

HER OWN HONOR.

A Tale of English Life.

By Walter Besant.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"When people have got no money they keep themselves. The Dean came to see us this morning. You know there was no one respected father more than the Dean. He says that we must be brave and make the best of things."

"Yes, but, my child, I cannot bear to think of my leaving to work. These pretty hands should do nothing but play with pretty things."

"As for Naomi," said the owner of the pretty hands, "she is so clever with her needle that she is quite sure to get a good place somewhere. She says that she could not take a situation in the town to be reminded all day long how we have come down. So she will go to London, and I must go with her. Then I shall be near you, Harry; and perhaps—"

"Perhaps what, dear?"

"Perhaps, before long, you will be able to take me away for good, and then I will work at nothing harder than to please you, dear."

"Dear Ruth, I ask for nothing better. You could be nothing better. But—"

"You have not told your people about me? Why not tell them and have done. They can't but refuse to call upon me, I suppose."

"You don't understand, dear child. They are ambitious. They want to get into society, you see, and they expect me to help them. Well, we are rich enough, I suppose, and we've got a big house in Palace Gardens, but my grandfather kept a shop. We are only in trade as it is, although we have our offices, and our clerks instead of our counter and our shopmen. See now, Ruth, my father will give me a partnership when I am five and twenty. That is in six months; then I shall be independent. Let us get along, some how, till then. I cannot have my darling ordered about by some scoundrel shop-walker, or working her fingers to the bone."

The girl shook her head.

"Naomi would not hear of such a thing," she said, "unless it was properly understood and was acknowledged. No, Harry, I must be independent of you until—"

"If I can afford to maintain you, dear, why not?"

"No, not even if I have to go lower down the ladder, Harry. Can't you see that it is impossible? I can't wait for you. And I don't suppose that I shall drag you down with me, shall I?"

She said this with a laugh, but like many light words they were prophetic. She was, although she knew it not, to drag him lower—lower; her hand was to be upon his head pushing him down, down, down.

"Let us go home," she said. "Alas, Naomi is going through the things. They all belong to the creditors—even the old books on the shelves—even the eaving in the garden—except our own big tree, even the seat under the mulberry tree. In a day or two we shall go out of the old home—we two together. What will become of us? What shall we do?"

"You are not without friends," said the young man, "you have me."

The wind freshened and the rain beat upon their faces.

"I am full of terrors," said the girl. "It seems as if something dreadful would happen to me."

"You have me to protect you, Ruth."

Her lover's words were brave, but somehow they lacked that subtle quality which insures confidence.

"Yes, Harry, I have you, and you have your own people as well; and they are not likely to welcome the daughter of the county bookseller. Let me go home."

CHAPTER III. THE CITY MERCHANT.

The chief—the sole partner—the head of the house—sat in his private office.



THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE.

No study or reading room of any counting house was more comfortably furnished than this private office. A pile of letters unanswered lay upon the great table beside the blotting pad; a shallow basket containing the letters which he had written or signed; there were bundles of papers tied up and indorsed. On either side of the fireplace was a long stool; on a small table in the window stood the luncheon tray. The chief had taken his watch and put it on the table, and was now sitting in one of those low chairs, his feet stretched out before him in complete physical ease. In the rooms without he knew that his managers, heads of departments, and clerks were all diligently at work for him. It was a man comfortable only to think that people are at work for him. Most of us, when we are not ourselves at work have got the feeling of unprofitable service. Not so Mr. John Stoke. He knew that his people were working for him to what is called a pretty tune. As he rolled his cigar between his lips that tune melodiously rung in his ears. The same thing was every day for all the great city merchants. It was first set as an earthen by Dick Whittington in the tower of St. Michael's, Petermaster (Icy I, for the salute and delectation of all rich merchants for all time, and to turn away their thoughts from the profitable Dives. The words of the tune can only be heard by rich men, but I have been told that they are something as follows: "Merchant, take this care while the treasure grows, wise he who leaps what another sows." I believe there is more

to the same effect. Mr. John Stoke was now a man of 55 or so. The kind of face and the expression upon it are not uncommon in the city—they belong to a certain type of city men—and those who have it are generally successful. It is a masterful face. If any of Mr. John Stoke's servants fail in their duty they know better than to ask for mercy from such a face. Nelson himself did not reckon more confidently than Mr. John Stoke on every man doing his duty. He was not exactly popular with his servants, because he bought his labor as he bought his goods—at the cheapest rate—and because he exacted from labor, as from goods, the utmost profit. The law of political economy, which makes a man buy in the cheapest market, when applied to labor, does not, somehow, lead to a contented and happy service. It is a law, when applied, which only allows people to be happy when it is broken. A good many laws, moral, political and doctrinal, possess the same characteristic. Nobody likes being bought at the cheapest; we all want a fancy price put on our work, especially if we have grown gray in the service. Now Mr. John Stoke allowed no allusions on this subject in his office, and had no respect for gray hairs or for length of service, or for anything in the world except his own interests.

He lay in his chair and watched the wreaths of smoke, listening to that peasant tune—the psalm of Dives quite forgotten. Presently he began to think. Mr. John Stoke was one of those persons who are gifted with the power of thought. One of our worst, we pretend that everybody has this power. Not so; otherwise the majority of mankind would not be as sheep running whither they are driven, and bleating at their leader's command. But let me continue to be polite. This man had a little copy of his mind, a trifle that would probably bring him in twenty thousand or so, and he was turning it over so as to get at the best points of handling it. The warmth and comfort of fireside, lunch, and cigar send some men into mental sleep. To this man they only gave the opportunity of uninterrupted thought.

Presently the door opened and a young man stood in the doorway—a tall and handsome young man—you have already seen him in the walk by the river side.

"Come in, Harry, come in," said the chief, pleasantly; "shut the door and come in."

"You said you should want to speak to me about half-past two."

"Yes, I did. Well, my boy, I thought that we might have a few words, perhaps two or three, just to understand each other. Sit down. Take a cigar? No? Well, you are five-and-twenty today, are you not?"

"It is my birthday," the young man looked anxious, yet expectant of some pleasant word. One day he can be five-and-twenty once in life. Besides, things had been promised.

"Yes," his father continued, looking critically at the ash of his cigar. "Yes, five-and-twenty. I was a partner before that age—before we sank the ship and became an office."

"There was the ship, though, to begin with," said the son.

"Undoubtedly; and a very good ship, too. We mustn't forget the ship. Not likely it will be forgotten. People talk about it when they dine at my dinner parties; when they have had a fortnight among my birds, with champagne up to the eyes every night, they snigger over the ship in the train going home; when they have been on a cruise in my yacht, with everything of the very best—oh, yes, that you do for 'em—the better they remember it, the more they sneer and snigger. Our friends, dear boy, will not readily forget the ship. It is their only consolation when they consider the prosperity of the firm. If it was not for the ship how green they get with envy I'd never have any old friends in the place at all."

"I don't see why we should want to forget it, father."

"No, there is no absolute necessity for forgetting anything. However, we are now, Harry, pretty big 'up the tree. I don't think there can be many men in the city likely to out-step me or my father. Very good, then. I'd like to see you at his son for a while in minute as if seeking for the best way to go on. Very good, then," he repeated. "I've always promised and always intended to take you into partnership at five-and-twenty, and now, Harry, I have sent for you to say that I am willing to carry out that intention, and to give you a birthday present worth having."

"Oh," said Harry, with a great sigh, "in addition to that, of course, if you do you suppose that I am going to admit any one, even my own sons, into my house—the house I have made—to share my income, except on my own terms?"

"Well, sir," said Harry, "I always supposed you would have your own way in everything, whether I am to be a partner or not."

"You are right, my boy. My own way I mean to have. Yet there are not my conditions. Now sit there, and don't hear that. I shall be Lord Thunamy, and you shall be the Honorable Harry. Very well, then—he marked his sentences with short pulls at his cigar—"that's understood. Next thing how is that terrace to be advanced and made into a private place? Money? You don't enough! Land? That isn't enough! Politics? I'm too old and you are too stupid. Your brother Joe—the Honorable Joe—he will, he may, take up politics in the family; interest, not you. By marriage, my boy—the young man again changed color, but this time he became crimson—"if you want to get any good out of your rank you must marry into the same blood as that into which your children will be born. By marriage, Harry. That's my condition. As to my having

my own way, or course I shall have my own way. I should like to see anybody in this house wanting to have any way that wasn't mine. You will have to marry to please me. Do that, and you shall have whatever you wish—you shall be a partner and with you shall have no work to do; you shall have fashion, land, and rank."

Harry made no reply. His color had now gone back to pallor, and his hand trembled.

"Those are my conditions," said his father. "Have you anything to say?"

His son opened his mouth but no sound came forth.

"P. riaps I can help you, Harry." His father threw his head back and watched the blue-white wreath curling over his



"MY OWN WAY I MEAN TO HAVE."

face. "I am sure I can help you. There is that little girl you have been fooling around for six months."

"What about her?"

"I know all about her. She's a girl in an Oxford street fancy shop; her sister is employed at a Regent street dressmaker's. They are respectable girls, which makes them more dangerous."

"I've given my—my word to that girl," said Harry, but with an apprehensive glance at his father's face.

"I don't care what you have given her. You've got to get rid of her."

"I must keep my word." The son got up and stood before his father with dogged face.

When two obstinate faces gaze upon each other, one or the other has got to give in; everybody knows that.

"I said, Harry, that you've got to get rid of her. As for your word, or any other mess you may have got into, you must get out of it the best way you can. I suppose money will do it."

"I must marry her; I will marry her!" But there was a weakening in his face as his father's look became more obstinate.

"Well, sir," said the older, "I am not going at my time to give in to anybody. My money's my own, I suppose, to do what I like with. Now, sir, here is my offer—a partnership, a great future, an estate, a peerage, the foundation of a family—that is what I offer you, on certain conditions. If you refuse you can go straight out of this office and never come back again. You shall have no money—not a brass cent. There's your choice to take. I'll give you an hour to make up your mind—no, I won't! I'll give you half-an-hour—no, I won't give you even a quarter of an hour. Damn it all, sir, I'll give you five minutes—five minutes to choose. Now!"

He took out his watch, one of those great clock things which you can buy for a hundred and twenty pounds or thereabouts, and held it in his hand. Harry stood before him, the obstinacy gone clean out of his face, pale and trembling.

"Well, sir?" His father put back his watch.

"I accept the conditions," said the son.

CHAPTER IV. SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

Sunday afternoon is the time when all the 'prentice youth of London, male and female, are walking out together. If it is summer they are in the park, that of Battersea, Finchley, Hampstead, Victoria, West Ham, or Southwark, proudly in-surrender. If it is winter they are on their way "out to tea." This afternoon should have been numbered with those of the sweet spring season, because it was nearly the end of April, but a cold northeast wind and occasional driving showers forbade the thought of spring. On the north side of the Pall Mall a girl walked up and down the pavement.

She had called at a certain house, and, being turned away, continued as if waiting for some one, and resolved to see that person, to walk up and down before the house. She began to wait three in the afternoon; at four, at five, at six, she was still waiting there. Nobody noticed her—not even the hall porters of the Carlton and the Reform Clubs opposite. The evening was so cold that people hurried to the streets, without looking at each other. Besides, Pall Mall is not a crowded Sunday thoroughfare. There are no one noticed the girl. She was a fair, light-haired girl; her features were regular and delicate; her eyes were blue, her figure rather thin, but tall and graceful. If anyone had stopped to look at her instead of hurrying along as if lashed with a whip by this abominable wind, he would have remarked first—generally, that he was an extremely pretty girl, and secondly, that she was a girl in trouble. Indeed, if an anxiety were ever depicted upon any face, it was upon this girl's face; an anxiety which showed itself in a trembling of the lips, in quick short sighs as she walked, in eager glances along the street as if she were asking when—when would he come?

It was at seven o'clock, just as the sun was setting and the lessening light like a messenger proclaimed the fact from his hidden lord, that he did come. He hurried into Pall Mall from St. James street, and walked rapidly along, looking down a young man.

"I accept," he had replied shortly. Mark that this man, who seemed to the girl so noble and so brave, had become suddenly at the girl's side, in a flash, hand the merest cur and coward of a man; he had promised a thing which wanted, to carry it through, the falsest, the coldest, the cruelest of hearts. Fear of poverty and dread of his father's anger were the ruling forces which transformed a lover, manly, true and tender, into a cur. The thing makes one tremble. Under what influences, Mr. Mark of mine, should we two put off the armor of the knight and reveal the craven tail of the mongrel cur?

Yet this man, who was going to do so mean and villainous a thing at his father's bidding, had so much of his father's courage in him that he was ready to tell the truth in so many words, face to face with her alone, what he meant.

"Come," he said, "I was going to write to you; but there would have been a row afterwards. Better never put in words."

"Harry—what is it? What has hap-

pened? Why do you look so strange? "Come up stairs," he led the way. His chambers were on the first floor. He raked up the low ashes of his fire and threw on some coal.

"Sit down," he said "you must be cold."

"She waited for him to take her in his arms and kiss her, as was his wont. He offered no caress at all. She sat down, however, and warmed her hands and feet. She was very cold. Then she started up again."

"Something has happened, Harry. What is it? Tell me instantly."

It was growing dark now. The young man lit the lamp and pulled the curtains slowly, as if taking as much time as possible over the job.

"It is a fortnight since I have heard of you or seen you. What does it mean? And, Harry, I must tell you—"

"Don't tell me anything. Look here, Ruth, it's all over."

"All over? How can it be all over?"

"I say—it is all over."

"Do you mean that after all you will have to acknowledge me without your father's permission?"

"Not quite; I mean what I say, Ruth. It is all over."

"Harry!" She sprang to her feet, tired and shivering, cold, but fired with a sudden strength. "Harry, what do you mean?"

"We had a very pleasant time in the August holidays, hadn't we, Ruth? I shall always look back to that time in the old town when we used to sit and make love in the garden under the mulberry tree. Yes—I shall never have such a time again. But that's all over. Play that good time never last—"

"I don't understand you to-day, Harry. Why can't you look me in the face? What are you doing?"

"When I came back to town I found out that it wouldn't do. I couldn't exactly explain to you why it wouldn't do. Besides, to tell the truth, I hoped it wouldn't do. I might have been made a partner without conditions—or without conditions, as you call it, but as you see, the truth is, of course, as I suppose you guess," he raised his eyes and faced her boldly, "that they want me to marry a lady."

She received this brutality without flinching.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Avoid Such Ornaments.

C. V. Boys, of the Royal College of Science, London, speaks of the danger attending the combination of gun-cotton and camphor when made into buttons. He says: "I have received a letter from the West of England describing a most extraordinary adventure of a lady who was standing near a bright but not blazing fire."

She found herself suddenly enveloped in smoke, and a gentleman who rescued her and crushed the ignited portion of her dress had his hand badly burned. The fire was found to have originated from a spot where a large fancy button had been, but which had now disappeared, while a similar button on the dress was scorched. The following rough and ready tests of one of the buttons which was enclosed in the letter are sufficient to show the danger of this style of ornament:

A gas flame was directed against one side of an iron ring, the head of a common wax match containing phosphorus was placed on the ring about two inches from the flame, and a piece of the button was similarly placed at an equal distance on the other side. A second piece of the button was also placed on the ring, but at twice the distance from the flame. A small piece of paper was laid lightly over each. After five minutes the first piece of the button ignited and burned with a bright flame; after twelve minutes the second piece did the same; while, after seventeen minutes, the match head was still unchanged. On testing it with a light it immediately burst into flame. Another piece of the button was pinned to the surface of an old duster which was hung from a chair in front of ordinary bright fire, but outside the fender and at a distance at which the skirts of a dress might any day be found. In two or three minutes there was a cloud of smoke and a hole was burned in the duster.

The No. 4 of the Indians.

Mrs. Collins, a Maine girl, who has been out among the Dakotas as a missionary, says the way to civilize the Indians is by nurses rather than by preachers or teachers. Instruction in the care of the sick, the nature of the disease and the proper use of medicines releases them from the influence of the "medicine man." It is these who, working on the superstitious minds of the Indians, are the greatest obstacles to their civilization.

The Indians have been peculiarly susceptible to epidemic diseases, which have created greater ravages than war and privation combined. Miss Collins instances an epidemic of measles in which cleanliness and nursing saved every life but that of a child whose grandmother was a medicine woman. When the influence of a medicine man is gone as a healer of the body he has lost his power as a spiritual director and the Indian's mind is open to the words of the Christian teacher and preacher.—New York Sun.

Thickly Populated.

The empire of China, covering an area of 4,000,000 square kilometers, now has a population of 350,000,000, or about 88 inhabitants to the square kilometer. Ho-Nan is the most thickly populated province, having about 210 persons to the square kilometer.

Not a Land of Ice Only.

Labrador, a country which we always associated with Arctic snow-drifts, icebergs, etc., has 900 species of flowering plants, 50 ferns, and over 250 species of mosses and lichens.

He—I don't see anything nice in personal reflections. She—Well, why don't you stop looking in a mirror?

The morning stars sang together for joy, after they secured their long-hoped-for engagement.

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