with you in the meadow by the rill this morning," continued the Captain. "Look here, Katherine, *no sweet-hearting with Tom Dancox*. He may do very well for a parson; I like him as such, as such only, you understand; but he can be no match for you."

"You are disturbing yourself unnecessarily, sir," said Katherine, her own tone an angry one.

"Well, I hope that is so; I should not like to think otherwise. Anyway, a word in season does no harm; and, take you notice that I have spoken it. You also, Emma."

As he left the room, Mrs. Carradyne spoke, dropping her voice: "Katherine, you know that I had already warned you. I told you it would not do to fall into any particular friendship with Mr. Dancox; that your father would never countenance it."

"And if I were to?—and if he did not?" scornfully returned Katherine. "What then, Aunt Emma?"

"Be silent, child; you must not talk in that strain. Your papa is perfectly right in this matter. Tom Dancox is not suitable in any way—for *you*."

[Pg 14]

This took place in November. Katherine paid little heed to the advice; she was not one to put up with advice of any sort, and she and Mr. Dancox met occasionally under the rose. Early in December she went with Mr. Dancox into the Parsonage, while he searched for a book he was about to lend her. That was the plea; the truth, no doubt, being that the two wanted a bit of a chat in quiet. As ill-luck had it, when she was coming out again, the Parson in attendance on her as far as the gate, Captain Monk came by.

A scene ensued. Captain Monk, in a terrible access of passion, vowed by all the laws of the Medes and Persians, which alter not, that never, in life or after death, should those two rebellious ones be man and wife, and he invoked unheard-of penalties on their heads should they dare to contemplate disobedience to his decree.

Thenceforth there was no more open rebellion; upon the surface all looked smooth. Captain Monk understood the folly to be at an end: that the two had come to their senses; and he took Tom Dancox back into favour. Mrs. Carradyne assumed the same. But Katherine had her father's unyielding will, and the Parson was bold and careless, and in love.

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The last day of the year came round, and the usual banquet would come with it. The weather this Christmas was not like that of last; the white snow lay on the ground, the cold biting frost hardened the glistening icicles on the trees.

And the chimes? Ready these three months past, they had not yet been heard. They would be to-night. Whether Captain Monk wished the remembrance of Mr. West's death to die away a bit first, or that he preferred to open the treat on the banqueting night, certain it was that he had kept them silent. When the church clock should toll the midnight knell of the old year, the chimes would ring out to welcome the new one and gladden the ears of Church Leet.

But not without a remonstrance. That morning, as the Captain sat in his study writing a letter, Mrs. Carradyne came to him.

"Godfrey," she said in a low and pleading tone, "you will not suffer the chimes to play to-night, will you? Pray do not."

"Not suffer the chimes to play?" cried the Captain. "But indeed I shall. Why, this is the special night they were put up for."

"I know it, Godfrey. But—you cannot think what a strangely-strong feeling I have against it: an instinct, it seems to me. The chimes have brought nothing but discomfort and disaster yet; they

may bring more in the future."

Captain Monk stared at her. "What d'ye mean, Emma?"

"*I would never let them be heard*," she said impressively. "I would have them taken down again. The story went about, you know, that poor George West in dying prophesied that whenever they should be heard woe would fall upon this house. I am not superstitious, Godfrey, but—"

Sheer passion had tied, so far, Godfrey Monk's lips. "Not superstitious!" he raved out. "You are worse than that, Emma—a fool. How dare you bring your nonsense here? There's the door."

[Pg 15]

The banquet hour approached. Nearly all the guests of last year were again present in the warm and holly-decorated dining-room, the one notable exception being the ill-fated Parson West. Parson Dancox came in his stead, and said grace from the post of honour at the Captain's right hand. Captain Monk did not appear to feel any remorse or regret: he was jovial, free, and grandly hospitable; one might suppose he had promoted the dead clergyman to a canonry instead of to a place in the churchyard.

"What became of the poor man's widow, Squire?" whispered a gentleman from the neighbourhood of Evesham to Mr. Todhetley, who sat on the left-hand of his host; Sir Thomas Rivers taking the foot of the table this year.

"Mrs. West? Well, we heard she opened a girls' school up in London," breathed the Squire.

"And what tale was that about his leaving a curse on the chimes?—I never heard the rights of it."

"Hush!" said the Squire cautiously. "Nobody talks of that here. Or believes it, either. Poor West was a man to leave a blessing behind him; never a curse."

Hubert, at home for the holidays, was again at table. He was fourteen now, tall of his age and slender, his blue eyes bright, his complexion delicately beautiful. The pleated cambric frill of his shirt, which hung over the collar of his Eton jacket after the fashion of the day, was carried low in front, displaying the small white throat; his golden hair curled naturally. A boy to admire and be proud of. The manners were more decorous this year than they ever had been, and Hubert was allowed to sit on. Possibly the shadow of George West's unhappy death lay insensibly upon the party.

It was about half-past nine o'clock when the butler came into the room, bringing a small note, twisted up, to his master from Mrs. Carradyne. Captain Monk opened it and held it towards one of the lighted branches to read the few words it contained.

*"A gentleman is asking to speak a word to Mr. Dancox. He says it is important."*

Captain Monk tore the paper to bits. "*Not to-night*, tell your mistress, is my answer," said he to Rimmer. "Hubert, you can go to your aunt now; it's past your bed-time."

There could be no appeal, as the boy knew; but he went off unwillingly and in bitter resentment against Mrs. Carradyne. He supposed she had sent for him.

"What a cross old thing you are, Aunt Emma!" he exclaimed as he entered the drawing-room on the other side the hall. "You won't let Harry go in at all to the banquets, and you won't let me stay at them! Papa meant—I think he meant—to let me remain there to hear the chimes. Why need you have interfered to send for me?"

[Pg 16]

"I neither interfered with you, Hubert, nor sent for you. A gentleman, who did not give his name and preferred to wait outside, wants to see Mr. Dancox; that's all," said Mrs. Carradyne. "You gave my note to your master, Rimmer?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the butler. "My master bade me say to you that his answer was *not to-night*."

Katherine Monk, her face betraying some agitation, rose from the piano. "Was the message not given to Mr. Dancox?" she asked of Rimmer.

"Not while I was there, Miss Katherine. The master tore the note into bits, after reading it; and dropped them under the table."

Now it chanced that Mr. Dancox, glancing covertly at the note while the Captain held it to the light, had read what was written there. For a few minutes he said nothing. The Captain was busy sending round the wine.

"Captain Monk—pardon me—I saw my name on that bit of paper; it caught my eye as you held it out," he said in a low tone. "Am I called out? Is anyone in the parish dying?"

Thus questioned, Captain Monk told the truth. No one was dying, and he was not called out to the parish. Some gentleman was asking to speak to him; only that.

"Well, I'll just see who it is, and what he wants," said Mr. Dancox, rising. "Won't be away two minutes, sir."

"Bring him back with you; tell him he'll find good wine here and jolly cheer," said the Captain. And Mr. Dancox went out, swinging his table-napkin in his hand.

In crossing the hall he met Katherine, exchanged a hasty word with her, let fall the serviette on a chair as he caught up his hat and overcoat, and went out. Katherine ran upstairs.

Hubert lay down on one of the drawing-room sofas. In point of fact, that young gentleman could not walk straight. A little wine takes effect on youngsters, especially when they are not accustomed to it. Mrs. Carradyne told Hubert the best place for him was bed. Not a bit of it, the boy answered: he should go out on the terrace at twelve o'clock; the chimes would be fine, heard out there. He fell asleep almost as he spoke; presently he woke up, feeling headachy, cross and stupid, and of his own accord went up to bed.

Meanwhile, the dining-room was getting jollier and louder as the time passed on towards midnight. Great wonder was expressed at the non-return of the parson; somebody must be undoubtedly grievously sick or dying. Mr. Speck, the quiet little Hurst Leet doctor, dissented from this. Nobody was dying in the parish, he affirmed, or sick enough to need a priest; as a proof of it, *he* had not been sent for.

Ring, ring, ring! broke forth the chimes on the quiet midnight air, as the church clock finished striking twelve. It was a sweet sound; even those prejudiced against the chimes could hear that: the windows had been opened in readiness.

[Pg 17] The glasses were charged; the company stood on their legs, some of them not at all steady legs just then, bending their ears to listen. Captain Monk stood in his place, majestically waving his head and his left hand to keep time in harmony with the Bay of Biscay. His right hand held his goblet in readiness for the toast when the sounds should cease.

Ring, ring, ring! chimed the last strokes of the bells, dying away to faintness on the still evening air. Suddenly, amidst the hushed silence, and whilst the sweet melody fell yet unbroken on the room, there arose a noise as of something falling outside on the terrace, mingled with a wild scream and the crash of breaking glass.

One of the guests rushed to the window, and put his head out of it. So far as he could see, he said (perhaps his sight was somewhat obscured), it was a looking-glass lying further up on the terrace.

Thrown out from one of the upper windows! scornfully pronounced the Captain, full of wrath that it should have happened at that critical moment to mar the dignity of his coming toast. And he gave the toast heartily; and the new year came in for them all with good wishes and good wine.

Some little time yet ere the company finally rose. The mahogany frame of the broken looking-glass, standing on end, was conspicuous on the white ground in the clear frosty night, as they streamed out from the house. Mr. Speck, whose sight was rather remarkably good, peered at it curiously from the hall steps, and then walked quickly along the snowy terrace towards it.

Sure enough, it was a looking-glass, broken in its fall from an open window above. But, lying by it in the deep snow, in his white nightshirt, was Hubert Monk.

When the chimes began to play, Hubert was not asleep. Sitting up in bed, he disposed himself to listen. After a bit they began to grow fainter; Hubert impatiently dashed to the window and threw it up to its full height as he jumped on the dressing-table, when in some unfortunate way he overbalanced himself, and pitched out on the terrace beneath, carrying the looking-glass with

him. The fall was not much, for his room was in one of the wings, the windows of which were low; but the boy had struck his head in falling, and there he had lain, insensible, on the terrace, one hand still clasping the looking-glass.

All the rosy wine-tint fading away to a sickly paleness on the Captain's face, he looked down on his well-beloved son. The boy was carried indoors to his room, reviving with the movement.

"Young bones are elastic," pronounced Mr. Speck, when he had examined him; "and none of these are broken. He will probably have a cold from the exposure; that's about the worst."

He seemed to have it already: he was shivering from head to foot now, as he related the above particulars. All the family had assembled round him, except Katherine.

[Pg 18] "Where is Katherine?" suddenly inquired her father, noticing her absence.

"I cannot think where she is," said Mrs. Carradyne. "I have not seen her for an hour or two. Eliza says she is not in her room; I sent her to see. She is somewhere about, of course."

"Go and look for your sister, Eliza. Tell her to come here," said Captain Monk. But though Eliza went at once, her quest was useless.

Miss Katherine was not in the house: Miss Katherine had made a moonlight flitting from it that evening with the Reverend Thomas Dancox.

You will hear more in the next paper.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



## A SONG.

Blue eyes that laugh at early morn  
 May weep ere close of day;  
 And weeping is a thing of scorn  
 To those whose hearts are gay.  
 Ah, simple souls, beware, beware!  
 Time's finger changeth smile to care!

Gold locks that glitter as the sun  
 May sudden fade to grey;  
 And who shall favour anyone  
 Despoiled of bright array?  
 Ah, simple souls, beware of loss,  
 Time's finger changeth gold to dross!

Good lack! we talk, yet all the same  
 We throw our words away!  
 The smiles, the gold, the tears, the shame,  
 Each tries them in his day.  
 And Time, with vengeful finger, makes  
 Of fondest goods our chief mistakes!

G.B. STUART.

[Pg 19]

## MISS KATE MARSDEN.

In this practical age we are inclined to estimate people by the worth of what they do, and thus it happens that Miss Kate Marsden and her mission are creating an interest and genuine



admiration in the hearts of the people such as few individuals or circumstances have power to call forth.

The work she has set herself to do, regardless of the dangers and difficulties she will have to encounter, seems to us, who look out from the security of our homes in this favoured land, almost beyond human power to perform. It is, in fact, appalling.

Even Miss Nightingale, who never exaggerates, writes of this lady: "Surely no human being ever needed the loving Father's help and guidance more than this brave woman." And in this the readers of THE ARGOSY will fully agree.

Her purpose is to travel through Russia to the extreme points of Siberia, chiefly for the purpose of seeing the condition of those affected with incurable disease, and what can be done to improve their surroundings and mitigate their sufferings.

This, if it stood alone, would be a grand work; but it is by no means all she hopes to do.

It is her purpose to join the gangs of exiles on their way to Siberia, to note their treatment, to halt at their halting-stages, and see if it be true that there is an utter absence of all sanitary appliances; that filth and cruelty are in evidence; and that the strongest constitutions break down under conditions unfit for brute beasts. She will investigate the assertions that delicate innocent women and children are chained to vile criminals, and so made to take their way on foot thousands of miles to far-off Siberia; often for no other crime than some careless words spoken against the Greek Church or the Czar.

She hopes fully to inspect the prisons and mines in those far-off regions, described by the Russians themselves as "living tombs." She will, if possible, go into the cells of the condemned exiles, whose walls are bare, except for their living covering of myriads of insects; and, lastly, she intends to visit the Jews' quarters, and satisfy our minds as to the existence of the terrible cruelties inflicted upon this persecuted race, the hearing of which alone is heart-breaking.

And all through her perilous journeys we may be sure she will lose no opportunity of comforting and helping the suffering ones who come under her notice, no matter what their race or condition.

[Pg 20]

This line of conduct will have its dangers; but she holds not her life dear unto her, so that she may accomplish her heart's desire. The practical result looked forward to by her is, that, having gained an intimate knowledge of the sufferings and cruelties inflicted upon so many thousands of Russian subjects, and of which there have been such conflicting accounts, she may be admitted a second time into the presence of the Empress, there to place the actual scenes before her, and to plead the cause of the sufferers personally.

Strange to say, she is convinced in her own mind that the Emperor and Empress of Russia are ignorant of a great deal that is done in their name; or, as the phrase is, "By order of the Czar;" and that they know little of the results of those Edicts and Ukase which are causing such dire misery to thousands of their subjects, not only to the long-suffering Jews but also to Christian women and children; and it is her belief that if the truth could be placed before them, as she hopes to place it, they will attack the evil even at the cost of life or crown.

This is quite a different view from that which obtains generally; and if Miss Kate Marsden should be able to prove her point, and bring before them the pictures of what she may see on her journey to and from Siberia, she will score a result such as has fallen to no one's endeavour hitherto.

It is only now and then in a lifetime that we meet a woman capable of such a grand work as this which Miss Kate Marsden has taken upon herself; and the reason is that the qualifications necessary are so rarely found in combination in one and the same individual. Many among us may have one or other of the characteristics, but it is the existence of them all in one person that makes the heroine and gives the power.

You cannot be an hour in Miss Kate Marsden's company without becoming aware of her enthusiasm, her courage, her self-devotion, her fearlessness, and above all her simple child-like faith. It avails nothing that you place before her the trials, the horrors, the dangers, the possible failure of such an undertaking as hers. The necessity of the work to be done she considers imperative, and the certainty in her mind that it is her mission to do it carries all before it.

The bravest among us would hesitate before deciding upon a tour in Russia and Siberia, supposing it were one of pleasure or of scientific research, because even under these favourable conditions we should be subject to ignominious surveillance night and day, and the chances of leaving the country when we pleased would be very small; but what can we say of a young and delicate woman who, voluntarily and without thought of self, deliberately walks into the country where deeds are done daily which make us shrink with fear, and which, for very shame for the century in which we live, we try hard not to believe? It is as if with eyes open she walked into a den of lions and expected them to give her a loving welcome and a free egress.

[Pg 21]

Heaven help her, for she is in the midst of it and has begun her work; the result of her fearlessness remains to be seen. I doubt greatly whether we shall be allowed to receive reports of her daily life out there, even where postal regulations are in force. We can but follow her on her way from Moscow to Tomsk in thought, and picture to ourselves the thousands of exiles she will find waiting there herded together like brute beasts. She will not turn from them, even though typhoid be raging amongst them—one can see her moving in and out among these miserable, debased human beings, who lie tossing on those terrible wooden shelves, helping them according to their needs; for she carries with her remedies for pain and disease of body, and her simple faith will find means of comforting heart and soul.

If any of those twenty thousand exiles who have this year trod the weary way between Petersburg and Tomsk, and on again to the far-off districts of Siberia, should hear of the coming of this gentle woman, strong only in her love for them, I think it would kindle a spark of hope again in their hearts. They would know that at least they were remembered by someone in the land of the living.

Miss Kate Marsden has dared so much for these poor suffering ones that she will not easily be turned aside by excessive politeness or brutality on the part of officials from seeing the actual state of things. She will not, I think, be content with viewing the Provincial Prison at Tomsk, which is light and airy and occupied by local offenders, instead of the *forwarding* prison which, according to the accounts that reach us, is a disgrace to the civilized world, and where the exiles are lodged while waiting to be "forwarded."

I pity Miss Kate Marsden if it should ever be her lot to witness the knout used to a woman without the power of stopping it, or retaliating upon the brute who is inflicting it. It would be almost the death of her.

If we have been successful in interesting the readers of THE ARGOSY in this lady and her mission, they will like to know that she is not a wilful person starting off on a wild-goose chase on a generous impulse without at all counting the cost. On the contrary, the work she is now doing has been the desire of her life, and all the training and discipline to which she has subjected herself has been for the purpose of fitting her for it.

From her earliest childhood she has been an indefatigable worker among the sick and wounded, with whom she has ever had the most intense sympathy, and consequently an extraordinary power to soothe and comfort.

Young as she was at the time of the Turko-Russian war, she did good service on the battle-fields and worked untiringly among every kind of depressing surrounding. The beautiful cross upon her breast is a gift from the Empress of Russia, as a recognition of the good work she did among the wounded soldiers at that time. From that day to this, whether in England or in New Zealand, her work has been steadily going on, ever gaining information and experience, and at the same time doing an amount of good difficult to calculate.

[Pg 22]

For one whole year she became, what I call for want of a better name, an itinerant teacher of ambulance work, in places out of reach of doctors in New Zealand. She taught the people how to deal with accidents caused by the falling of trees, cuts with the axe, or kicks from vicious horses, all of which are of frequent occurrence in the Bush. Again, she taught the miners how to make use of surrounding materials in case of an injury: how to bandage, and how to make a stretcher for moving a wounded person from one place to another with such things as were handy, viz., with two poles and a man's coat, the poles to be placed through the arms and the coat itself to be buttoned securely over the poles. Another thing she taught in these out-of-the-way places was how to deal with burns and foreign matter in the eye or ear—also accidents of frequent occurrence.

Many interesting and exciting scenes could be related of this part of her life, but I hesitate to do more than show her training and fitness for the work she is now doing.

It is a work we all want done, and would gladly take part in had we the qualifications for it. It is a work which, if well and honestly done, will deserve the best thanks of England and of the whole civilized world. She may not live to tell us, but her life will not have been lived in vain if she prove successful in getting at the truth of what is done *By order of the Czar*, and presenting it to the Czar himself.

We cannot travel with her bodily; we cannot hunger or perish with cold in her company; we cannot fight with dogs and wolves as she must do; we cannot, with her, go into the dens of immorality and fever; but we can determine upon some way of helping her, and I think we shall only be too thankful to join her friends who by giving of their means are participating in so grand a mission.



[Pg 23]

## THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

A Story Re-told.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MY ARRIVAL AT DEEPLEY WALLS.

"Miss Janet Hope,  
To the care of Lady Chillington,  
Deepley Walls, near Eastbury,  
Midlandshire."

"There, miss, I'm sure that will do famously," said Chirper, the overworked, oldish young person whose duty it was to attend to the innumerable wants of the young lady boarders of Park Hill Seminary. She had just written out, in a large sprawling hand, a card as above which card was presently to be nailed on to the one small box that held the whole of my worldly belongings.

"And I think, miss," added Chirper, meditatively, as she held out the card at arm's length, and gazed at it admiringly, "that if I was to write out another card similar, and tie it round your arm, it would, mayhap, help you in getting safe to your journey's end."

I, a girl of twelve, was the Janet Hope indicated above, and I had been looking over Chirper's shoulder with wondering eyes while she addressed the card.

"But who is Lady Chillington, and where is Deepley Walls, and what have I to do with either, Chirper, please?" I asked.

"If there is one thing in little girls more hateful than another, it is curiosity," answered Chirper, with her mouth half-full of nails. "Curiosity has been the bane of many of our sex. Witness Bluebeard's unhappy wife. If you want to know more, you must ask Mrs. Whitehead. I have my instructions and I act on them."

Meeting Mrs. Whitehead half-an-hour later, as she was coming down the stone corridor that led from the refectory, I did ask that lady precisely the same questions that I had put to Chirper. Her frosty glance, filled with a cold surprise, smote me even through her spectacles; and I shrank a little, abashed at my own boldness.

"The habit of asking questions elsewhere than in the class-room should not be encouraged in young ladies," said Mrs. Whitehead, with a sort of prim severity. "The other young ladies are gone home; you are about to follow their example."

"But, Mrs. Whitehead—madam," I pleaded, "I never had any other home than Park Hill."

"More questioning, Miss Hope? Fie! Fie!"

[Pg 24]

And with a lean finger uplifted in menacing reproof, Mrs. Whitehead sailed on her way, nor deigned me another word.

I stole out into the playground, wondering, wretched, and yet smitten through with faint delicious thrillings of a new-found happiness such as I had often dreamed of, but had scarcely dared hope ever to realise. I, Janet Hope, going home! It was almost too incredible for belief. I wandered about like one mazed—like one who, stepping suddenly out of darkness into sunshine, is dazzled by an intolerable brightness whichever way he turns his eyes. And yet I was wretched: for was not Miss Chinfeather dead? And that, too, was a fact almost too incredible for belief.

As I wandered, this autumn morning, up and down the solitary playground, I went back in memory as far as memory would carry me, but only to find that Miss Chinfeather and Park Hill Seminary blocked up the way. Beyond them lay darkness and mystery. Any events in my child's life that might have happened before my arrival at Park Hill had for me no authentic existence. I had been part and parcel of Miss Chinfeather and the Seminary for so long a time that I could not dissociate myself from them even in thought. Other pupils had had holidays, and letters, and presents, and dear ones at home of whom they often talked; but for me there had been none of these things. I knew that I had been placed at Park Hill when a very little girl by some, to me, mysterious and unknown person, but further than that I knew nothing. The mistress of Park Hill had not treated me in any way differently from her other pupils; but had not the bills contracted on my account been punctually paid by somebody, I am afraid that the even-handed justice on which she prided herself—which, in conjunction with her aquiline nose and a certain antique severity of deportment, caused her to be known amongst us girls as *The Roman Matron*—would have been somewhat ruffled, and that sentence of expulsion from those classic walls would have been promptly pronounced and as promptly carried into effect.

Happily no such necessity had ever arisen; and now the Roman Matron lay dead in the little corner room on the second floor, and had done with pupils, and half yearly accounts, and antique deportment for ever.

[Pg 25]

In losing Miss Chinfeather I felt as though the corner-stone of my life had been rent away. She was too cold, she was altogether too far removed for me to regard her with love, or even with that modified feeling which we call affection. But then no such demonstration was looked for by Miss Chinfeather. It was a weakness above which she rose superior. But if my child's love was a gift which she would have despised, she looked for and claimed my obedience—the resignation of my will to hers, the absorption of my individuality in her own, the gradual elimination from my life of all its colour and freshness. She strove earnestly, and with infinite patience, to change me from a dreamy, passionate child—a child full of strange wild moods, capricious, and yet easily touched either to laughter or tears—into a prim and elegant young lady, colourless and formal, and of the most orthodox boarding-school pattern; and if she did not quite succeed in the attempt, the fault, such as it was, must be set down to my obstinate disposition and not to any lack of effort on the part of Miss Chinfeather. And now this powerful influence had vanished from my life, from the world itself, as swiftly and silently as a snowflake in the sun. The grasp of the hard but not unkindly hand, that had held me so firmly in the narrow groove in which it wished me to move, had been suddenly relaxed, and everything around me seemed tottering to its fall. Three nights ago Miss Chinfeather had retired to rest, as well, to all appearance, and as cheerful as ever she had been; next morning she had been found dead in bed. This was what they told us pupils; but so great was the awe in which I held the mistress of Park Hill Seminary that I could not conceive of Death even as venturing to behave disrespectfully towards her. I pictured him in my girlish fancy as knocking at her chamber door in the middle of the night, and after apologising for the interruption, asking whether she was ready to accompany him. Then would she who was thus addressed arise, and wrap an ample robe about her, and place her hand with solemn sweetness in that of the Great Captain, and the two would pass out together into the starlit night, and Miss Chinfeather would be seen of mortal eyes nevermore.

Such was the picture that had haunted my brain for two days and as many nights, while I wandered forlorn through house and playground, or lay awake on my little bed. I had said farewell to one pupil after another till all were gone, and the riddle which I had been putting to myself continually for the last forty-eight hours had now been solved for me by Mrs. Whitehead, and I had been told that I too was going home.

"To the care of Lady Chillington, Deepley Walls, Midlandshire." The words repeated themselves again and again in my brain, and became a greater puzzle with every repetition. I had never to my knowledge heard of either the person or the place. I knew nothing of one or the other. I only knew that my heart thrilled strangely at the mention of the word *Home*; that unbidden tears started to my eyes at the thought that perhaps—only perhaps—in that as yet unknown place there might be someone who would love me just a little. "Father—Mother." I spoke the words, but they sounded unreal to me, and as if uttered by another. I spoke them again, holding out my arms and crying aloud. All my heart seemed to go out in the cry, but only the hollow winds answered me as they piped mournfully through the yellowing leaves, a throng of which went rustling down the walk as though stirred by the footsteps of a ghost. Then my eyes grew blind with tears and I wept silently for a time as if my heart would break.

[Pg 26]

But tears were a forbidden luxury at Park Hill, and when, a little later on, I heard Chirper calling me by name, I made haste to dry my eyes and compose my features. She scanned me narrowly as I ran up to her. "You dear, soft-hearted little thing!" she said. And with that she stooped suddenly and gave me a hearty kiss, that might have been heard a dozen yards away. I was about to fling my arms round her neck, but she stopped me, saying, "That will do, dear. Mrs. Whitehead is waiting for us at the door."

Mrs. Whitehead was watching us through the glass door which led into the playground. "The coach will be here in half-an-hour, Miss Hope," she said; "so that you have not much time for your preparations."

I stood like one stunned for a moment or two. Then I said: "If you please, Mrs. Whitehead, may I see Miss Chinfeather before I go?"

Her thin, straight lips quivered slightly, but in her eyes I read only cold disapproval of my request. "Really," she said, "what a singular child you must be. I scarcely know what to say."

"Oh, if you please!" I urged. "Miss Chinfeather was always kind to me. I remember her as long as I can remember anything. To see her once more—for the last time. It would seem to me cruel to go away without."

"Follow me," she said, almost in a whisper. So I followed her softly up stairs into the little corner room where Miss Chinfeather lay in white and solemn state, grandly indifferent to all mundane matters. As I gazed, it seemed but an hour ago since I had heard those still lips conjugating the verb *mourir* for the behoof of poor ignorant me, and the words came back to me, and I could not help repeating them to myself as I looked: *Je meurs, tu meurs*, etc.

I bent over and kissed the marble-cold forehead and said farewell in my heart, and went downstairs without a word.

Half-an-hour later the district coach, a splendid vision, pulled up impetuously at the gates. I was ready to the moment. Mrs. Whitehead's frosty fingers touched mine for an instant; she imprinted a chill kiss on my cheek and looked relieved. "Good-bye, my dear Miss Hope, and God bless you," she said. "Strive to bear in mind through after life the lessons that have been instilled into you at Park Hill Seminary. Present my respectful compliments to Lady Chillington, and do not forget your catechism."

At this point the guard sounded an impatient summons on his bugle; Chirper picked up my box, seized me by the hand, and hurried with me to the coach. My luggage found a place on the roof; I was unceremoniously bundled inside; Chirper gave me another of her hearty kisses, and pressed a crooked sixpence into my hand "for luck," as she whispered. I am sure there was a real tear in her eye as she did so. Next moment we were off.

[Pg 27]

I kept my eyes fixed on the Seminary as long as it remained in view, especially on the little corner room. It seemed to me that I must be a very wicked girl indeed, because I felt no real sorrow at quitting the place that had been my home for so many years. I could not feel anything but secretly glad, but furtively happy with a happiness which I felt ashamed of acknowledging even to myself. Miss Chinfeather's white and solemn face, as seen in her coffin, haunted my

memory, but even of her I thought only with a sort of chastened regret. She had never touched my heart. There had been about her a bleakness of nature that effectually chilled any tender buds of liking or affection that might in the ordinary course of events have grown up and blossomed round her life. Therefore, in my child's heart there was no lasting sorrow for her death, no gracious memories of her that would stay with me, and smell sweet, long after she herself should be dust.

My eight miles' ride by coach was soon over. It ended at the railway station of the county town. The guard of the coach had, I suppose, received his secret instructions. Almost before I knew what had happened, I found myself in a first-class carriage, with a ticket for Eastbury in my hand, and committed to the care of another guard, he of the railway this time—a fiery-faced man, with immense red whiskers, who came and surveyed me as though I were some contraband article, but finished by nodding his head and saying with a smile, "I dessay we shall be good friends, miss, before we get to the end of our journey."

It was my first journey by rail, and the novelty of it filled me with wonder and delight. The train by which I travelled was a fast one, and after my first feeling of fright at the rapidity of the motion had merged into one of intense pleasure and exhilaration of mind, I could afford to look back on my recent coach experience with a sort of pitying superiority, as on a something that was altogether *rococo* and out of date. Already the rash of new ideas into my mind was so powerful that the old landmarks of my life seemed in danger of being swept clean away. Already it seemed days instead of only a brief hour or two since I had bidden Mrs. Whitehead farewell, and had taken my last look at Park Hill Seminary.

The red-faced guard was as good as his word; he and I became famous friends before I reached the end of my journey. At every station at which we stopped he came to the window to see how I was getting on, and whether I was in want of anything, and was altogether so kind to me that I was quite sorry to part from him when the train reached Eastbury, and left me, a minute later, standing, a solitary waif, on the little platform.

The one solitary fly of which the station could boast was laid under contribution. My little box was tossed on to its roof; I myself was shut up inside; the word was given, "To Deepley Walls;" the station was left behind, and away we went, jolting and rumbling along the quiet country lanes, and under over-arching trees, all aglow just now with autumn's swift-fading beauty. The afternoon was closing in, and the wind was rising, sweeping up with melancholy sighs from the dim wooded hollows where it had lain asleep till the sun went down; garnering up the fallen leaves like a cunning miser, wherever it could find a hiding-place for them, and then dying suddenly down, and seeming to hold its breath as if listening for the footsteps of the coming winter.

In the western sky hung a huge tumbled wrack of molten cloud like the ruins of some vast temple of the gods of eld. Chasmed buttresses, battlements overthrown; on the horizon a press of giants, shoulder against shoulder, climbing slowly to the rescue; in mid-sky a praying woman; farther afield a huge head, and a severed arm the fingers of which were clenched in menace: all these things I saw, and a score others, as the clouds changed from minute to minute in form and brightness, while the stars began to glow out like clusters of silver lilies in the eastern sky.

We kept jolting on for so long a time through the twilight lanes, and the evening darkened so rapidly, that I began to grow frightened. It was like being lifted out of a dungeon, when the old fly drew up with a jerk, and a shout of "House there!" and when I looked out and saw that we were close to the lodge entrance of some park.

Presently a woman, with a child in her arms, came out of the lodge and proceeded to open the gate for us. Said the driver—"How's Johnny to-night?"

The woman shouted something in reply, but I don't think the old fellow heard her.

"Ay, ay," he called out, "Johnny will be a famous young shaver one of these days;" and with that, he whipped up his horse, and away we went.

The drive up the avenue, for such at the time I judged it to be, and such it proved to be, did not occupy many minutes. The fly came to a stand, and the driver got down and opened the door. "Now, young lady, here you are," he said; and I found myself in front of the main entrance to Deepley Walls.

It was too dark by this time for me to discern more than the merest outline of the place. I saw that it was very large, and I noticed that not even one of its hundred windows showed the least glimmer of light. It loomed vast, dark and silent, as if deserted by every living thing.

The old driver gave a hearty pull at the bell, and the muffled clamour reached me where I stood. I was quaking with fears and apprehensions of that unknown future on whose threshold I was standing. Would Love or Hate open for me the doors of Deepley Walls? I was strung to such a pitch that it seemed impossible for any lesser passion to be handmaiden to my needs.

[Pg 29]

What I saw when the massive door was opened was an aged woman, dressed like a superior domestic, who, in sharp accents, demanded to know what we meant by disturbing a quiet family in that unseemly way. She was holding one hand over her eyes, and trying to make out our appearance through the gathering darkness. I stepped close up to her. "I am Miss Janet Hope, from Park Hill Seminary," I said, "and I wish to speak with Lady Chillington."

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE MISTRESS OF DEEPLEY WALLS.

The words were hardly out of my lips when the woman shrank suddenly back, as though struck by an invisible hand, and gave utterance to an inarticulate cry of wonder and alarm. Then, striding forward, she seized me by the wrist, and drew me into the lamp-light hall. "Child! child! why have you come here?" she cried, scanning my face with eager eyes. "In all the wide world this is the last place you should have come to."

"Miss Chinfeather is dead, and all the young ladies have been sent to their homes. I have no home, so they have sent me here."

"What shall I do? What will her ladyship say?" cried the woman, in a frightened voice. "How shall I ever dare to tell her?"

"Who rang the bell, Dance, a few minutes ago? And to whom are you talking?"

The voice sounded so suddenly out of the semi-darkness at the upper end of the large hall, which was lighted only by a small oil lamp, that both the woman and I started. Looking in the direction from which the sound had come, I could dimly make out, through the obscurity, the figures of two women who had entered without noise through the curtained doorway, close to which they were now standing. One of the two was very tall, and was dressed entirely in black. The second one, who was less tall, was also dressed in black, except that she seemed to have something white thrown over her head and shoulders; but I was too far away to make out any details.

"Hush! don't you speak," whispered the woman warningly to me. "Leave me to break the news to her ladyship." With that, she left me standing on the threshold, and hurried towards the upper end of the hall.

The tall personage in black, then, with the harsh voice—high pitched, and slightly cracked—was Lady Chillington! How fast my heart beat! If only I could have slipped out unobserved I would never have braved my fortune within those walls again.

[Pg 30]

She who had been called Dance went up to the two ladies, curtsied deeply, and began talking in a low, earnest voice. Hardly, however, had she spoken a dozen words when the lesser of the two ladies flung up her arms with a cry like that of some wounded creature, and would have fallen to the ground had not Dance caught her round the waist and so held her.

"What folly is this?" cried Lady Chillington, sternly, striking the pavement of the hall sharply with the iron ferrule of her cane. "To your room, Sister Agnes! For such poor weak fools as you solitude is the only safe companion. But, remember your oath! Not a word; not a word." With one lean hand uplifted, and menacing forefinger, she emphasised those last warning words.

She who had been addressed as Sister Agnes raised herself, with a deep sigh, from the shoulder of Dance, cast one long look in the direction of the spot where I was standing, and vanished

slowly through the curtained arch. Then Dance took up the broken thread of her narration, and Lady Chillington, grim and motionless, listened without a word.

Even after Dance had done speaking, her ladyship stood for some time looking straight before her, but saying nothing in reply. I felt intuitively that my fate was hanging on the decision of those few moments, but I neither stirred nor spoke.

At length the silence was broken by Lady Chillington. "Take the child away," she said; "attend to her wants, make her presentable, and bring her to me in the Green Saloon after dinner. It will be time enough to-morrow to consider what must be done with her."

Dance curtsied again. Her ladyship sailed slowly across the hall, and passed out through another curtained doorway.

Dance's first act was to pay and dismiss the driver, who had been waiting outside all this time. Then, taking me by the hand, "Come along with me, dear," she said. "Why, I declare, you look quite white and frightened! You have nothing to fear, child. We shall not eat you—at least, not just yet; not till we have fed you up a bit."

At the end of a long corridor was Mrs. Dance's own room, into which I was now ushered. Scarcely had I made a few changes in my toilette when tea for two persons was brought in, and Mrs. Dance and I sat down to table. The old lady was well on with her second cup before she made any remark other than was required by the necessities of the occasion.

I have called her an old woman, and such she looked in my youthful eyes, although her years were only about sixty. She wore a dark brown dress and a black silk apron, and had on a cap with thick frilled borders, under which her grey hair was neatly snooded away. She looked ruddy and full of health. A shrewd, sensible woman, evidently; yet with a motherly kindness about her that made me cling to her with a child's unerring instinct.

[Pg 31]

"You look tired, poor thing," she said, as she leisurely stirred her tea; "and well you may, considering the long journey you have had to-day. I don't suppose that her ladyship will keep you more than ten minutes in the Green Saloon, and after that you can go to bed as soon as you like. What a surprise for all of us your coming has been! Dear, dear! who would have expected such a thing this morning? But I knew by the twitching of my corns that something uncommon was going to happen. I was really frightened of telling her ladyship that you were here. There's no knowing how she might have taken it; and there's no knowing what she will decide to do with you to-morrow."

"But what has Lady Chillington to do with me in any way?" I asked. "Before this morning I never even heard her name; and now it seems that she is to do what she likes with me."

"That she will do what she likes with you, you may depend, dear," said Mrs. Dance. "As to how she happens to have the right so to do, that is another thing, and one about which it is not my place to talk nor yours to question me. That she possesses such a right you may make yourself certain. All that you have to do is to obey and to ask no questions."

I sat in distressed and bewildered silence for a little while. Then I ventured to say: "Please not to think me rude, but I should like to know who Sister Agnes is."

Mrs. Dance stirred uneasily in her chair and bent her eyes on the fire, but did not immediately answer my question.

"Sister Agnes is Lady Chillington's companion," she said at last. "She reads to her, and writes her letters, and talks to her, and all that, you know. Sister Agnes is a Roman Catholic, and came here from the convent of Saint Ursula. However, she is not a nun, but something like one of those Sisters of Mercy in the large towns, who go about among poor people and visit the hospitals and prisons. She is allowed to live here always, and Lady Chillington would hardly know how to get through the day without her."

"Is she not a relative of Lady Chillington?" I asked.

"No, not a relative," answered Dance. "You must try to love her a great deal, my dear Miss Janet; for if angels are ever allowed to visit this vile earth, Sister Agnes is one of them. But there goes her ladyship's bell. She is ready to receive you."



I had washed away the stains of travel, and had put on my best frock, and Dance was pleased to say that I looked very nice, "though, perhaps, a trifle more old-fashioned than a girl of your age ought to look." Then she laid down a few rules for my guidance when in the presence of Lady Chillington, and led the way to the Green Saloon, I following with a timorous heart.

Dance flung open the folding-doors of the big room. "Miss Janet Hope to see your ladyship," she called out; and next moment the doors closed behind me, and I was left standing there alone.

"Come nearer—come nearer," said her ladyship's cracked voice, as with a long, lean hand she beckoned me to approach.

[Pg 32]

I advanced slowly up the room, stopped and curtsied. Lady Chillington pointed out a high footstool about three yards from her chair. I curtsied again, and sat down on it. During the interview that followed my quick eyes had ample opportunity for taking a mental inventory of Lady Chillington and her surroundings.

She had exchanged the black dress in which I first saw her for one of green velvet, trimmed with ermine. This dress was made with short sleeves and low body, so as to leave exposed her ladyship's arms, long, lean and skinny, and her scraggy neck. Her nose was hooked and her chin pointed. Between the two shone a row of large white, even teeth, which long afterwards I knew to be artificial. Equally artificial was the mass of short black, frizzly curls that crowned her head, which was unburdened with cap or covering of any kind. Her eyebrows were dyed to match her hair. Her cheeks, even through the powder with which they were thickly smeared, showed two spots of brilliant red, which no one less ignorant than I would have accepted without question as the last genuine remains of the bloom of youth. But at that first interview I accepted everything *au pied de la lettre*, without doubt or question of any kind.

Her ladyship wore long earrings of filigree gold. Round her neck was a massive gold chain. On her fingers sparkled several rings of price—diamonds, rubies and opals. In figure her ladyship was tall, and upright as a dart. She was, however, slightly lame of one foot, which necessitated the use of a cane when walking. Lady Chillington's cane was ivory-headed, and had a gold plate let into it, on which was engraved her crest and initials. She was seated in an elaborately-carved high-backed chair, near a table on which were the remains of a dessert for one person.

The Green Saloon was a large gloomy room; at least it looked gloomy as I saw it for the first time, lighted up by four wax candles where twenty were needed. These four candles being placed close by where Lady Chillington was sitting, left the other end of the saloon in comparative darkness. The furniture was heavy, formal and old-fashioned. Gloomy portraits of dead and gone Chillingtons lined the green walls, and this might be the reason why there always seemed to me a slight graveyard flavour—scarcely perceptible, but none the less surely there—about this room which caused me to shudder involuntarily whenever I crossed its threshold.

Lady Chillington's black eyes—large, cold and steady as Juno's own—had been bent upon me all this time, measuring me from head to foot with what I felt to be a slightly contemptuous scrutiny.

"What is your name, and how old are you?" she asked, with startling abruptness, after a minute or two of silence.

[Pg 33]

"Janet Hope, and twelve years," I answered, laconically. A feeling of defiance, of dislike to this bedizened old woman began to gnaw my child's heart. Young as I was, I had learned, with what bitterness I alone could have told, the art of wrapping myself round with a husk of cold reserve, which no one uninitiated in the ways of children could penetrate, unless I were inclined to let them. Sulkiness was the generic name for this quality at school, but I dignified it with a different term.

"How many years were you at Park Hill Seminary? and where did you live before you went there?" asked Lady Chillington.

"I have lived at Park Hill ever since I can remember anything. I don't know where I lived before that time."

"Are your parents alive or dead? If the latter, what do you remember of them?"

A lump came into my throat, and tears into my eyes. For a moment or two I could not answer.

"I don't know anything about my parents," I said. "I never remember seeing them. I don't know whether they are alive or dead."

"Do you know why you were consigned by the Park Hill people to this particular house—to Deepley Walls—to me, in fact?"

Her voice was raised almost to a shriek as she said these last words, and she pointed to herself with one claw-like finger.

"No, ma'am, I don't know why I was sent here. I was told to come, and I came."

"But you have no claim on me—none whatever," she continued, fiercely. "Bear that in mind: remember it always. Whatever I may choose to do for you will be done of my own free will, and not through compulsion of any kind. No claim whatever; remember that. None whatever."

She was silent for some time after this, and sat with her cold, steady eyes fixed intently on the fire. For my part, I sat as still as a mouse, afraid to stir, longing for my dismissal, and dreading to be questioned further.

Lady Chillington roused herself at length with a deep sigh, and a few words muttered under her breath.

"Here is a bunch of grapes for you, child," she said. "When you have eaten them it will be time for you to retire."

I advanced timidly and took the grapes, with a curtsy and a "Thank you, ma'am," and then went back to my seat.

As I sat eating my grapes my eyes went up to an oval mirror over the fire-place, in which were reflected the figures of Lady Chillington and myself. My momentary glance into its depths showed me how keenly, but furtively, her ladyship was watching me. But what interest could a great lady have in watching poor insignificant me? I ventured another glance into the mirror. Yes, she looked as if she were devouring me with her eyes. But hothouse grapes are nicer than mysteries, and how is it possible to give one's serious attention to two things at a time?

When I had finished the grapes, I put my plate back on the table.

"Ring that bell," said Lady Chillington. I rang it accordingly, and presently Dance made her appearance.

"Miss Hope is ready to retire," said her ladyship.

[Pg 34] I arose, and going a step or two nearer to her, I made her my most elaborate curtsy, and said, "I wish your ladyship a very good-night."

The ghost of a smile flickered across her face. "I am pleased to find, child, that you are not entirely destitute of manners," she said, and with a stately wave of the arm I was dismissed.

It was like an escape from slavery to hear the door of the Green Saloon close behind me, and to get into the great corridors and passages outside. I could have capered for very glee; only Mrs. Dance was a staid sort of person, and might not have liked it.

"Her ladyship is pleased with you, I am sure," she remarked, as we went along.

"That is more than I am with her," I answered, pertly. Mrs. Dance looked shocked.

"You must not talk in that way, dear, on any account," she said. "You must try to like Lady Chillington; it is to your interest to do so. But even should you never learn to like her, you must not let anyone know it."

"I'm sure that I shall like the lady that you call Sister Agnes," I said. "When shall I see her? To-morrow?"

Mrs. Dance looked at me sharply for a moment. "You think you shall like Sister Agnes, eh? When you come to know her, you will more than like her; you will love her. But perhaps Lady Chillington will not allow you to see her."

"But why not?" I said abruptly, and I could feel my eyes flash with anger.

"The why not I am not at liberty to explain," said Mrs. Dance, drily. "And let me tell you, Miss Janet Hope, there are many things under this roof of which no explanation will be given you, and if you are a wise, good girl, you will not ask too many questions. I tell you this simply for your own good. Lady Chillington cannot abear people that are always prying and asking 'What does this mean?' and 'What does the other mean?' A still tongue is the sign of a wise head."

Ten minutes later I had said my prayers and was in bed. "Don't go without kissing me," I said to Dance as she took up the candle.

The old lady came back and kissed me tenderly. "Heaven bless you and keep you, my dear!" she said, with solemn dignity. "There are those in the world who love you very dearly, and some day perhaps you will know all. I dare not say more. Good-night, and God bless you."

Mrs. Dance's words reached a chord in my heart that vibrated to the slightest touch. I cried myself silently to sleep.

[Pg 35]

How long I had been asleep I had no means of knowing, but I was awakened some time in the night by a rain of kisses, soft, warm, and light, on lips, cheeks and forehead. The room was pitch dark, and for a second or two I thought I was still at Park Hill, and that Miss Chinfeather had come back from heaven to tell me how much she loved me. But this thought passed away like the slide of a magic lantern, and I knew that I was at Deepley Walls. The moment I knew this I put out my arms with the intention of clasping my unknown visitor round the neck. But I was not quick enough. The kisses ceased, my hands met each other in the empty air, and I heard a faint noise of garments trailing across the floor. I started up in bed, and called out, in a frightened voice, "Who's there?"

"Hush! not a word!" whispered a voice out of the darkness. Then I heard the door of my room softly closed, and I felt that I was alone.

I was left as wide awake as ever I had been in my life. My child's heart was filled with an unspeakable yearning, and yet the darkness and the mystery frightened me. It could not be Miss Chinfeather who had visited me, I argued with myself. The lips that had touched mine were not those of a corpse, but were instinct with life and love. Who, then, could my mysterious visitor be? Not Lady Chillington, surely! I half started up in bed at the thought. Just as I did so, without warning of any kind, a solemn muffled tramp became audible in the room immediately over mine. A tramp, slow, heavy, measured, from one end of the room to the other, and then back again. I slipped back into the bedclothes and buried myself up to the ears. I could hear the beating of my heart, oppressed now with a new terror before which the lesser one faded utterly. The very monotony of that dull measured walk was enough to unstring the nerves of a child, coming as it did in the middle of the night. I tried to escape from it by going still deeper under the clothes, but I could hear it even then. Since I could not escape it altogether, I had better listen to it with all my ears, for it was quite possible that it might come down stairs, and so into my room. Had such a thing happened, I think I should have died from sheer terror. Happily for me nothing of the kind took place; and, still listening, I fell asleep at last from utter weariness, and knew nothing more till I was awoke by a stray sunbeam smiting me across the eyes.

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## CHAPTER III.

### A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

A golden sunbeam was shining through a crevice in the blinds; the birds were twittering in the ivy outside; oxen were lowing to each other across the park. Morning, with all her music, was abroad.

[Pg 36]

I started up in bed and rubbed my eyes. Within the house everything was as mute as the grave. That horrible tramping overhead had ceased—had ceased, doubtless, with the return of daylight, which would otherwise have shifted it from the region of the weird to that of the commonplace. I smiled to myself as I thought of my terrors of the past night, and felt brave enough just then to have faced a thousand ghosts. In another minute I was out of bed, and had drawn up my blind, and flung open my window, and was drinking in the sweet peaceful scene that stretched away before me in long level lines to the edge of a far-off horizon.

My window was high up and looked out at the front of the hall. Immediately below me was a semicircular lawn, shut in from the park by an invisible fence, close shaven, and clumped with baskets of flowers glowing just now with all the brilliance of late autumn. The main entrance—a flight of shallow steps, and an Ionic portico, as I afterwards found—was at one end of the building, and was reached by a long straight carriage drive, the route of which could be traced across the park by the thicker growth of trees with which it was fringed. This park stretched to right and left for a mile either way. In front, it was bounded, a short half-mile away, by the high road, beyond which were level wide-stretching meadows, through which the river Adair washed slow and clear.

But chief of all this morning I wanted to be down among the flowers. I made haste to wash and dress, taking an occasional peep through the window as I did so, and trying to entice the birds from their hiding-places in the ivy. Then I opened my bed-room door, and then, in view of the great landing outside, I paused. Several doors, all except mine now closed, gave admittance from this landing to different rooms. Both landing and stairs were made of oak, black and polished with age. One broad flight of stairs, with heavy carved banisters, pointed the way below; a second and narrower flight led to the regions above. As a matter of course I chose the former, but not till after a minute's hesitation as to whether I should venture to leave my room at all before I should be called. But my desire to see the baskets of flowers prevailed over everything else. I closed my door gently and hurried down.

I found myself in the entrance-hall of Deepley Walls, into which I had been ushered on my arrival. There were the two curtained doorways through which Lady Chillington had come and gone. For the rest, it was a gloomy place enough, with its flagged floor, and its diamond-paned windows high up in the semicircular roof. A few rusty full-lengths graced the walls; the stairs were guarded by two effigies in armour; a marble bust of one of the Cæsars stood on a high pedestal in the middle of the floor; and that was all.

I was glad to get away from this dismal spot and to find myself in the passage which led to the housekeeper's room. I opened the door and looked in, but the room was vacant. Farther along the same passage I found the kitchen and other domestic offices. The kitchen clock was just on the point of six as I went in. One servant alone had come down. From her I inquired my way into the garden, and next minute I was on the lawn. The close-cropped grass was wet with the heavy dew; but my boots were thick and I heeded it not, for the flowers were there within my very grasp.

[Pg 37]

Oh, those flowers! can I ever forget them? I have seen none so beautiful since. There can be none so beautiful out of Paradise.

One spray of scarlet geranium was all that I ventured to pluck. But the odours and the colours were there for all comers, and were as much mine for the time being as if the flowers themselves had belonged to me. Suddenly I turned and glanced up at the many-windowed house with a sort of guilty consciousness that I might possibly be doing wrong. But the house was still asleep—closed shutters or down-drawn blind at every window. I saw before me a substantial-looking red-brick mansion, with a high slanting roof, of not undignified appearance now that it was mellowed by age, but with no pretensions to architectural beauty. The sole attempt at outside ornamentation consisted of a few flutings of white stone, reaching from the ground to the second floor, and terminating in oval shields of the same material, on which had originally been carved the initials of the builder and the date of erection; but the summer's sun and the winter's rain of many a long year had rubbed both letters and figures carefully out. Long afterwards I knew that Deepley Walls had been built in the reign of the Third William by a certain Squire Chillington of that date, "out of my own head," as he himself put it in a quaint document still preserved among the family archives; and rather a muddled head it must have been in matters architectural.

After this, I ventured round by the main entrance, with its gravelled carriage sweep, to the other side of the house, where I found a long flagged terrace bordered with large evergreens in tubs placed at frequent intervals. On to this terrace several French windows opened—the windows, as I found later in the day, of Lady Chillington's private rooms. To the left of this terrace stood a plantation of young trees, through which a winding path that opened by a wicket into the private grounds invited me to penetrate. Through the green gloom I advanced bravely, my heart beating with all the pleasure of one who was exploring some unknown land. I saw no living thing by the way, save two grey rabbits that scuttered across my path and vanished in the undergrowth on the

other side. Pretty frisky creatures! how I should like to have caught them, and fed them, and made pets of them as long as they lived!

Two or three hundred yards farther on the path ended with another wicket, now locked, which opened into the high road. About a mile away I could discern the roofs and chimneys of a little town. When I got back to the hall I found dear old Dance getting rather anxious at my long absence, but she brightened into smiles when I kissed her and told her where I had been.

"You must have slept well, or you would hardly look so rosy this morning," she said as we sat down to breakfast.

[Pg 38] "I should have slept very well if I had not been troubled by the ghosts."

"Ghosts! my dear Miss Janet? You do not mean to say—" and the old lady's cheek paled suddenly, and her cup rattled in her saucer as she held it.

"I mean to say that Deepley Walls is haunted by two ghosts, one of which came and kissed me last night when I was asleep; while the other one was walking nearly all night in the room over mine."

Dance's face brightened, but still wore a puzzled expression. "You must have dreamed that someone kissed you, dear," she said. "If you were asleep you could not know anything about it."

"But I was awakened by it, and I am positive that it was no dream." Then I told her what few particulars there were to tell.

"For the future we must lock your bed-room door," she said.

"Then I should be more frightened than ever. Besides, a real ghost would not be kept out by locking the door."

"Well, dear, tell me if you are disturbed in the same way again. But as for the tramping you heard in the room overhead, that is easily explained. It was no ghost that you heard walking, but Lady Chillington." Then, seeing my look of astonishment, she went on to explain. "You see, my dear Miss Janet, her ladyship is a very peculiar person, and does many things that to commonplace people like you and me may seem rather strange. One of these little peculiarities is her fondness for walking about the room over yours at night. Now, if she likes to do this, I know of no reason why she should not do it. It is a little whim that does no harm to anybody; and as the house and everything in it are her own, she may surely please herself in such a trifle."

"But what is there in the room that she should prefer it to any other in the house for walking in by night?"

"What—is—there—in the room?" said the old lady, staring at me across the table with a strange, frightened look in her eyes. "What a curious question! The room is a common room, of course, with nothing in it out of the ordinary way; only, as I said before, it happens to be Lady Chillington's whim to walk there. So, if you hear the noise again, you will know how to account for it, and will have too much good sense to feel in the least afraid."

I had a half consciousness that Dance was prevaricating with me in this matter, or hiding something from me; but I was obliged to accept her version as the correct one, especially as I saw that any further questioning would be of no avail.

I did not see Lady Chillington that day. She was reported to be unwell, and kept her own rooms.

[Pg 39] About noon a message came from Sister Agnes that she would like to see me in her room. When I entered she was standing by a square oak table, resting one hand on it while the other was pressed to her heart. Her face was very pale, but her dark eyes beamed on me with a veiled tenderness that I could not misinterpret.

"Good-morrow, Miss Hope," she said, offering her white slender hand for my acceptance. "I fear that you will find Deepley Walls even duller than Park Hill Seminary."

Her tone was cold and constrained. I looked up earnestly into her face. Her lips began to quiver painfully. "Child! child! you must not look at me in that way," she cried.

Instinct whispered something in my ear. "You are the lady who came and kissed me when I was asleep!" I exclaimed.

Her brow contracted for a moment as if she were in pain. A hectic spot came out suddenly on either cheek, and vanished almost as swiftly. "Yes, it was I who came to your room last night," she said. "You are not vexed with me for doing so?"

"On the contrary, I love you for it."

Her smile, the sweetest I ever saw, beamed out at this. Gently she stroked my hair. "You looked so forlorn and weary last night," she said, "that after I got to bed I could not help thinking about you. I was afraid you would not be able to sleep in a strange place, so I could not rest till I had visited you: but I never intended to awake you."

"I do not mind how often I am awakened in the same way," I said. "No one has ever seemed to love me but you, and I cannot help loving you back."

"My poor child!" was all she said. We had sat down by this time close to the window, and Sister Agnes was holding one of my hands in hers and caressing it gently as she gazed dreamily across the park. My eyes, child-like, wandered from her to the room and then back again. The picture still lives in my memory as fresh as though it had been limned but yesterday.

A square whitewashed room, fitted up with furniture of unpolished oak. On the walls a few proof engravings of subjects taken from Sacred History. A small bookcase in one corner, and a *prie-dieu* in another. The floor uncarpeted, but polished after the French fashion. A writing-table; a large workbox; a heap of clothing for the poor; and lastly, a stand for flowers.

The features of Sister Agnes were as delicate and clearly cut as those of some antique statue, but their habitual expression was one of intense melancholy. Her voice was low and gracious: the voice of a refined and educated gentlewoman. Her hair was black, with here and there a faint silver streak; but the peculiar head-dress of white linen which she wore left very little of it visible. Disfiguring as this head-dress might have been to many people, in her case it served merely to enhance the marble whiteness and transparent purity of her complexion. Her eyebrows were black and well-defined; but as for the eyes themselves, I can only repeat what I said before—that their dark depths were full of tenderness and a sort of veiled enthusiasm difficult to describe in words. Her dress was black, soft and coarse, relieved by deep cuffs of white linen. Her solitary ornament, if ornament it could be called, was a rosary of black beads. Not without reason have I been thus particular in describing Sister Agnes and her surroundings, as they who read will discover for themselves by-and-by.

[Pg 40]

Sister Agnes woke up from her reverie with a sigh, and began talking to me about my schooldays and my mode of life at Park Hill Seminary. It was a pleasure to me to talk, because I felt it was a pleasure to her to listen to me. And she let me talk on and on for I can't tell how long, only putting in a question now and again, till she knew almost as much about Miss Chinfeather and Park Hill as I knew myself. But she never seemed to grow weary. We were sitting close together, and after a time I felt her arm steal gently round my waist, pressing me closer still; and so, with my head nestling against her shoulder, I talked on, heedless of the time. O happy afternoon!

It was broken by a summons for Sister Agnes from Lady Chillington. "To-morrow, if the weather hold fine, we will go to Charke Forest and gather blackberries," said Sister Agnes as she gave me a parting kiss.

That night I went early to bed, and never woke till daybreak.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### SCARSDALE WEIR.

I was up betimes next morning, long before Sister Agnes could possibly be ready to take me to the forest. So I took my sewing into the garden, and found a pleasant sunny nook, where I sat and worked till breakfast time. The meal was scarcely over when Sister Agnes sent for me. It made my heart leap with pleasure to see how her beautiful, melancholy face lighted up at my

approach. Why should she feel such an interest in one whom she had never seen till a few hours ago? The question was one I could not answer; I could only recognise the fact and be thankful.

The morning was delicious: sunny, without being oppressive; while in the shade there was a faint touch of austerity like the first breath of coming winter. A walk of two miles brought us to the skirts of the forest, and in five minutes after quitting the high road we might have been a hundred miles away from any habitation, so utterly lost and buried from the outer world did we seem to be. Already the forest paths were half hidden by fallen leaves, which rustled pleasantly under our feet. By-and-by we came to a pretty opening in the wood, where some charitable soul had erected a rude rustic seat that was more than half covered with the initials of idle wayfarers. Here Sister Agnes sat down to rest. She had brought a volume of poems with her, and while she read I wandered about, never going very far away, feasting on the purple blackberries, finding here and there a late-ripened cluster of nuts, trying to find out a nest or two among the thinned foliage, and enjoying myself in a quiet way much to my heart's content.

[Pg 41]

I don't think Sister Agnes read much that morning. Her gaze was oftener away from her book than on it. After a time she came and joined me in gathering nuts and blackberries. She seemed brighter and happier than I had hitherto seen her, entering into all my little projects with as much eagerness as though she were herself a child. How soon I had learned to love her! Why had I lived all those dreary years at Park Hill without knowing her? But I could never again feel quite so lonely—never quite such an outcast from that common household love which all the girls I had known seemed to accept as a matter of course. Even if I should unhappily be separated from Sister Agnes, I could not cease to love her; and although I had seen her for the first time barely forty-eight hours ago, my child's instinct told me that she possessed that steadfastness, sweet and strong, which allows no name that has once been written on its heart to be erased therefrom for ever.

My thoughts were running in some such groove, but they were all as tangled and confused as the luxuriant undergrowth around me. It must have been out of this confusion that the impulse arose which caused me to address a question to Sister Agnes that startled her as much as if a shell had exploded at her feet.

"Dear Sister Agnes," I said, "you seem to know my history, and all about me. Did you know my papa and mamma?"

She dropped the leaf that held her fruit, and turned on me a haggard, frightened face that made my own grow pale.

"What makes you think that I know your history?" she stammered out.

"You who are so intimate with Lady Chillington must know why I was brought to Deepley Walls: you must know something about me. If you know anything about my father and mother, oh! do please tell me; please do!"

"I am tired, Janet. Let us sit down," she said, wearily. So, hand in hand, we went back to the rustic seat and sat down.

She sat for a minute or two without speaking, gazing straight before her into some far-away forest vista, but seeing only with that inner eye which searches through the dusty chambers of heart and brain whenever some record of the past has to be brought forth to answer the questions of to-day.

"I do know your history, dear child," she said at length, "and both your parents were friends of mine."

"Were! Then neither of them is alive?"

"Alas! no. They have been dead many years. Your father was drowned in one of the Italian lakes. Your mother died a year afterwards."

[Pg 42]

All the sweet vague hopes that I had cherished in secret, ever since I could remember anything, of some day finding at least one of my parents alive, died out utterly as Sister Agnes said these words. My heart seemed to faint within me. I flung myself into her arms, and burst into tears.

Very tenderly and lovingly, with sweet caresses and words of comfort, did Sister Agnes strive to win me back to cheerfulness. Her efforts were not unsuccessful, and after a time I grew calmer

and recovered my self-possession; and as soon as so much was accomplished we set out on our return to Deepley Walls.

As we rose to go, I said, "Since you have told me so much, Sister Agnes, will you not also tell me why I have been brought to Deepley Walls, and why Lady Chillington has anything to do with me?"

"That is a question, dear Janet, which I cannot answer," she said. "I am bound to Lady Chillington by a solemn promise not to reveal to you the nature of the secret bond which has brought you under her roof. That she has your welfare at heart you may well believe, and that it is to your interest to please her in every possible way is equally certain. More than this I dare not say, except there are certain pages of your history, some of them of a very painful character, which it would not be advisable that you should read till you shall be many years older than you are now. Meanwhile rest assured that in Lady Chillington, however eccentric she may seem to be, you have a firm and powerful friend; while in me, who have neither influence nor power, you have one who simply loves you, and prays night and day for your welfare."

"And you will never cease to love me, will you?" I said, just as we stepped out of the forest into the high road.

She took both my hands in hers and looked me straight in the face. "Never, while I live, Janet Hope, can I cease to love you," she said. Then we kissed and went on our way towards Deepley Walls.

"You are to dine with her ladyship to-day, Miss Janet," said Dance the same afternoon. "We must look out your best bib and tucker."

Dance seemed to think that a mighty honour was about to be conferred upon me, but for my own part I would have given much to forego the distinction. However, there was no help for it, so I submitted quietly to having my hair dressed and to being inducted into my best frock. I was dreadfully abashed when the footman threw open the dining-room door and announced in a loud voice, "Miss Janet Hope."

Dinner had just been served, and her ladyship was waiting. I advanced up the room and made my curtsy. Lady Chillington looked at me grimly, without relaxing a muscle, and then extended a lean forefinger, which I pressed respectfully. The butler indicated a chair, and I sat down. Next moment Sister Agnes glided in through a side door, and took her place at the table, but considerably apart from Lady Chillington and me. I felt infinitely relieved by her presence.

[Pg 43]

Her ladyship looked as elaborately youthful, with her pink cheeks, her black wig, and her large white teeth, as on the evening of my arrival at Deepley Walls. But her hands shook a little, making the diamonds on her fingers scintillate in the candlelight as she carried her food to her mouth, and this was a sign of age which not all the art in the world could obviate. The table was laid out with a quantity of old-fashioned plate; indeed, the plate was out of all proportion to the dinner, which consisted of nothing more elaborate than some mutton broth, a roast pullet and a custard. But there was a good deal of show, and we were waited on assiduously by a respectable but fatuous-looking butler. There was no wine brought out, but some old ale was poured into her ladyship's glass from a silver flagon. Sister Agnes had a small cover laid apart from ours. Her dinner consisted of herbs, fruit, bread and water. It pained me to see that the look of intense melancholy which had lightened so wonderfully during our forest walk had again overshadowed her face like a veil. She gave me one long, earnest look as she took her seat at the table, but after that she seemed scarcely to be aware of my presence.

We had sat in grim silence for full five minutes, when Lady Chillington spoke.

"Can you speak French, child?" she said, turning abruptly to me.

"I can read it a little, but I cannot speak it," I replied.

"Nor understand what is said when it is spoken in your presence?"

"No, ma'am."

"So much the better," she answered with a grating laugh. "Children have long ears, and there is no freedom of conversation when they are present." With that she addressed some remarks in French to Sister Agnes, who replied to her in the same language. I knew nothing about my ears being long, but her ladyship's words had made them tingle as if they had been boxed. For one



thing I was thankful—that no further remarks were addressed to me during dinner. The conversation in French became animated, and I had leisure to think of other things.

Dinner was quickly over, and at a signal from her ladyship, the folding doors were thrown open, and we defiled into the Green Saloon, I bringing up the rear meekly. On the table were fruit and flowers, and one small bottle of some light wine. The butler filled her ladyship's glass, and then withdrew.

[Pg 44]

"You can take a pear, little girl," said Lady Chillington. Accordingly I took a pear, but when I had got it I was too timid to eat it, and could do nothing but hold it between my hot palms. Had I been at Park Hill Seminary, I should soon have made my teeth meet in the fruit; but I was not certain as to the proper mode of eating pears in society.

Lady Chillington placed her glass in her eye and examined me critically.

"Haie! haie!" she said. "That good Chinfeather has not quite eradicated our gaucherie, it seems. We are deficient in ease and aplomb. What is the name of that Frenchwoman, Agnes, who 'finished' Lady Kinbuck's girls?"

"You mean Madame Delclos."

"The same. Look out her address to-morrow, and remind me that you write to her. If mademoiselle here remain in England, she will grow up weedy, and will never learn to carry her shoulders properly. Besides, the child has scarcely two words to say for herself. A little Parisian training may prove beneficial. At her age a French girl of family would be a little duchess in bearing and manners, even though she had never been outside the walls of her pension. How is such an anomaly to be accounted for? It is possible that the atmosphere may have something to do with it."

Here was fresh food for wonder, and for such serious thought as my age admitted of. I was to be sent to a school in France! I could not make up my mind whether to be sorry or glad. In truth, I was neither wholly the one nor the other; the tangled web of my feelings was something altogether beyond my skill to unravel.

Lady Chillington sipped her wine absently awhile; Sister Agnes was busy with some fine needlework; and I was striving to elaborate a giant and his attendant dwarf out of the glowing embers and cavernous recesses of the wood fire, while there was yet an underlying vein of thought at work in my mind which busied itself desultorily with trying to piece together all that I had ever heard or read of life in a French school.

"You can run away now, little girl. You are *de trop*," said her ladyship, turning on me in her abrupt fashion. "And you, Agnes, may as well read to me a couple of chapters out of the '*Girondins*.' What a wonderful man was that Robespierre! What a giant! Had he but lived, how different the history of Europe would have been from what we know it to-day."

I could almost have kissed her ladyship of my own accord, so pleased was I to get away. I made my curtsy to her, and also to Sister Agnes, whose only reply was a sweet, sad smile, and managed to preserve my dignity till I was out of the room. But when the door was safely closed behind me, I ran, I flew along the passages till I reached the housekeeper's room. Dance was not there, neither had candles yet been lighted. The bright moonlight pouring in through the window gave me a new idea.

[Pg 45]

I had not yet been down to look at the river! What time could be better than the present one for such a purpose? I had heard some of the elder girls at Park Hill talk of the delights of boating by moonlight. Boating in the present case was out of the question, but there was the river itself to be seen. Taking my hat and scarf, I let myself out by a side door, and then sped away across the park like a hunted fawn, not forgetting to take an occasional bite at her ladyship's pear. To-night, for a wonder, my mind seemed purged of all those strange fears and stranger fancies engendered in it, some people would say, by superstition, while others would hold that they were merely the effects of a delicate nervous organisation and over-excitability re-acting one upon the other. Be that as it may, for this night they had left me, and I skipped on my way as fearlessly as though I were walking at mid-day, and with a glorious sense of freedom working within me, such, only in a more intense degree, as I had often felt on our rare holidays at school.

There was a right of public footpath across one corner of the park. Tracking this narrow white ribbon through the greensward, I came at length to a stile which admitted me into the high road.

Exactly opposite was a second stile, opening on a second footpath, which I felt sure could lead to nowhere but the river. Nor was I mistaken. In another five minutes I was on the banks of the Adair.

To my child's eye, the scene was one of exquisite beauty. To-day, I should probably call it flat and wanting in variety. The equable full-flowing river was lighted up by a full and unclouded moon. The undergrowth that fringed its banks was silver-foliaged; silver-white rose the mists in the meadows. Silence everywhere, save for the low liquid murmur of the river itself, which seemed burdened with some love secret, centuries old, which it was vainly striving to tell in articulate words.

The burden of the beauty lay upon me and saddened me. I wandered slowly along the bank, watching the play of moonlight on the river. Suddenly I saw a tiny boat that was moored to an overhanging willow, and floated out the length of its chain towards the middle of the stream. I looked around. Not a creature of any kind was visible. Then I thought to myself: "How pleasant it would be to sit out there in the boat for a little while. And surely no one could be angry with me for taking such a liberty—not even the owner of the boat, if he were to find me there."

No sooner said than done. I went down to the edge of the river and drew the boat inshore by the chain that held it. Then I stepped gingerly in, half-frightened at my own temerity, and sat down. The boat glided slowly out again to the length of its chain and then became motionless. But it was motionless only for a moment or two. A splash in the water drew my attention to the chain. It had been insecurely fastened to a branch of the willow; my weight in the boat had caused it to become detached and fall into the water, and with horrified eyes I saw that I had now no means of getting back to the shore. Next moment the strength of the current carried the boat out into mid-stream, and I began to float slowly down the river.

[Pg 46]

I sat like one paralysed, unable either to stir or speak. The willows seemed to bow their heads in mocking farewell as I glided past them. I heard the faint baying of a dog on some distant farm, and it sounded like a death-note in my frightened ears. Suddenly the spell that had held me was loosened, and I started to my feet. The boat heeled over, and but for a sudden instinctive movement backward I should have gone headlong into the river, and have ended my troubles there and then. The boat righted itself, veered half-round and then went steadily on its way down the stream. I sank on my knees and buried my face in my hands, and began to cry. When I had cried a little while it came into my mind that I would say my prayers. So I said them, with clasped hands and wet eyes; and the words seemed to come from me and affect me in a way that I had never experienced before. As I write these lines I have a vivid recollection of noticing how blurred and large the moon looked through my tears.

My heart was now quieted a little; I was no longer so utterly overmastered by my fears. I was recalled to a more vivid sense of earth and its realities by the low, melancholy striking of some village clock. I gazed eagerly along both banks of the river; but although the moon shone so brightly, neither house nor church nor any sign of human habitation was visible. When the clock had told its last syllable, the silence seemed even more profound than before. I might have been floating on a river that wound through a country never trodden by the foot of man, so entirely alone, so utterly removed from all human aid, did I feel myself to be.

I drew the skirt of my frock over my shoulders, for the night air was beginning to chill me, and contrived to regain the seat I had taken on first entering the boat. Whither would the river carry me, was the question I now put to myself. To the sea, doubtless. Had I not been taught at school that sooner or later all rivers emptied themselves into the ocean? The immensity of the thought appalled me. It seemed to chill the beating of my heart; I grew cold from head to foot. Still the boat held its course steadily, swept onward by the resistless current; still the willows nodded their fantastic farewells. Along the level meadows far and wide the white mist lay like a vast winding-sheet; now and then through the stillness I heard, or seemed to hear, a moan—a mournful wail, as of some spirit just released from earthly bonds, and forced to leave its dear ones behind. The moonlight looked cruel, and the water very, very cold. Someone had told me that death by drowning was swift and painless. Those stars up there were millions of miles away; how long would it take my soul, I wondered, to travel that distance—to reach those glowing orbs—to leave them behind? How glorious such a journey, beyond all power of thought, to track one's way among the worlds that flash through space! In the world I should leave there would be one person only who would mourn for me—Sister Agnes, who would—But what noise was that?

[Pg 47]

A noise, low and faint at first, just taking the edge of silence with a musical murmur that seemed to die out for an instant now and again, then coming again stronger than before, and so growing by fine degrees louder and more confirmed, and resolving itself at last into a sound which could not be mistaken for that of anything but falling water. The sound was clearly in front of me; I was being swept resistlessly towards it. A curve of the river and a swelling of the banks hid everything from me. The sound was momentarily growing louder, and had distinctly resolved itself into the roar and rush of some great body of water. I shuddered and grasped the sides of the boat with both hands.

Suddenly the curve was rounded, and there, almost in front of me, was a mass of buildings, and there, too, spanning the river, was what looked to me like a trellis-work bridge, and on the bridge was a human figure. The roar and noise of the cataract were deafening, but louder than all was my piercing cry for help. He who stood on the bridge heard it. I saw him fling up his hands as if in sudden horror, and that was the last thing I did see. I sank down with closed eyes in the bottom of the boat, and my heart went up in a silent cry to Heaven. Next moment I was swept into Scarsdale Weir. The boat seemed to glide from under me; my head struck something hard; the water overwhelmed me, seized on me, dashed me here and there in its merciless arms; a noise as of a thousand cataracts filled my ears for a moment; and then I recollect nothing more.

*(To be continued.)*



## SONNET.

Wouldst thou be happy, friend, forget, forget.  
 A curse—no blessing—Memory, thou art;  
 The very torment of a human heart.  
 Ah! yes, I thought, I still am young; and let  
 My heart but beat, I can be happy yet.  
 Upon a friendly face clear shone the light;  
 Without, low moaned the mountain's winds, and night  
 Closed our warm home—sad words of fond regret.  
 A voice which in my ear no more shall ring;  
 A look estranged in hate like lightning came,  
 My very soul within me died as flame  
 By strong wind spent. It was not grief, for dead  
 Was grief; nor love, for love in wrath had fled;  
 It was of both the last undying sting!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

[Pg 48]

## THE BRETONS AT HOME.

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

The long grey walls, the fortifications, the church towers and steeples, the clustering roofs of St. Malo came into view.

It is a charming sight after the long and often unpleasant night journey which separates St. Malo from Southampton. The boats leave much to be desired, and the sea very often, like Shakespeare's heroine, needs taming, but, unlike that heroine, will not be tamed, charm we never so wisely. As a rule, however, one is not in a mood to charm.

The Company are not accommodating. There are private cabins on board holding four, badly placed, uncomfortable, possessing the single advantage of privacy; but these managers would



A BRETON MAIDEN.

have them empty rather than allow two passengers to occupy one of them under the full fare of four. This is unamiable and exacting. In crowded times it may be all very right, but on ordinary occasions they would do well to follow the example of the more generous Norwegians, who place their state cabins holding four at the disposal of anyone paying the fare of three passengers.

After the long night-passage it is delightful to steam into the harbour of St. Malo. If the sea has been rough and unkindly, you at once pass from Purgatory to Paradise, with a relief those will understand who have experienced it. The scene is very charming. The coast, broken and undulating, is rich and fertile; very often hazy and dreamy; the landscape is veiled by a purple mist which reminds one very much of the Irish lakes and mountains.

Across the water lies Dinard, with its lovely views, its hilly thoroughfares, its English colony and its French patois. But the boat, turning the point, steams up the harbour and Dinard falls away. St. Malo lies ahead on the left, enclosed in its ancient grey walls, which encircle it like a belt; and on the right, farther away, rise the towers and steeples of St. Servan, also of

ancient celebrity.

On the particular morning of which I write, as we steamed up the harbour towards our moorings, the quays looked gay and lively, the town very picturesque. It is so in truth, though some of its picturesqueness is the result of antiquity, dirt and dilapidation. But the fresh green trees lining the quay looked bright and youthful; a contrast with the ancient grey walls that formed their background. Vessels were loading and unloading, people hurried to and fro; many had evidently come down to see the boat in, and not a few were unmistakably English.

Here and there in the grey walls were the grand imposing gateways of the town. Above the walls rose the quaint houses, roof above roof, gable beside gable, tier beyond tier.

At the end of the quay the old Castle brought the scene to a fine conclusion. It was built by Anne of Brittany, and dates from the sixteenth century. One of its towers bears the singular motto or inscription: *Qui qu'en grogne, ainsi sera, c'est mon plaisir*: which seems to suggest that the illustrious lady owned a determined will and purpose. It is now turned into barracks; a lordly residence for the simple paysans who swelled the ranks of the Breton regiment occupying it at the time of which I write. They are said to be the best fighting soldiers in France, these Bretons. Of a low order of development, physically and mentally, they yet have a stubborn will which carries them through impossible hardships. They may be conquered, but they never yield.

The walk round the town upon the walls is extremely interesting. Gradually making way, the scene changes like the shifting slides of a panorama. Now the harbour lies before you, with its busy quays, its docks, its small crowd of shipping; very crowded we have never seen it. The old Castle rises majestically, looking all its three centuries of age and royal dignity; its four towers unspoilt by restoration.

[Pg 50]

Onward still and the walls rise sheer out of the rocks and the water. At certain tides, the sea dashes against them and breaks back upon itself in froth and foam and angry boom. Sight and sound are a wonderful nerve tonic. Countless rocks rise like small islands in every direction, stretching far out to sea. On a calm day it is all lovely beyond the power of words. The sky is blue and brilliant with sunshine. The sea receives the dazzling rays and returns them in a myriad flashes. The water seems to have as many tints as the rainbow, and they are as changing and beautiful and intangible. A distant vessel, passing slowly with all her sails set, almost becalmed, suggests a dreamy and delicious existence that has not its rival. The coast of Normandy stretches far out of sight. In the distance are the Channel Islands, visible possibly on a clear day and with a strong glass. I know not how that may be.

Turn your gaze, and you have St. Malo lying within its grey walls. The sea on the right is all freedom and broad expanse; the town on the left is cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd. Extremes meet here, as they often do elsewhere.

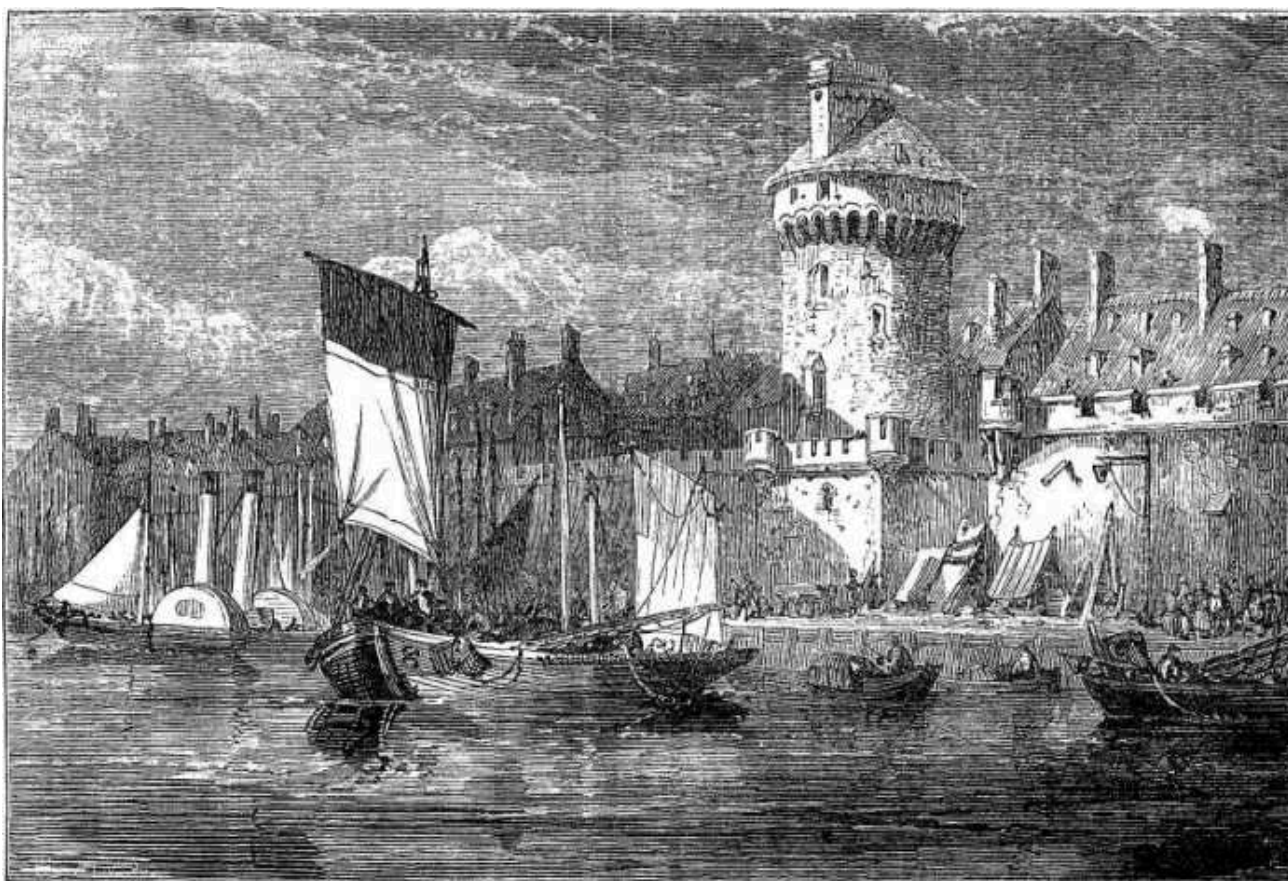
It is a succession of slanting roofs, roof above roof, street beyond street. Many of the houses are very old and form wonderful groups, full of quaint gables and dormer windows, whilst the high roofs slant upwards and fall away in picturesque outlines. An artist might work here for years and still find fresh material to his hand. The streets are narrow, steep and tortuous; the houses, crowding one upon another, are many stories high; not a few seem ready to fall with age and decay. Only have patience, and all yields to time.

On one of the islets is the tomb of Chateaubriand, who was born in St. Malo and lived here many years. It was one of his last wishes to be buried where the sea, for ever playing and plashing around him, would chant him an everlasting requiem. Many will sympathise with the feeling. No scene could be more in accordance with the solemnity of death, the long waiting for the "eternal term;" more in unison with the pure spirit that could write such a prose-poem as *Atala*.

Nothing could have been lovelier than the day of our arrival at St. Malo; the special day of which I write; for St. Malo has seen our coming and going many times and in all weathers.

The crossing had been calm as a lake. Even H.C., who would sooner brave the tortures of a Spanish Inquisition than the ocean in its angry moods, and who has occasionally landed after a rough passage in an expiring condition: even H.C. was impatient to land and break his fast at the liberal table of the Hôtel de France—very liberal in comparison with the Hôtel Franklin. We had once dined at the table d'hôte of the Franklin, and found it a veritable Barmecide's feast, from which we got up far more hungry than we had sat down; a display so mean that we soon ceased to wonder that only two others graced the board with ourselves, and they, though Frenchmen, strangers to the place. The Hôtel de France was very different from this; if it left something to be desired in the way of refinement, it erred on the side of abundance.

Therefore, on landing this morning, we gave our lighter baggage in charge of the porter of the hotel, who knew us well, and according to his wont, gave us a friendly greeting. "Monsieur visite encore St. Malo," said he, "et nous apporte le beau temps. Soyez le bienvenu!" This was not in the least familiar—from a Frenchman.



ST. MALO.

We went on to the custom-house, and as we had nothing to declare the inspection was soon over. H.C. had left all his tea and cigars behind him at the Waterloo Station, in a small hand-bag which he had put down for a moment to record a sudden fine phrenzy of poetical inspiration. Besides tea and cigars, the bag contained a copy of his beloved "Love Lyrics," without which he never travels, and a bunch of lilies of the valley, given him at the moment of leaving home by Lady Maria; an amiable but æsthetical aunt, who lives on crystallised violets, and spends her time in endeavouring to convert all the young men of her acquaintance who go in for muscular Christianity to her æsthetical way of thinking.

Leaving the custom-house, we crossed the quay, the old castle in front of us, and passing through the great gateway, immediately found ourselves at the Place Chateaubriand and the Hôtel de France. For the hotel forms part of the building in which Chateaubriand lived.

We had a very short time to devote to St. Malo. A long journey still lay before us, for we wished to reach Morlaix that night. There was the choice of taking the train direct, or of crossing by boat to Dinard, and so joining the train from St. Malo, which reached Dinan after a long round. The latter seemed preferable, since it promised more variety, though shortening our stay at the old town. But, as Madame wisely remarked, it would give us sufficient time for luncheon, and an extra hour or so in St. Malo could not be very profitably spent.

So before long we were once more going down the quay, in company with the porter—whose lamentations at our abrupt departure were no doubt sincere as well as politic—and a truck carrying our goods and chattels. As yet, they were modest in number and respectable in appearance. H.C. had not commenced his raid upon the old curiosity shops; had not yet encumbered himself with endless packages, from deal boxes containing old silver, to worm-eaten, fourteenth century carved-wood monks and madonnas, carefully wrapped in brown paper, and bound head, hand and foot (where these essentials were not missing) with cord. All this came in due time, but to-day we were still dignified.

We passed without the walls and went down the quay. All our surroundings were gay and brilliant. Everything was life and movement, the life and movement of a Continental town. The "gentle gales" wooed the trees, and the trees made music in the air. The sun shone as it can only shine out of England. The sky, wearing its purest blue, was flecked with white clouds pure as angels' wings. The boat we had recently left was discharging cargo, and her steam was quietly dying down.

Four old women—each must have been eighty, at least—were seated on a bench, knitting and smiling and looking as placid and contented as if the world and the sunshine had been made for them alone, and it was their duty to enjoy it to the utmost. It was impossible to sketch them: Time and Tide wait for no man, and even now the whistle of the Dinard boat might be heard shrieking its impatient warning round the corner: but we took the old women with an instantaneous camera, and with wonderful result. It was all over before they had time to pose and put on expressions; and when they found they had been photographed, they thought it the great event of their lives. The mere fact is sufficient with these good folk; possession of the likeness is a very secondary consideration. We left them crooning and laughing and casting admiring glances after H.C.—even at eighty years of age: possibly with a sigh to their lost youth.

[Pg 53]

Then we turned where the walls bend round and came in sight of the boat, steaming alongside the small stone landing-place and preparing for departure.

The passengers were not numerous. A few men and women; the latter with white caps and large baskets, who had evidently been over to St. Malo for household purposes, and were returning with the resigned air—it is very pathetic—that country women are so fond of wearing when they have been spending money and lessening the weight of the stocking which contains their treasured hoard.

We mounted the bridge, which, being first-class and an extra two or three sous, was deserted. These thrifty people would as soon think of burning down their cottages, as of wasting two sous in a useless luxury—all honour to them for the principle. But we, surveying human nature from an elevation, felt privileged to philosophise.

And if this human nature was interesting, what about the natural world around us? The boat loosed its moorings when time was up, and the grey walls of St. Malo receded; the innumerable roofs, towers and steeples grew dreamy and indistinct, dissolved and disappeared. The water was still blue and calm and flashing with sunlight. To the right lay the sleeping ocean; ahead of us, Dinard. Land rose on all sides; bays and creeks ran upwards, out of sight; headlands, rich in verdure, magnificently wooded; houses standing out, here lonely and solitary, there clustering almost into towns and villages; the mouth of the Rance, leading up to Dol and Dinan, which some have called the Rhine of France, and everyone must think a stream lovely and romantic.

Most beautiful of all seemed Dinard, which we rapidly approached. In twenty minutes we had passed into the little harbour beyond the pier. It was quite a bustling quay, with carriages for hire, and men with barrows touting noisily for custom, treading upon each other's heels in the race for existence; cafés and small hotels in the background.

Having plenty of time, we preferred to walk to the station, and consigned our baggage to the care of a deaf and dumb man, who disappeared with everything like magic, left us high and dry upon the quay to follow more leisurely, and to hope that we were not the victims of misplaced confidence. It looked very much like it.

A steep climb brought us to the heights of Dinard. Nothing could be more romantic. Here were no traces of antiquity; everything was aggressively modern; all beauty lay in scenery and situation. Humble cottages embowered in roses and wisteria; stately châteaux standing in large luxuriant gardens flaming with flowers, proudly secluded behind great iron gates. At every opening the sea, far down, lay stretched before us. Precipitous cliffs, rugged rocks where flowers and verdure grew in wild profusion, led sheer to the water's edge. Land everywhere rose in a dreamy atmosphere; St. Malo and St. Servan across the bay in the distance. It was a wealth of vegetation; trees in full foliage, masses of gorgeous flowers, that you had only to stretch out your hand and gather; the blue sky over all. A scene we sometimes realise in our dreams, rarely in our waking hours—as we saw it that day. On the far-off water below small white-winged boats looked as shadowy and dreamy as the far-off fleecy clouds above.

[Pg 54]

But we could not linger. We passed away from the town and the sea and found ourselves in the country—the station seemed to escape us like a will-o'-the-wisp. Presently we came to where two roads met—which of them led to the station? No sign-post, no cottage. We should probably have taken the wrong one—who does not on these occasions?—when happily a priest came in sight, with stately step and slow reading his breviary. Of him we asked the way, and he very politely set us right, in French that was refreshing after the patois around us—he was evidently a cultivated man; and offered to escort us.



As this was unnecessary, we thanked him and departed; and, arriving soon after at the station, found our deaf and dumb porter had not played us false. He was cunning enough to ask us three times his proper fare, and when we gave him half his demand seemed surprised at so much liberality. Conversation had to be carried on with paper and pencil, and by signs and tokens.

The train started after a great flourish of trumpets. We had a journey of many hours before us through North Brittany; for Brittany is a hundred years behind the rest of France, and however slow the trains may be in Fair Normandy they are still slower in the Breton Provinces. In due time we reached Dinan, when we joined the train that had come round from St. Malo.

Nothing in Brittany is more lovely and striking than the situation of Dinan. It overlooks the Rance, and from the train we looked down into an immense valley.

Everywhere the eye rested upon a profusion of wild uncultivated verdure. The granite cliffs were steep and wooded. Far in the depths "the sacred river ran." A few boats and barges sailing up and down, passed under the lovely viaduct; Brittany peasant girls were putting off from the shallow bank with small cargoes of provisions, evidently coming from some market. Under the rugged cliffs ran a long row of small, unpretending houses, level with the river; a paradise sheltered, one would think, from all the winds of heaven: yet even here, no doubt, the east wind finds a passage for its sharp tooth to warp the waters.



ST. MALO.

[Pg 56]

Further on one caught sight of an old church, evidently in the hands of the Philistines, under process of restoration, and an ancient monastery. The town crowned the cliffs, but very little could be seen beyond churches and steeples. We left it to a future time.

The train went through beautiful and undulating country until it reached Lamballe, picturesquely placed on the slope of a hill watered by a small stream, and crowned by the ancient and romantic ruins of the Castle which belonged to the Counts of Penthievre, and was dismantled by Cardinal Richelieu. A fine Gothic building, of which we easily traced the outlines. The present church of Notre Dame was formerly the chapel of the Castle.

Here we longed to explore, but it did not enter into our plans. So, also, the interesting town of Guingamp had to be passed over for the present.

For we were impatient to see Morlaix. Having heard much of its picturesqueness and antiquity, we hoped for great things. Yet our experiences began in an adventurous and not very agreeable manner.

Darkness had fallen when we reached the old town, after a long and tedious journey. Nothing is so tiring as a slow train, which crawls upon the road and lingers at every station. Of Morlaix we



could see nothing. We felt ourselves rumbling over a viaduct which seemed to reach the clouds, and far down we saw the lights of the town shining like stars; so that, with the stars above, we seemed to be placed between two firmaments; but that was all. Everything was wrapped in gloom and mystery. The train steamed into the station and its few lights only rendered darkness yet more visible. The passengers stumbled across the line in a small flock to the point of exit.

We had been strongly recommended to the Hôtel d'Europe, as strongly cautioned against any other; but we found that the omnibus was not at the station; nor any flies; nothing but the omnibus of a small hotel we had never heard of, in charge of a conductor, rough, uncivil, and less than half sober.

This conductor—who was also the driver—declined to take us to any other hotel than his own; would listen to no argument or reason. Had he been civil, we might have accepted the situation, but it seemed evident that an inn employing such a man was to be avoided. Unwilling to be beaten, we sought the station-master and his advice.

"Why is the omnibus of the Hôtel d'Europe not here?" we asked.

"No doubt the hotel is full. It is the moment of the great fair, you know."

But we did not know. We knew of Leipzig Fair by sad experience, of Bartholomew Fair by tradition, of the Fair of Novgorod by hearsay; but of Morlaix Fair we had never heard.

"What is the fair?" we asked, with a sinking heart.

"The great Horse Fair," replied the station-master. "Surely you have heard of it? No one ever visits Morlaix at the time of the fair unless he comes to buy or sell horses."

[Pg 57] Having come neither to buy nor sell horses, we felt crushed, and hoped for the deluge. I proposed to re-enter the train and let it take us whither it would—it mattered not. H.C. calmly suggested suicide.

"What is to be done?" he groaned. "The man refuses to take us to the Hôtel d'Europe. He is not sober; it is useless to argue with him."

"The fair again," laughed the official. "It is responsible for everything just now, and Bretons are not the most sober people at the best of times. Still, if you wish to go to the Hôtel d'Europe, the man must take you. There is no other conveyance and he is bound to do so. But I warn you that it will be full, or the omnibus would have been here."

Turning to the man, he threatened to report him, gave him his orders, and said he should inquire on the morrow how they had been carried out. We struggled into the omnibus, which was already fairly packed with men who looked very much like horsedealers, the surly driver slammed the door, and the station-master politely bowed us away.

The curtain dropped upon Act I.; Comedy or Tragedy as the event might prove.

It soon threatened to be Tragedy. The omnibus tore down a steep hill as if the horses as well as the driver had been indulging, swayed from side to side and seemed every moment about to overturn. Now the passengers were all thrown to the right of the vehicle, now to the left, and now they all collided in the centre. The enraged driver was having his revenge upon us, and we repented our boldness in trusting our lives in his hands. But the sturdy Bretons accepted the situation so calmly that we felt there must still be a chance of escape.

So it proved. In due time it drew up at the Hôtel d'Europe with the noise of an artillery waggon, and out came M. Hellard, the landlord. His appearance, with his white hair and benevolent face, was sufficient to recommend him, to begin with. We felt we had done wisely, and made known our wants.

"I am very sorry," he replied, "but, gentlemen, I am quite full. There is not a vacant room in the hotel from roof to basement."

"Put us anywhere," we persisted, for it would never do to be beaten at last: "the coal-cellar; a couple of cupboards; anything; but don't send us away."

The landlord looked puzzled. He had a tall, fine presence and a handsome face; not in the least like a Frenchman. "I assure you that I have neither hole nor corner nor cupboard at your

disposal," he declared. "I have sent away a dozen people in the last hour who arrived by the last train. Why did you not send me word you were coming?"

[Pg 58] "We are only two, not a dozen," we urged. "And we knew nothing of this terrible Fair, or we should not have come at all. But as we are here, here we must remain."

With that we left the omnibus and went into the hall, enjoying the landlord's perplexed attitude. But when did a case of this sort ever fail to yield to persuasion? The last resource has very seldom been reached, however much we may think it; and an emergency begets its own remedy. The remedy in this instance was the landlady. Out she came at the moment from her bureau, all gestures and possibilities; we felt saved.

"Mon cher," she exclaimed—not to H.C., but to her spouse—"don't send the gentlemen away at this time of night, and consign them to you know not what fate. Something can be managed. *Tenez!*" with uplifted hands and an inspiration, "ma bouchère! Mon cher, ma bouchère!" (Voice, exclamation, gesture, general inspiration, the whole essence would evaporate if translated.) "Ma bouchère has two charming rooms that she will be delighted to give me. It is only a cat's jump from here," she added, turning to us; "you will be perfectly comfortable, and can take your meals in the hotel. To-morrow I shall have rooms for you."

So the luggage was brought down; the landlord went through a passage at arms with the driver, who demanded double fare, and finally went off with nothing but a promise of punishment. We had triumphed, and thought our troubles were over: they had only begun.

Our remaining earthly desire was for strong tea, followed by repose. We had had very little sleep the previous night on board the boat, and the day had been long and tiring.

"The tea immediately; but you will have to wait a little for the rooms," said Madame. "My bouchère is at the theatre to-night; we must all have a little distraction sometimes; it will be over a short quarter of an hour, and then I will send to her."

Madame was evidently a woman of capacity. The short quarter of an hour might be profitably spent in consuming the tea: after that—a delicious prospect of rest, for which we longed as the Peri longed for Paradise.

"Meanwhile, perhaps messieurs will walk into the café of the hotel, awaiting their rooms," said the landlord.

"Where tea shall be served," concluded Madame, giving directions to a waiter who stood by, a perfect Image of Misery, his face tied up after the fashion of the French nation suffering from toothache and a *fluxion*.

"But the fire is out in the kitchen," objected Misery, in the spirit of Pierrot's friend.

"Then let it be re-lighted," commanded Madame. "At such times as these, the fire has not the right to be out."

[Pg 59] Monsieur marshalled us into the café, a large long room forming part of the hotel; by no means the best waiting-place after a long and tiring day. It was hot, blazing with gas, clouded with smoke—the usual French smoke, worse than the worst of English tobacco. The room was crowded, the noise pandemonium. Card playing occupied some tables, dominoes others. The company was very much what might be expected at a Horse Fair: loud, familiar, slightly inclined to be quarrelsome; no nerves. Our host joined a card table, evidently taking up his game where our arrival had interrupted it. He soon became absorbed and forgot our existence; our hope was in Madame.



MORLAIX.

[Pg 60]

We waited in patience; the short quarter of an hour developed into a long half-hour, when tea arrived: small cups, small tea pot, usual strainer, straw-coloured infusion; still, it just saved our reason. H.C. felt that he should never write another line of poetry; the tobacco fumes had taken an opium effect upon me, and I began to see visions and imagined ourselves in Dante's Inferno. We looked with mild reproach at the waiter. He quite understood; a guilty conscience needed no words; and explained that the chef had let out the fire. As the chef was at that moment in the café playing cards, as absorbed and excited as anyone, no wonder that he had forgotten his ordinary duties.

"And our rooms?" we asked. "Are they ready?"

"The theatre is not yet over," replied the waiter. "Madame is on the look-out. The play is extra long to-night in honour of the fair."

That miserable fair!

The tea revived us: it always does. "I feel less like expiring," murmured H.C., with a tremulous sigh. "But this place is like a furnace seven times heated, and the noise is pandemonium in revolt. What would Lady Maria think of this? Why need that frivolous butcher-woman have gone to the theatre to-night of all nights in the year? And why need all these people have stayed away from it? Why is everything upside down and cross and contrary? And why are we here at all?"

H.C. was evidently on the verge of brain fever.

We waited; there was nothing else for it. It was torture; but others have been tortured before now; and some have survived, and some have died of it. We felt that we should die of it. Half past eleven had come and gone; midnight was about to strike. Oh that we had gone on with that wretched omnibus, no matter what the end. Yes; it had come to that.

At last human nature could bear it no longer: we appealed to the landlord. He looked up from his game, flushed, startled and repentant.

"What! have they not taken you to the bouchère!" he exclaimed. "Why the theatre was over long ago, and no doubt everything is arranged. You shall be conducted at once."

Misery, looking himself more dead than alive (he informed us presently in an access of confidence that he had had four teeth taken out that day and felt none the better for it), was told off to act as guide, and shouldering such baggage as we needed for the night, stepped forth. We pitied him, he seemed so completely at the end of all things; and feeling, by comparison, that there was a deeper depth of suffering than our own, we revived. His name was not Misery, but André.

[Pg 61]

Monsieur accompanied us to the door and wished us Good-night. Madame had disappeared and was nowhere to be found; the lights were out in her bureau. It looked very much as if she, too, had gone to bed and forgotten us. "Cette chère dame is tired," said the sympathetic landlord. "We really have no rest day or night at the time of the fair. But you may depend upon it she has made it all right with her bouchère."

So we departed in faith. It was impossible to be angry with Monsieur, though we felt neglected. He was so unlike the ordinary run of landlords that one could only repose confidence in him and overlook small inattentions. He had a way of throwing himself into your interests, and making them his own for the time being. But I fear that his memory was very short.

We departed with thanksgiving, and followed our guide. I cannot say that we trod in his footsteps, for, too far gone to lift his feet bravely, he merely shuffled along the pavement. With one hand he supported the luggage on his shoulder; with the other he carried a candle, ostensibly to light our pathway, in reality only complicating matters and the darkness. As we turned round by the hotel, the clocks struck the witching hour. H.C. shivered and looked about for ghosts. It was really a very ghostly scene and atmosphere. In spite of the occasion of the fair, the town was in repose. The theatre was long over; the extra entertainment on account of the fair had been a mere invention of the imaginative waiter's; people had very properly gone home to bed, and lights were out. No noisy groups were abroad, making night hideous with untimely revelry.

We formed a strange procession. Our little guide slipped and shuffled, hardly able to put one foot before the other. He wore house-slippers of list or wool, and made scarcely any noise as he went along. Every now and then he groaned in the agonies of toothache; and each time H.C. shivered and looked back for the ghost. It was excusable, for the candle threw weird shadows around, which flitted about like phantoms playing at hide-and-seek. The night was so calm that the flame scarcely flickered.

In spite of the darkness, we could see how picturesque was the old town, and we longed for daylight. Against the dark background of sky the yet darker outlines of the houses stood out mysteriously. We turned into a narrow street where opposite neighbours might almost have shaken hands with each other from the upper windows. Wonderful gabled roofs succeeded each other in a long procession. There seemed not a vestige of anything modern in the whole thoroughfare. We were in a scene of the Middle Ages, back in those far-off days.

Here and there a light shining in a room revealed a large latticed window, running the whole width of the house. In spite of André's fatigue and burden, we could only stand and gaze. No human power could mesmerise us, but the window did so.

[Pg 62]

What could be more startlingly weird and picturesque than the bright reflection of these latticed panes, surrounded by this intense darkness, these mysterious outlines? Almost we expected to see a ghostly vision advance from the interior, and, opening the lattice with a skeleton hand, ask our pleasure at thus invading their solitude at the witching hour—for the vibration of the bells tolling midnight was still upon the air, travelling into space, perhaps announcing to other worlds that to us another day was dead, another day was born.

But no ghost appeared. A very human figure, however, did so. It looked down upon us for a moment, and mistaking our rapt gaze at the antiquities—of which it did not form a part—for mere vulgar curiosity, held up a reproving hand. Then, catching sight of H.C., it darted forward, looked breathlessly into the night, and seemed also mesmerised as by a revelation.

We quietly went our way, leaving the spell to work itself out. Our footsteps echoed in the silent night, with the running accompaniment of a double-shuffle from Misery. No other sound broke the stillness; we were absolutely alone with the ancient houses, the stars and the sky. It might have been a Mediæval City of the Dead, unpeopled since the days of its youth. Our candle burned on in the hand of André; our reflections danced and played about us: one hears of the Dance of Death—this was the Dance of Ghosts—a natural sequence; ghostly shadows flitted out of every doorway, down every turning.

At last we emerged on to an open space, partly filled by a modern building with a hideous roof, evidently the market place. Here we ascended to a higher level. Ancient outlines still surrounded us, but were interrupted by modern ones also. Square roofs and straight lines broke the continuity of the picturesque gabled roofs and latticed windows. Ichabod may be written upon the lintels of all that is ancient and disappearing, all that is modern and hideous. The spirit and beauty of the past are dead and buried.

"We are almost there," said André, with a sigh that would have been profound if he had had strength to make it so. "A few more yards and we arrive."

We too sighed with relief, though the midnight walk amidst these wonders of a bygone age had proved refreshing and awakening. But we sympathised with our guide, who was only kept up by necessity.

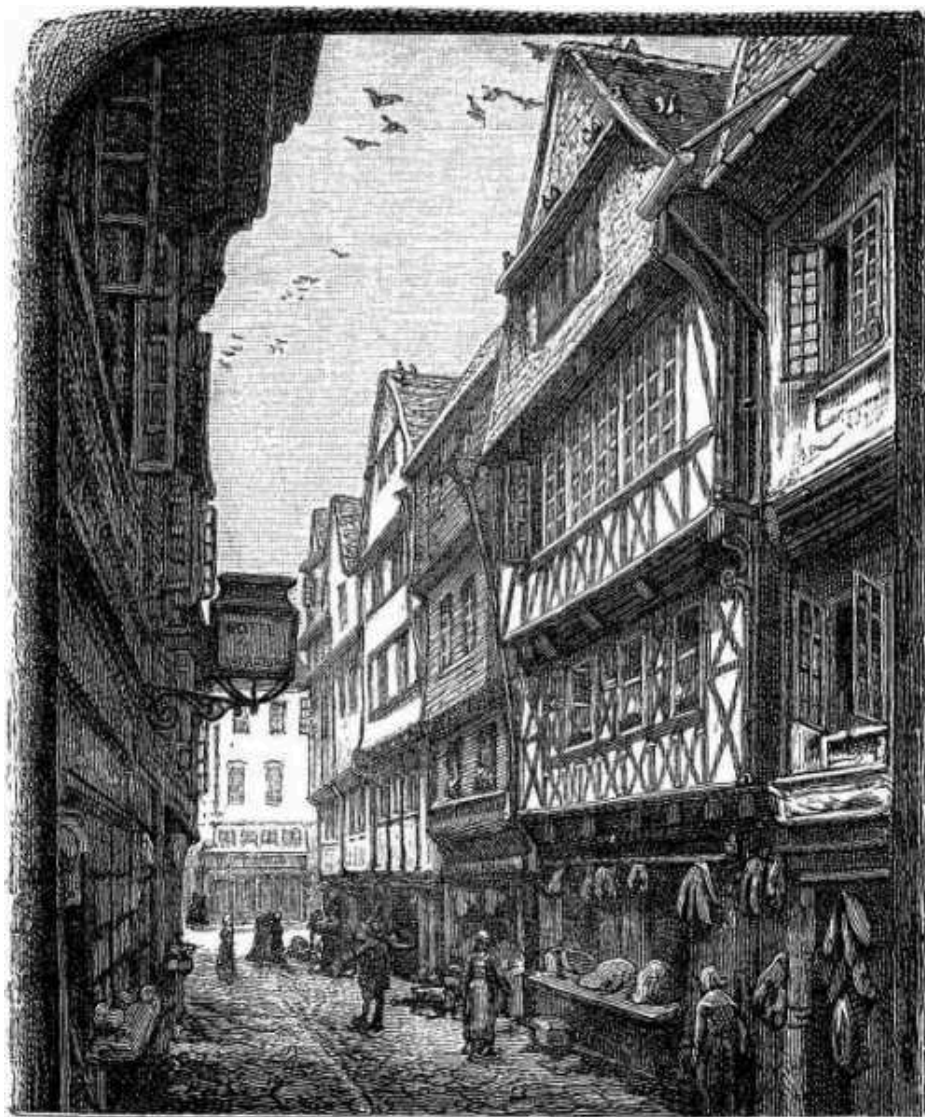
We passed out of the market place again into a narrow street, dark, silent and gloomy. At the third or fourth house, André exclaimed "Nous voilà!" and down went the baggage like a dead-weight in front of a closed doorway.

The house was in darkness: no sight or sound could be seen or heard; everyone seemed wrapped in slumber; a strange condition of things if we were expected. The man rang the bell: a loud, long peal. No response; no light, no movement; profound silence.

"C'est drôle!" he murmured. "The theatre" (that everlasting theatre!) "has been long over and Madame must have returned. Where can she be?"

[Pg 63] "Probably in bed," replied H.C. "We have little chance of following her excellent example if this is to go on. There must be some mistake, and we are not expected."

"Impossible," returned André. "La Patrone never forgets anything and must have arranged it all." He, too, had unlimited confidence in Madame, but for once it was misplaced.



**GRANDE RUE, MORLAIX.**

Not only the house, but the whole street was in darkness. Not the ghost of a glimmer appeared from any window or doorway; not a gas-light from end to end. Oil lamps ought to have been slung across from house to house to keep up the character of the thoroughfare; but here, apparently, consistency was less thought of than economy. We looked and looked, every moment expecting a cloaked watchman to appear, with lantern casting weird flashes around and a sepulchral voice calling the hour and the weather. But *Il Sereno* of Majorca had no counterpart in Morlaix; the darkness, silence and solitude remained unbroken.

[Pg 64]

We were the sole group of humanity visible, and must have appeared singular as the still flaring candle lighted up our faces, pale and anxious from fatigue, threw out in huge proportions the head of our guide, bound up as if prepared for the grave for which he was fast qualifying.

After a time Misery gave another peal at the bell, and, borrowing a stick, drummed a tattoo upon the door that might have waked the departed Mediævals. This at length brought forth fruit.

A latticed window was opened, a white figure appeared, a nightcapped head was put forth without ceremony, a feminine voice, sleepy and indignant, demanded who thus disturbed the sacred silence of the night.

"The gentlemen are here," said André, mildly. "Come down and open the door. A pretty reception this, for tired travellers."

"What gentlemen?" asked the voice, which belonged to no less a person than Madame la bouchère herself.

"Parbleu! why the gentlemen you are expecting. The gentlemen la Patrone sent to you about and that you agreed to lodge for the night."

"André—I know your voice, though I cannot see your form—you have been taking too much, and to-morrow I shall complain to Madame Hellard. How dare you wake quiet people out of their first sleep?"

"First sleep! Has la bouchère not been to the theatre?"

"Theatre, you good-for-nothing! Do I ever join in such frivolities? I have been in bed and asleep ever since ten o'clock—where you ought to be at this hour of the night."

"But la Patrone sent to engage rooms for these gentlemen and you promised to give them. They have come. Open the door. We cannot stay here till daybreak."

"You will stay there till doomsday if it depends on my opening to you. La Patrone never sent and I never promised. I have only one small empty bed in my house, and in the other bed in the same room two of my boys are sleeping. I am very sorry for the gentlemen. My compliments to la Patrone, and before sending gentlemen to me at midnight, she ought to find out if I can accommodate them. Good-night to you, and let us have no more rioting and bell-ringing."

The nightcapped head was withdrawn, the lattice was sharply closed, and we were left to make the best of the situation.

It was serious: nearly one in the morning, the whole town slumbering, and we "homeless, ragged, and tanned."

[Pg 65]

To remain was useless. Not all the ringing and rowing in the world would bring forth Madame again, though it might possibly produce her avenging spouse. André shouldered his baggage and we began to retrace our steps.

"Back to the hotel," commanded H.C.; "they must put us up somewhere."

"Not a hole or corner unoccupied," groaned André. "You can't sleep in the bread oven. And they will all have gone to bed by the time we get back again."

Suddenly he halted before a house at the corner of the marketplace. It looked little better than a common cabaret, and was also closed and dark. Down went the luggage, as he knocked mysteriously at the shutters.

"What are you doing?" we said. "You don't suppose that we would put up here even for an hour."

"It is clean and respectable," objected André. "Messieurs cannot walk the streets till morning."

A door was as mysteriously opened, leading into a room. A couple of candles were burning at a table, round which some rough-looking men were seated, drinking and playing cards, but keeping silence. It looked suspicious and uninviting.

"In fact we might be murdered here," shuddered H.C.: "most certainly we should be robbed."

André made his request: could they give us lodgment?

"Not so much as a chair or a bench," answered the woman, to our relief; for though we should never have entered, André might have disappeared with the baggage and given us some trouble. He evidently had all the obstinacy of the Breton about him, and was growing desperate. The door was closed again without ceremony, and once more we were left to make the best of it.

This time we took the lead and made for the hotel. Again we passed through the wonderful street with the overhanging eaves and gables. Again we paused and lingered, lost in admiration. But the light had departed from the latticed window, and no doubt in dreams the Fair One was beholding again the vision of H.C.

A few minutes more and we stood before the hotel. They were just closing the doors. Monsieur Hellard was crossing the passage at the moment. Never shall I forget his consternation. He raised his hands, and his hair stood on end.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Matter enough," replied André taking up the parable. "Madame never sent to the bouchère, and the bouchère has no room. And I think"—despair giving him courage—"it was too bad to give us a wild goose chase at this time of night."

"And now you must do your best and put us where you can," I concluded. "We are too tired to stir another step."

"I haven't where to lodge a cat," returned the perplexed landlord. "I cannot do impossibilities. What on earth are we to manufacture?"

[Pg 66] "You have a salon?"

"Comme de juste!"

"Is it occupied?"

"No; but there are no beds there. It stands to reason."

"Then put down two mattresses on the floor, and we will make the best of them for to-night. And the sooner you allow us to repose our weary heads, the more grateful we shall be. It is nearly one o'clock."

Monsieur seemed convinced, and gave the word of command which sent two or three waiters flying. Poor André was one of them; but we soon discovered that he was the most willing and obliging man in the world.

Even now everything was mismanaged and had to be done over again; a wordy war ensued between landlord, waiters and chambermaids, each one having an original idea for our comfort and wanting their own way. The small Bedlam that went on would have been diverting at any other time. It was very nearly two o'clock before we closed the door upon the world, and felt that something like peace and repose lay before us.

The room was not uncomfortable. It had all the stiff luxuriance of a French salon, and a gilt clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly and rang out the hours—too many of which, alas, we heard. On the table were the remains of a dessert, evidently hastily brought in from the table d'hôte room, which communicated with this by folding doors: dishes of biscuits, raisins and luscious grapes.

"At least we can refresh ourselves," sighed H.C., taking up a fine bunch and offering me another, "Nectar in its primitive state; the drink of the gods."

"And of Poets," I added.

"Talk not of poetry," he cried. "I feel that my vein has evaporated, and after to-night will never return."

Very soon, you may be sure, the room was in darkness and repose.

"The inequalities of the earth's surface are nothing to my bed," groaned H.C. as he laid himself down. "It is all hills and valleys. I think they must have put the mattress upon all the brooms and brushes of the hotel, crossed by all the fire-irons. And that wretched clock ticks on my brain like a sledge-hammer. I shall not be alive by morning."

"Have you made your will?"

"Yes," he replied; "and left you my museum, my shooting-box, all my unpublished MSS. and the care of my æsthetic aunt, Lady Maria. You will not find her troublesome; she lives on crystallised violets and barley water."

"Mixed blessings," I thought, but was too polite to say so. It must have been my last thought, for I remembered no more until the clock awoke me, striking four; and woke me again, striking six; after which sleep finally fled.

[Pg 67] Soon the town also awoke; doors slammed and echoed; omnibuses and other vehicles rattled over the stones; voices seemed to fill the air; the streets echoed with foot-passengers. The sun was shining gloriously and we threw open the windows to the new day and the fresh breeze, and took our first look at Morlaix by daylight. Already we felt braced and exhilarated as we took in deep draughts of oxygen.





**MARKET PLACE, MORLAIX.**

[Pg 68]

It was a lively scene. The Square close by was surrounded by gabled houses, and houses not gabled: a mixture of Ancient and Modern. That it should be all old was too much to expect, excepting from such sleepy old towns as Vitré or Nuremberg, where you have unbroken outlines, a mediæval picture unspoilt by modern barbarities; may dream and fancy yourself far back in the ages, and find it difficult indeed to realise that you are really not in the fifteenth but in the nineteenth century.

The streets were already beginning to be gay and animated; there was a look of expectancy and mild excitement on many faces, announcing that something unusual was going on. It was fair time and fête time; and even these stolid, sober people were stirred into something like laughter and enjoyment. Fair Normandy has a good deal of the vivacity of the French; but Graver Brittany, like England, loves to take its pleasures somewhat sadly.

It was a lovely morning. Before us, and beyond the square, stretched the heights of Morlaix, green and fertile, fruit and flower-laden. To our left towered the great viaduct, over which the train rolls, depositing its passengers far, far above the tops of the houses, far above the tallest steeple. It was a very striking picture, and H.C. shouted for joy and felt the muse rekindling within him. Upon all shone the glorious sun, above all was the glorious sky, blue, liquid and almost tangible, as only foreign skies can be. The fatigues of yesterday, the terrible adventures of the past night, all were forgotten. Nay, that midnight expedition was remembered with intense pleasure. All that was uncomfortable about it had evaporated; nothing remained but a vision wonderfully unusual, weird, picturesque: grand old-world outlines standing out in the surrounding darkness; a small procession of three; a flickering candle throwing out ghostly lights and shadows; a willing but unhappy waiter dying of exhaustion and pain; a curious figure of Misery in which there certainly was nothing picturesque, but much to arouse one's pity and sympathy—the better, diviner part of one's nature.

"Hurrah for a new day!" cried H.C., turning from the window and hastening to beautify and adorn. "New scenes, new people, new impressions! Oh, this glorious world! the delight of living!"



[Pg 69]

## WHO WAS THE THIRD MAID?

It was on a wild October evening about a year ago that my wife and I arrived by train at a well-known watering-place in the North of England. The wind was howling and roaring with delight at its resistless power; the rain came hissing down in large drops.

On yonder headland doubtless might be heard "The Whistling Woman"—dread harbinger of death and disaster to the mariner. The gale had been hourly increasing in violence, till for the last hour before arriving at our destination we had momentarily expected that the train would be blown from the track. Our hotel was situated on an eminence overlooking the town; and as we slowly ascended to it in our cab we thought: "Well, we must not be surprised to find our intended abode for the night has vanished."

However, presently we stopped in front of a building which looked substantial enough to withstand anything; and in answer to our driver's application to the bell, the door was promptly opened by a smartly-attired porter. He was closely followed by a person full of smiles and bows, who posted himself in the doorway ready to receive us.

All at once there was a terrific bang, as though a forty-pounder had been fired to welcome our arrival; and he of the smiles and bows was hurled headlong against the muddy wheel of our conveyance by the slamming-to of the large door. My wife's bonnet blew off and tugged hard at its moorings; the light in the porch was extinguished; while the wind seemed to give a shriek of triumph at the jokes he was playing upon us. Here we were, then, in total darkness and exposed to the drenching rain. However, half-an-hour afterwards all our discomforts were forgotten as we sat down to an excellent dinner à la carte.

Next morning I was abroad very early, looking for lodgings. Fortune seemed to smile upon me on this occasion; for scarcely had I proceeded fifty yards from my hotel when I came upon a very nice-looking row of houses, and in the window of the first was "Lodgings to let." Knocking at the door, it was soon opened by a very neat-looking maid.

I inquired if I could see the proprietor, but was told that Miss G. was not yet down. I said I would wait; and was shown into a very comfortably-furnished dining-room. Soon Miss G. appeared, and proved to be a pretty brunette of about five-and-twenty, whose dark eyes during our short interview were every now and then fixed on me with an intentness that seemed to be trying to read what kind of person I was; whilst her manner, though decidedly pleasing, had a certain restlessness in it which I could not help observing. Her father and mother being both dead, she kept the lodging-house herself. I asked her if she had a good cook, to which she replied that she was responsible for most of that difficult part of the ménage herself, keeping two maids to assist in the house and parlour work. She went on to say that her drawing-room was "dissected:" a term common amongst north country lodging-house keepers, and meant to express that it was undergoing its autumn cleaning, but she would have it put straight if I wished. I told her that we should be quite contented with the dining-room, provided we had a good bed-room. This she at once showed me, and, soon coming to terms, I returned to the hotel.

After breakfast, I went to the bureau to ask for my account. Whilst it was being made out, I observed casually that I had taken lodgings at Miss G.'s on Cliff Terrace, upon which the accountant looked quickly up and said: "Oh, Miss G.'s," and then as quickly went on with my bill. I hardly noticed this at the moment, though I thought of it afterwards.

Eleven o'clock saw us comfortably ensconced in our rooms. After lunch, we took a delightful expedition, the weather having greatly moderated. We found that night, at dinner, that Miss G. was a first-rate cook, and we retired to rest much pleased with our quarters.

We soon made the acquaintance of the two maids, Jane, who waited upon us, and Mary, the housemaid; and two very pleasant and obliging young women we found them.

[Pg 70]

About the third morning of our stay, on going up to my bed-room after breakfast, I was surprised to find a strange maid in the room. She was standing by the bed, smoothing down the bed-clothes with both hands and appeared to take no notice of me, but continued gazing steadily in front of her, while her hands went mechanically on smoothing the clothes. I could not help being struck with her pale face, which wore a look of pain, and the fixed and almost stony expression of her eyes. I left her in exactly the same position as I found her. On coming down I said to my wife: "I did not know Miss G. employed three servants. There certainly is another making the bed in our room." I am short-sighted, and my wife would have it I had made a mistake; but I felt quite certain I had not. Later on, whilst Jane was laying the lunch, I said to her: "I thought that you and Mary were the only two servants in the house."

"Yes, sir, only me and Mary," was Jane's reply, as she left the room.

"There," said my wife, "I told you that you were mistaken." And I did not pursue the subject further.

Two or three days slipped away in pleasant occupations, such as driving, boating, etc., and we had forgotten all about the third maid. We saw but little of Miss G., though her handiwork was pleasantly apparent in the cuisine.

[Pg 71]

On the sixth morning of our stay, which was the day before we were to leave, my wife after breakfast said she would go up and do a little packing whilst I made out our route for the following day in the Bradshaw; but was soon interrupted by the return of my wife with a rather scared look on her face.

"Well," she said, "you were right after all, for there is another maid, and she is now in our bed-room, and apparently engaged in much the same occupation as when you saw her there. She took no notice of me, but stood there with her body slightly bent over the bed, looking straight in front of her, her hands smoothing the bed-clothes." She described her as having dark hair, her face very pale, and her mouth very firmly set. My curiosity was now so much awakened that I determined to question Miss G. on the subject. But our carriage was now at the door waiting for us to start on an expedition that would engage us all day.

On my return, late in the afternoon, meeting Miss G. in the passage, I said to her: "Who is the third servant that Mrs. K. and myself have seen once or twice in our bed-room?"

Miss G. looked, I thought, rather scared, and, murmuring something that I could not catch, turned and went hurriedly down the stairs into the kitchen.

An hour afterwards, as we were sitting waiting for our dinner, Jane brought a note from Miss G. enclosing her account, and saying that she had just had a telegram summoning her to the sick-bed of a relation, that in all probability she would not be back till after our departure, but that she had left directions with the servants, and hoped they would make us quite comfortable, and that we would excuse her hurried departure.

A few minutes after, a cab drove up to the door, into which, from our window, we saw Miss G. get, and drive rapidly away.

Later on in the evening, whilst Jane was clearing away the dinner things, I said to her: "By-the-by, Jane, who is the third maid?" She was just going to leave the room as I spoke; instead of replying she turned round with such a scared look on her face that I felt quite alarmed, then, hurriedly catching up her tray, she left the room. Thinking that further inquiry would be very disagreeable to her, I forbore again mentioning the subject. Next day, our week being up, we departed for fresh woods and pastures new.

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Our tour led us considerably further north, but a month later saw us homeward bound. The nearest route by rail led us by X. As we drew up at the station we noticed on the platform a parson, in whom we recognised one of the clergy of X., whose church we had been to. Presently the door of our compartment was opened and he put in a lady, wished her good-bye, the guard's whistle blew and we were off. After a short time we fell into conversation with the lady and found her to be the clergyman's wife. Amongst other things, we asked after Miss G.

[Pg 72]

"Oh, Miss G.," she replied; "she is very well, but I hear, poor thing, she has not had a very good season."

"I am sorry to hear that," I replied; "why is it?" She was silent for a minute and then related to us the following facts.

At the beginning of the season a rather untoward event occurred at Miss G.'s lodgings. An elderly lady took one of the flats for a month. She had with her an attendant of about thirty. Before long Miss G. observed that they were not on very good terms, and one morning the old lady was found dead in her bed.

A doctor was at once called in, who, on viewing the body, found there were very suspicious marks round the neck and throat, as if a person's fingers had been tightly pressed upon them. The maid on hearing this at once became very restless, and going to her bed-room, which was at the top of the house, packed a small bag and, having put on her things, was about to descend the stairs when, from hurry or agitation, she missed her footing and, falling to the bottom, broke her neck.

But not the least extraordinary part of the business was that not the slightest clue could be obtained as to who the lady was, the linen of herself and her maid having only initials marked on it. The police did their best by advertising and inquiry, but all they could find out was that they had come straight to X. from Liverpool, where they had arrived from America. There they were traced to Fifth Avenue Hotel, in New York, where they had been only known by the number of their room, and to which they had come from no one knew whither. Enough money was found in the lady's box to pay the expenses of their funerals. An open verdict was returned at the inquests which were held. The police took possession of their belongings and had them, no doubt, at the present moment.

At this point the train stopped, the lady wished us "Good-morning" and left the carriage; and we, as we steamed south, were left to meditate on this strange but perfectly true story and to solve as we best could the still unanswered question of "Who was the third maid?"



[Pg 73]

## A MODERN WITCH.

### I.

Never shall I forget my first meeting with Irene Latouche. After travelling all day, I had arrived at my friend Maitland's house to find that dinner had been over for at least an hour. Having taken the precaution of dining during the journey this did not affect me very materially; but my kindly host, who met me in the hall, took it very much to heart.

"We quite gave you up, my dear fellow, we did indeed," he reiterated, grasping my hand with additional fervour each time he made the assertion. "My wife will be so vexed at your missing dinner. You are sure you won't have a bit now? Such a haunch of venison, hung to a turn! One of old Ward's. You know he has taken Glen Bogie this season, and is having rare sport, I am told. Ah, well, if you really won't take anything, we had better join the ladies in the drawing-room."

"But the luggage hasn't come from the station yet," I interposed, "and my dress clothes are in my portmanteau—"

"Nonsense about dress clothes! It will be bed-time soon. You don't suppose anybody cares what you have on, do you?"

With this comforting assurance, Maitland pushed open the drawing-room door, and a flood of light streamed out into the hall. Dazzled by the sudden glare I stepped back, but not before I had caught sight of a most striking figure at the further end of the long room.

"Who on earth is that girl?" I whispered.

"Which? Oh, the one playing the harp, you mean? I might have known that! A rare beauty, isn't she? I thought you would find her out pretty soon!"

Now I am a middle-aged bachelor of quiet tastes, and nothing annoys me more than when my friends poke ponderous fun at me in this fashion. So, ignoring Maitland's facetious suggestion, I calmly walked forward and shook hands with my hostess. She greeted me with her customary cordiality, and in about two minutes I was feeling perfectly at home in spite of my dusty clothes. I now had an opportunity of examining the other guests, who were dispersed in groups about the room. Most of them were people I had frequently met before under the Maitlands' hospitable roof, but the face which had first arrested my attention was that of an absolute stranger.

[Pg 74]

"I see you are admiring Miss Latouche, like the rest of us," said Mrs. Maitland in a low voice. "Such a talented girl! She can play positively any kind of instrument, and has persuaded me to have the old harp taken out of the lumber-room and put in order for her. She looks so well playing it, doesn't she? Quite like Cleopatra or the Queen of Sheba!"

"She is undoubtedly handsome in a certain style," I replied cautiously. "I don't know whether I admire such a gipsy type myself—"

"Ah, you agree with me then," interrupted my hostess eagerly. "I call it an uncomfortable sort of beauty for a drawing-room. She always looks as if she might produce a dagger at a moment's notice, as the people do in operas. Give me a nice simple girl with a pretty English face, like my niece Lily Wallace over there! But I am bound to say Miss Latouche makes a great sensation wherever she goes. Of course she has wonderful powers."

I was about to inquire in what these powers consisted, when Mrs. Maitland was called away. Left to myself, I could not repress a smile at the comparison she had instituted between her own niece and the beautiful stranger. Lily was well enough, a good-tempered pink and white girl, who in twenty years' time would develop into just such another florid matron as her aunt. And then I looked again at Miss Latouche.

She was seated a little apart from the rest, one white arm hanging listlessly over the harp upon which she had just been playing. Her large dark eyes had a far-away look of utter abstraction from all sub-lunary matters that I have never seen in anyone besides. Masses of wavy black hair were loosely coiled over her head, round a high Spanish comb, and half concealed her brow in a dusky cloud. At first sight the black velvet dress, which swept around her in heavy folds, seemed rather an unsuitable costume for so young a girl. But its sombreness was relieved by a gorgeous Indian scarf, thrown carelessly over the shoulders. I do not know who was responsible for Miss Latouche's get-up, or if she really required an extra wrap. At any rate, the combination of colours was very effective.

Whilst I was speculating vaguely on the probable character of this striking young lady, she slowly rose from her low seat and crossed the room. Her eyes were wide open, but apparently fixed on space, and she moved with the slow, mechanical motion of a sleepwalker. To my intense surprise she came straight towards me, and stood in an expectant attitude about a yard from where I was sitting. Not knowing exactly how to receive this advance, I jumped up and offered her my chair. She waved it aside with a gesture of imperial scorn. Her dark eyes positively flashed fire, and a rich glow flushed her pale olive cheek. I could see that I had deeply offended her.

"I must apologise," I began nervously, "but I thought you might be tired."

[Pg 75]

Before the words were fairly spoken, I realised the full imbecility of this remark. My only excuse for making such a fatuous observation was that the near vicinity of this weird beauty had paralysed my reasoning faculties, so that I hardly knew what I was saying. And then she spoke in a low, rich voice which thrilled me through every nerve. I could not understand the meaning of her words, or even recognise the language in which they were spoken. But the tone of her voice was unutterably sad, like an inarticulate wail of despair. All the time her glorious eyes were resting on me as if she would read my inmost thoughts, whilst I responded with an idiotic smile of embarrassment. Even now, after the lapse of years, it makes me hot all over to think of that moment.

I don't know how long I had been standing looking like a fool, when Miss Latouche turned away as abruptly as she had approached and walked straight to the door. With a sigh of relief I sank down on the despised chair. After a few moments I gained sufficient courage to glance round and assure myself that no spectators had witnessed my discomfiture. It was a great relief to find that the entire party had migrated to the further end of the room, where a funny little man

was singing comic songs with a banjo accompaniment. I slipped in next my host, who was thoroughly enjoying the performance.

"Encore! Capital! Give us some more of it, Tommy," he roared when the song came to an end. "That's my sort of music, isn't it yours, Carew?" he added, turning to me.

"A very clever performance," I answered stiffly, divided between my natural abhorrence of comic songs and the difficulty of making a candid reply in the immediate vicinity of the funny man.

"Just so. That's what I call really clever," said Maitland, not perceiving my lack of enthusiasm. "Worth a dozen of those melancholy tunes on the harp, in my opinion. By-the-bye, what's become of Miss Latouche? Couldn't stand this sort of thing, I suppose. Too merry for her. What a pity such a handsome girl should mope so."

"Miss Latouche appears to be rather eccentric," I interposed. "Something of a genius, I imagine?"

"So they all say. Well, she is a clever girl, certainly—only—but you will soon find out what she is like. Here's Tommy going to give us that capital song about the bad cigar. Ever heard it? No? Ha! ha! It will make you laugh then."

That is just what I hate about a comic performance. One laughs under compulsion. If one is sufficiently independent to resist, one incurs the suspicion of being wanting in humour and some well-meaning friend feels bound to explain the joke until one forces a little hollow mirth. Directly the song was in full swing, and the audience convulsed with merriment, I seized my opportunity and fled from the drawing-room. In the library I knew by experience that I should find a good fire and a comfortable arm-chair, both of which would be acceptable after my long journey. It was separated from the rest of the house by a heavy baize door and a long passage, so that I was not likely to be disturbed by any stray revellers. Several years' experience of the comforts of a bachelor establishment has given me a great taste for my own society, and it was with unfeigned delight that I looked forward to a quiet half-hour in this haven of refuge.

[Pg 76]

"Bother Maitland! Why doesn't he have the house better warmed and lighted," I muttered, as the baize door swung behind me, and the sudden draught extinguished my candle. I would not go back to relight it for fear of encountering some officious friend in the hall, who would insist upon accompanying me into my retreat. I preferred groping my way down the long corridor, which was in darkness except for a bright streak of moonlight that streamed in through a window at the further end. I had just decided that it was my plain duty to give Maitland the address of a good shop where he could not only procure cheap lamps but also very serviceable stoves for warming passages, at a moderate price, when I discovered that the said window was open.

"Too bad of the servants," I thought; "I should discharge them all if they were mine. It quite accounts for the howling draught through the house. Just the thing to give one rheumatism at this time of year."

Advancing with the intention of excluding the chilly blast, I was suddenly arrested by the sight of a motionless figure kneeling in front of the window. It was Irene Latouche. I had not noticed her in the confusing patch of moonlight until my foot was almost on the heavy velvet dress which fell over the floor like a great dark pall. Her arms were resting on the window-sill, her beautiful pale face gazing upwards with an expression of agonised despair. Evidently she was quite unconscious of my presence.

Whilst I was turning over in my mind the possibility of beating a silent retreat, she gave a low groan, so full of unquenchable pain that my blood fairly ran cold. Then rising to her feet, she leaned far out into the chill night air, stretching her white arms up towards the stars with a passionate action of entreaty.

"Oh, my Beloved! Shall I ever pray in vain? Is there no mercy?" she cried, and the sound of her voice was like the wind moaning through rocky caverns. "My heart is breaking! My strength is almost at an end! How much longer must I suffer this unspeakable misery?"

Clearly this sort of thing was not intended for strangers. I stopped my ears and shrank as closely as I could into the shadow of the wall. But I could not take my eyes off the girl for a moment. Such an exhibition of wild passion I have never witnessed before or since. As a dramatic effort

[Pg 77]

it was superb; but all the time I was distinctly conscious of the absurd figure I should cut if any third person came on the scene. Also certain warning twinges in my left shoulder reminded me that I was not in the habit of standing by open windows on bleak autumn nights. Why Miss Latouche did not catch her death of cold I cannot imagine; for I could see the wind disordering her dark masses of hair and blowing back the Indian scarf from her bare shoulders. But she appeared to be as indifferent to personal discomfort as she was to all external sounds.

Just as I had settled that my health would never survive such a wanton infringement of all sanitary laws, Irene again sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands. Now was my time. I crept noiselessly back up the corridor until my hand was actually on the baize door. Then excitement got the better of prudence; and, tearing it open, I rushed wildly across the hall and up the staircase, never pausing until I was safe in my own room, with the door locked behind me and the unlighted bed-room candle still clutched firmly in my hand.

## II.

Now, having already mentioned that I am a person of regular and strictly conventional habits, it will be readily believed that I viewed these extraordinary proceedings with unmitigated disgust. It was not to encounter horrid experiences like this that I had left my comfortable town house, where draughts and midnight adventures were alike unknown. Before I came down to breakfast on the following morning, I had fabricated a long story about pressing business which necessitated my immediate return to town. Though ordinarily of a truthful disposition, I was prepared to solemnly aver that the success of an important lawsuit depended on my presence in London within the next twelve hours. I did not even shrink from the prospect of having to produce circumstantial evidence to convince Maitland of the truth of my assertion. Anything rather than undergo any further shocks to my nervous system.

Happily I was spared the necessity of perjuring myself to this extent. When the breakfast bell rang, I descended and found that as usual very few of the guests, had obeyed the summons. Mrs. Maitland was pouring out tea quite undisturbed by this irregularity, for Longacres is a house where attendance at the meals is never compulsory.

[Pg 78]

"And how have you slept?" she said, extending me a plump hand glittering with rings. "We were afraid that perhaps you were a little overtired last night, as you went off to bed in the middle of the singing. Capital, wasn't it? Mr. Tucker is so very funny, and never in the least vulgar with his jokes! Now some comic singers really forget that there are girls in the room.—(Lily, my love, just go and see if your uncle is coming down).—I assure you, Mr. Carew, I was staying in a country house last year—mind, I give no names—where the songs were only fit for a music-hall! It's perfectly true; even George said it made him feel quite red to hear such things in a drawing-room. But, as I was saying, Mr. Tucker is so different; such genuine humour, you know!"

It is impossible to conjecture how long my amiable hostess might have rippled on in this strain if our conversation had not been interrupted by the entry of Miss Latouche.

"You have been introduced?" whispered Mrs. Maitland; and, without waiting for an answer, she called out merrily: "My dear Irene, you must positively come and entertain Mr. Carew. He will give up early rising if he finds that it is always to mean a tête-à-tête with an old woman!"

To my intense astonishment, Miss Latouche replied in the same jesting tone, and taking the vacant seat next mine began at once to talk in the most friendly way imaginable. Not a trace of eccentricity was perceptible in her manner. She was merely a handsome girl, with a strong vein of originality. I began to doubt the evidence of my senses. Surely I must have been labouring under some hallucination the previous night. It was almost easier to believe that I had been the dupe of a portentous nightmare than that this charming girl should have enacted such a strange part.

Before the end of breakfast I was certain that I had taken a very exaggerated view of the situation. It would be a pity to cut short a pleasant visit and risk offending some of my oldest friends on such purely fanciful grounds. Besides, I just remembered that I had given my cook a holiday and that if I went home I should be dependent on the culinary skill of a charwoman. This last consideration determined me. I settled to stay.

Nothing in Miss Latouche's behaviour led me to regret my decision. On the contrary, at the end of a few days we were firm friends. The better I knew her the greater became my admiration of her beauty and talents; and, without vanity, I think I may say that she distinctly preferred me to the other guests, who were mostly very ordinary types of modern young men. The extraordinary impressions of the first evening had entirely faded from my mind, when they were suddenly revived in all their intensity by the following incident.

It was a wet morning and we were all lolling about the billiard-room in various stages of boredom. Some of the more energetic members of the party had been out at dawn, cub hunting, and had returned wet through just as we finished breakfast, in time to add their little quota of grumbling to the general bulk of discontent. Mrs. Maitland, after making a fruitless attempt to rally the spirits of the party, gave up the effort in despair and retired to write letters in her room. Conversation was carried on in fits and starts, whilst from time to time people knocked about the billiard balls in a desultory fashion without exhibiting even a show of interest in the result of the game.

[Pg 79] At last someone introduced the subject of fortune-telling. Instantly there was a revival of interest. Everybody had some scrap of experience to contribute, or some marvellous story to relate. Only Miss Latouche remained silent.

"What a pity none of us can tell fortunes!" cried Lily Wallace, eagerly. "Won't anybody try? It's such fun, almost as amusing as turning tables, and it often comes true in the most wonderful way!"

"Ah, it does indeed!" sighed Mr. Tucker, with a countenance of preternatural gravity. "A poor fellow I know was told that he would marry and then die. Well, it's all coming true!"

"Indeed! Really! How very shocking!"

"Yes, indeed! Poor chap! He married last year and now he has nothing but death before him!"

"How awfully sad!" exclaimed Lily, sympathetically. "Why, you are smiling! Oh, you bad man. I do believe you were only laughing at me after all! Now, Irene, will you please tell Mr. Tucker's fortune, and show him that it is no joking matter? I am sure you know the way, because I have seen a mysterious book about palmistry in your room. Now do, there's a dear girl."

After a little more pressing, Miss Latouche acceded to the general request that she would show her skill. Several people pressed forward at once to have their fortunes told, the men being quite as eager as the girls, although they affected to laugh at the whole affair. I watched the exhibition with some interest. Surely here would be a fair field for the exercise of that wonderful dramatic power which I knew Miss Latouche held in reserve. Well, I was disappointed. She examined the hands submitted to her notice, and interpreted the lines with an amount of conscientious commonplaceness for which I should never have given her credit. The majority of the fortunes were composed of the conventional mixture of illnesses and love affairs which is the stock-in-trade of drawing-room magicians. I glanced at her face. Not a trace of enthusiasm was visible. She was telling fortunes as mechanically as a cottager knits stockings.

"Now we have all been done except Mr. Carew! It's his turn!" cried Lily, who was enjoying the whole thing immensely. "He must have his fortune told! You will do him next, won't you, Irene?"

"Never!"

"Oh, why not? Are you tired? What a pity!"

Miss Latouche took not the slightest notice of the chorus of protestations. She merely turned away with such an air of inflexible determination that even the ardent Lily refrained from pressing her any further.

My curiosity was considerably excited by finding myself an exception to the general rule. Was the inference to be drawn from Miss Latouche's behaviour flattering, or the reverse? I had no chance of finding out until late in the afternoon, when the rain ceased and we all gladly seized the opportunity of getting some exercise before dinner.

[Pg 80] The different members of the party quickly dispersed in opposite directions. A few exceptionally active young people tried to make up for lost time by starting a game of tennis on the cinder courts. Some diverged towards the stables, others took a brisk constitutional up and



down the gravel path. Under the pretence of lighting a cigar, I contrived to wait about near the door until I saw Miss Latouche crossing the hall. I remember thinking how wonderfully handsome she looked as she came forward with a crimson shawl thrown over her head—for it was one of her peculiarities never to wear a conventional hat or bonnet unless absolutely obliged.

"What do you say to going up the hill on the chance of seeing a fine sunset?" I said, as she joined me. She nodded assent, and turning away from the others, we began to climb a winding path, from the top of which there was supposed to be a wonderful view. When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, we stopped and looked round. Far out in front stretched a beautiful valley lighted by gleams of fitful sunshine. The house and garden lay at our feet, but so far below that we only occasionally heard a faint echo from the tennis courts. The moment seemed propitious.

"Miss Latouche," I said abruptly, "I want to ask you something."

No sooner were the words spoken than it struck me they were liable to be misunderstood. She might imagine that I intended to make her an offer, and accept me on the spot. Infinitely as I admired her in an abstract fashion, I had never contemplated matrimony for a moment. Visions of enraged male relatives armed with horse-whips, followed by a formidable breach of promise case, flitted through my mind. There was no time to be lost.

"It's only about the fortune-telling," I stammered out; "nothing else, I assure you—nothing at all!"

"I knew it," replied Miss Latouche calmly and without a trace of embarrassment.

Sensible girl! I breathed freely once more and proceeded with my investigations.

"Why wouldn't you tell my fortune this morning? Why am I alone excluded?"

"Do you really wish to know?" she said very quietly.

"Of course, or I shouldn't ask!"

"Well then, the reason that I declined to tamper with *your* destiny is that I should be irresistibly compelled to tell *you* the truth!"

"Are you serious, or only —?"

"Am I serious?" she cried, with a wild laugh; "*you* ask this? The time has at last come for an explanation. I would willingly have spared you, but it is in vain that we seek to avoid our fate! Rest here!" and seizing my wrist, she dragged me down on the fallen trunk of a tree that lay half hidden by the tall grass at the side of the path. Immediately behind us was a gloomy wood, choked with rank autumnal growths. A more dank, unwholesome situation for a seat on a wet day it would be impossible to conceive. But I preferred running the risk of rheumatic fever to contradicting Miss Latouche in her present mood. Only I hoped the explanation would be exceedingly brief.

"You pretend that you never saw me before the other evening?" she began, feverishly.

"Certainly!" I answered, with great astonishment. "It was undoubtedly our first meeting. I am sure —"

"Can you swear it?" she interrupted, eagerly.

"Oh, no! I never swear! But I don't mind affirming," I said playfully, hoping to give a less serious turn to the conversation.

To my horror Miss Latouche wrung her hands with the same expression of hopeless suffering that I had seen once before.

"It is too cruel," she moaned, "after all this dreary waiting and watching, to be met like this! Oh, my Beloved! I cannot bear it any longer! Shall I never find you? Never! never!"

Her voice died away with a sob of despair, which effectually quenched my capacity for making jokes.

"I hardly understand what you are alluding to," I said as nicely as I could; "but if you will trust me, I promise to do anything that lies in my power to help you."

"You promise!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Mind, you are bound now! Bound to my service!"

This was taking my polite offer of assistance rather more seriously than I intended. Muttering some commonplace compliment, I begged to be further enlightened.

"You will not repeat to any living soul the mysteries I am about to disclose?" she began. "No, I need not ask! There is already sufficient sympathy between us for me to be sure of your discretion. But remember, if you ever feel tempted to disclose a single word of these hidden matters, there are Unseen Powers who will amply avenge the profanation. Know, then, that since my Beloved was snatched from me by what dull men call death, all my faculties have been concentrated on the effort to discover some link of communication with the Invisible World. I will not dwell on my toils and sufferings, the terrible sights I have braved and the sleepless nights that I have sacrificed to study. I do not grudge my youth, passed as it were under the shadow of the tomb, for at last the truth has been revealed to me. *You* are to be the medium!"

"Oh, nonsense!" I shouted. "I won't undertake it! Nothing shall persuade me! Besides, I am perfectly ignorant of the subject."

"You underrate your powers," observed Miss Latouche with calm conviction. "Nature has endowed you with a most unusual organisation. Your powers are quite involuntary. Nothing you say or do can make the slightest difference. You are merely a passive agent for the transmission of electric force."

[Pg 82] "Do you mean a sort of telegraph wire?" I gasped, feebly.

"If you offer no resistance, all will be well with us," continued Miss Latouche, ignoring the interruption; "but the Unseen Powers will bear no trifling, and I can summon those to my aid who will make you bitterly repent any levity!"

I hate those sort of vague prophecies. They frighten one quite out of proportion to their real gravity.

"By the bye, I don't yet understand the reason you wouldn't tell my fortune, as you seem to know such a lot about those things," I said at last.

"What! You do not understand yet that there is a bond between us which makes any concealment impossible? I could not blind *you* with the paltry fictions that satisfy those poor fools!" and she waved her hand contemptuously towards the distant figures of the tennis players, amongst whom Mr. Tucker, in a wonderful costume, was distinctly visible. The expression struck me as unjustifiably strong, even when applied to a man who sang comic songs with a banjo accompaniment.

"I don't think he is a bad little chap," I said, apologetically.

"They are all alike," she replied, with an air of ineffable scorn. "You can only content them with idle promises of love and wealth, like the ignorant village girl who crosses a gipsy's hand with silver and in return is promised a rich husband. And all the while I see the dark cloud hanging over them and can do nothing to avert it. Ah! it is terrible to know the evil to come and be powerless to warn others! To be obliged to smile whilst one's heart is wrung with anguish and one's brain tortured with nameless apprehensions; that is indeed misery!"

"Dear me!" I said, nervously; "I hope you don't foresee any catastrophe about to overwhelm *me*?"

She gazed straight into my eyes, and her passionate face gradually softened into a lovely smile.

"No, my only friend!" she exclaimed, taking my hand gently in hers; "so far, no cloud darkens the perfect happiness of our intercourse!"

I felt that there were moments of compensation even in the pursuit of the Black Arts!

### III.

[Pg 83]

It was a curious sensation, mixing again with the commonplace pleasure-seekers at Longacres, conscious that I was the repository of such extraordinary revelations. For, before we left our damp retreat, Irene had confided in me the secret history of her life. Not that I understood it very clearly, owing to her voice being continually choked by stifled emotion. But I gathered that a person, presumably of the male sex, who was vaguely designated as the Beloved, had perished in some frightful manner before her eyes, and ever since that time she had devoted herself to the study of the occult sciences in the firm conviction that it was possible to discover a medium of communication with the Unseen World. She now persisted that I had been designated by unerring proofs as that medium. She assured me that, months previously, she had foreseen my arrival at Longacres in the precise fashion in which it really took place.

"Every detail," she said, "was exactly foreshadowed in the vision. Not only did I recognise you at once by your clothes (which were different from those of the other men present), but your voice seemed familiar to me, as if I had known you for years. I saw you gazing at me with what I fondly believed to be a look of mutual recognition. I remember rising from my seat in a species of ecstatic trance to which I am liable in moments of excitement. I have a faint recollection of addressing you with an impassioned appeal for help, to which you responded with icy indifference, but the rest of our interview remains a blank. Only there was a cruel sense of disappointment: instead of meeting as two spirits whose interests were inseparable, you denied any previous knowledge of me, and even manifested a sort of terrified aversion at my approach. I saw you shrink away from my side; then nothing remained for me but to temporarily dissemble my purpose and try first to win your confidence by the exercise of my poor woman's wits. In this at least I was successful!"

Irene only spoke the truth. She had completely subdued my will by her fascinations, and though I hated and, in private, ridiculed all supernatural dealings, I was prepared to try the wildest experiments at her bidding.

The trial of my obedience arrived sooner than I anticipated. Immediately after luncheon next day Irene made a sign to me to follow her into the garden.

"All is ready!" she exclaimed, with great excitement. "To-night will see us successful or for ever lost!"

"What do you mean?" I inquired, dubiously; for it did not sound a very cheery prospect.

"I mean that all things point to a hasty solution of the great problem. To-night the planets are propitious, and with your help the chain of communication will be at last complete. Oh, my Beloved! my toil and waiting has not been all in vain!"

"Well, what do you want me to do?" I said, rather sulkily. "Mind, it mustn't be this evening, because Mrs. Maitland has a lot of people coming to dinner, and we can't possibly leave the drawing-room."

"The crisis will be at midnight in the ruined chapel," observed Irene, as if she were stating the most ordinary fact; "but you must meet me an hour before to make all sure."

[Pg 84]

"Preposterous!" I exclaimed; "it's quite out of the question. Wander about the garden at midnight indeed! What would people say if they saw us?"

"Do you imagine that I allow myself to be influenced by the opinion of poor-spirited fools?" inquired Irene with fine scorn. And then, suddenly changing her tactics, she sobbed and prayed me to grant her this one boon—it might be the last thing she would ever ask.

Well, she was very handsome, and I am but human. Before she left me I had promised to do what she wished.

It may be imagined that I passed a miserable day, distracted by a thousand gloomy apprehensions which increased as the fatal hour approached. I have mentioned that there was to be a dinner party that evening.

"A lot of country neighbours," as Maitland explained. "They like a big feed from time to time. I put out the old port and my wife wears her smartest dress and all the diamonds. It is quite a fuss to persuade her to put them on, she is so nervous about them being lost! She always insists on my locking them up in the safe again before I go to bed. Of course I don't contradict her, but

half the time I leave them on my dressing-room table till next morning. Ha! ha! It is always best to humour ladies, even when they are a trifle unreasonable."

It is one of Maitland's little foibles that he never can resist drawing attention to the family diamonds (which are remarkably fine) by some passing allusion of this sort.

Nothing of any interest happened during dinner. When it was at last terminated we retired to the drawing-room, and listened with great decorum to several pieces of music. Miss Latouche was pressed to perform upon the harp, which she did with her usual melancholy grace. To-night she was in a rich white robe, which enhanced the peculiarly dusky effect of her olive skin and masses of dark hair. Her face was very pale; and, to my surprise, shortly after playing she complained of a bad headache and went off to bed. I hardly knew what to think. Had her courage failed her at the last, and, when it came to the point, did she shrink from braving the opinion of the world which she affected so thoroughly to despise?

"So, after all her boasting, she is no bolder than the rest of us!" I thought, with intense relief, as I wandered across the hall to join the other men in the smoking-room. The last guest had departed, and very soon the whole house would be at rest for the night. "How I shall laugh at her to-morrow!" I muttered. "Never again will she impose—"

My meditations were interrupted by an icy touch on my wrist. Turning, I saw Irene by my side, with a dark cloak thrown over her evening dress. Without speaking a word she drew me towards a side door into the garden, which was seldom used, and, producing a key from her pocket, opened it noiselessly.

[Pg 85] "We can't go out at this time of night!" I gasped, making a faint effort to break loose. "I haven't even a hat! It's really past a joke!"

"Remember your promise!" she whispered, in a voice of such awful menace that, feeling all resistance was useless, I followed her out into the darkness. At that moment a sudden gust of wind slammed the door.

"Now what shall we do!" I exclaimed. "There is no handle and the key is inside!"

"Hush!" she whispered. "No more of these trivialities! I tell you the Spirits are abroad to-night; the air is thick with unseen forms. Obey me in silence, or you are lost."

Speechless with annoyance, my teeth chattering with cold and general creepiness, I followed her through the shrubberies until we reached the site of a ruined chapel, which had originally joined on to the old wing of the house. Of this building little remained except portions of the outer walls, overgrown with ivy. The pavement had long since disappeared, and was replaced by a rank growth of grass and weeds, amongst which lay scattered such monumental remains as had survived the general destruction. Only one window of the house happened to look out in this direction. I could see a light shining through the blind, and, with a touch, drew Irene's attention to it.

"Do not alarm yourself with vain fears," she whispered; "it is only Mr. Maitland's dressing-room. All will be quiet soon!" As she spoke, the light was suddenly extinguished.

Only then did I realise the full horrors of my position. When that bed-room candle went out, the last link which bound me to civilization seemed to have snapped. I was at the mercy of an enthusiast who had broken loose from all those conventional trammels which I hold in such respect. Although I had the greatest admiration for Irene, nothing would have surprised me less than if my murdered remains had been found next morning half hidden in the dank grass of the ruined chapel.

We were standing in the deep shadow of the old wall. The silence was intense. Indeed, after Irene's injunctions, I hardly dared breathe for fear of drawing down some misfortune on my devoted head. Not that I quite believed anything was going to happen, only it was best to be on the safe side. Suddenly the stillness was broken by the distant sound of the stable clock striking twelve.

"It has come!" whispered Irene, stooping towards me with an expression of the utmost anxiety. "Now you must obey me absolutely, or we shall both incur the wrath of the Unseen Powers. No wavering! We have gone too far to recede! First, to establish the electric current between us,

you must hold me firmly by the wrist and pass your hand slowly up and down my arm, repeating these words after me."

[Pg 86] I hesitated. The proceeding struck me as extraordinary.

"Will you imperil us both?" muttered Irene, in such a tone of agony that I seized her arm and began to rub for my life. I remember noticing that it was as cold and white as the arm of a marble statue. Meanwhile Irene repeated an invocation, apparently in the same language in which she had addressed me at our first meeting, and I imitated her to the best of my ability.

After this had been going on a few minutes, she inquired in a whisper if I felt anything unusual. I considered that my sensations were quite sufficiently peculiar to justify my replying in the affirmative. She appeared satisfied.

"All will be well, my friend," she murmured, sinking down with an air of exhaustion on the lid of an ancient stone coffin that lay half overgrown with ivy at our feet. "The danger will be averted if you act with courage; only keep your hold on my hand and the Unseen Influences have no power to hurt us! Now drink this." With these words she offered me a small bottle of a dull blue colour and very curious shape.

I examined the little flask suspiciously. I had a hazy impression that I had once seen something like it in the British Museum.

"Never can I reveal by what means I procured this invaluable treasure and the precious fluid that it contains," replied Irene in answer to my inquisitive glance. "Suffice it to say that for countless ages they lay concealed in the cerements of a mummy."

That settled me. I instantly resolved that no power on earth should induce me to taste the nasty mess. A bright thought occurred to me—I would base my refusal upon grounds which even Irene could scarcely combat.

"I am dreadfully sorry," I whispered, "but it upsets me to drink anything except water; in fact I can't do it, the consequences would be too horrible! I need not particularise, but literally I couldn't keep it down a minute. So it seems hardly worth while to risk wasting this valuable fluid."

"And am I to be baffled at this hour by Human Weakness!" cried Irene, stamping with suppressed rage. "It shall not be! Ha! I have it! The odour alone may be sufficiently powerful to work our purpose." And uncorking the bottle, she held it towards me.

The smell was pungent but not disagreeable.

"Now all is completed," she said, when I had inhaled a few whiffs. "You have only to gaze before you, and wish with all the force of your will that my Beloved may appear."

We stood perfectly still, hand clasped in hand. Irene had risen from her grim seat, and was leaning against me for support. Her cloak had fallen off, and I thought that she looked like a beautiful spirit herself against the dark background of ivy. In obedience to her orders, I fixed my eyes on space and tried to wish.

[Pg 87] Hardly had I begun, when a figure emerged from behind the opposite wall and glided slowly across the chapel towards us. I was so amazed that I could hardly believe the evidence of my senses. As for Irene, she only smiled with ineffable bliss, as if it were exactly what she had expected all along.

It was rather a cloudy night, so that I had great difficulty in following the movements of the mysterious figure. When it gained the centre of the chapel it paused, and then slowly turned towards the wall of the house. As far as I could see, it was making some wild motion with its upraised arms, whether of benediction or menace it was impossible to discern at that distance; but I could not shake off a horrid impression that it was cursing the slumbering inmates. And then, wonderful to relate, whilst my eyes were fixed upon the dark figure, it began slowly to rise into the air!

At this portentous sight, I don't mind confessing that my hair fairly bristled with horror. Fortunately for the preservation of my reason, at that instant the moon, gleaming from behind a cloud, revealed a long ladder planted against Mr. Maitland's dressing-room window.

In a moment I recovered my self-possession.

"Stay still—I am going to leave you for a short time," I whispered.

Irene clung to me with both hands, and expressed a fear that the outraged spirits would tear us in pieces if we moved.

"Bother the spirits!" I replied, in a gruff whisper. "I swear it will be the worse for you if you make a fuss now!"

She sobbed and wrung her hands, but the time was past for that to have any effect upon me, and, disengaging myself from her grasp, I crept away, hiding as well as I could behind the scattered ruins.

In this manner I contrived almost to reach the foot of the ladder without being discovered. I had a strange fancy for capturing the thief single-handed and monopolising all the glory of saving the famous diamonds. Waiting patiently until he had just reached the window, I rushed forward and seized the ladder.

"It's no use resisting," I shouted; "if you don't give up quietly, I'll shake."

At this point a second figure stepped out from behind a laurel bush and effectually silenced any further threats by dealing me a heavy blow on the head.

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For days I lay insensible from concussion of the brain. When I was at last pronounced convalescent, Maitland was admitted to my room, being bound by solemn promises not to excite me in any way. With heartfelt gratitude he shook my hand and thanked me for saving the family diamonds.

[Pg 88]

"I shall take better care of them in the future," he said. "Catch me leaving them about in my dressing-room again. No, they shall always go straight back into the safe. Mrs. Maitland was right about that, though it wouldn't do to confess it. Precious lucky for me that you heard the burglars and ran out; though I wouldn't advise you to try and tackle two muscular ruffians by yourself another time. It was just a chance that one broke his leg when you pulled down the ladder, otherwise they would have finished you off before we arrived on the scene."

I may here remark that I never thought it necessary to correct the version of the story which I found was already generally accepted. To this day Maitland firmly believes that I was just getting into bed, when, with supernatural acuteness, I divined the presence of robbers under his dressing-room window, and creeping quietly out attacked them in the rear.

"By-the-bye, is Miss Latouche still staying here?" I presently inquired in as calm a voice as I could command.

"No, she left suddenly the day after your accident. She complained of feeling upset by the affair, and wished to go home. We did not press her to stay, as she is liable to nervous attacks which are rather alarming. Why, that very night, curiously enough, I met her evidently walking in her sleep down the passage as I rushed out at your shout. She passed quite close to me without making any sign, and was quite unconscious of it next day—in fact referred with some surprise to having slept all through the row."

"Has she always had these peculiar ways?" I asked with interest.

"Well, I always thought her an imaginative, fanciful sort of girl, but she has certainly been much worse since that poor fellow's death. What, you never heard the story? It was at a picnic, and she insisted upon his climbing some rocks to get her a certain flower, just for the sake of giving trouble, as girls do. The poor lad's foot slipped, and he rolled right over a precipice and was dashed to pieces. Of course it was a shocking thing, but it's a pity she became so morbid about it, as no real blame attached to her. Now I must not talk too much or the doctor will say I have tired you; so good-bye for the present."

And that was the last I heard of Irene Latouche.



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