

MAY.

SONNET BY HENRY PRINCE.

Like as a radiant bride, whose perfect bliss
Is consummated on her wedding-day :—
So come the bound, peerless maiden May,
To give the Earth her tender natal-kiss.

A crimson splendour gloweth in the East,
As Nature to her fond caresses yields
In happy transports :—and the verdant fields
Send up sweet incense for her birthday feast.

On topmost boughs aerial warblers sing
The sweetest notes they pipe thro' all the year.—
And drowsy insects from their quarters dream
Essay in gorgeous liveries of spring.

And day begeth from departed day
Some new-born glory from the loving hand of MAT.
Montreal, May 1st, 1877.

ALIVE OR DEAD?

BY MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER

I.

It was a very hot day : hot in oppressiveness. The sky was one blaze of yellow sunshine : there was not a breath of air, not a rustle in a leaf, not a sound save the monotonous hum of the bees ransacking the blossoms. A dead stillness reigned without the manor of Brocklehurst, although within there were both noise and excitement, for the morrow was the wedding-day of Hester Kyrle, the sole child of John Kyrle, millionaire, and the heiress of the Brocklehurst estates. But there were two rooms within the house that noise and excitement did not reach. They were apparently sacred from intrusion ; and even the mother of the bride-elect did not venture to invade their precincts. One of them was the study of John Kyrle, and the other was the chamber of his daughter. Mr. Kyrle sat in his study in a deep reverie. He was a tall lean man, with hawk-like eyes, that rested with a curious intensity on the empty grate, while a huge pile of letters, pushed carelessly into a heap, lay unheeded by his side.

He was exclusively that which is understood by the term a man of the world, thoroughly mundane to the backbone. He slept and he ate and drank under the connubial roof, and with a stereotyped icy smile paid the household bills without a question or a comment ever crossing his thin lips.

But as far as any of the ordinary feeling or influence that the magical word "home" is supposed to exercise over man, he might have been a colubine. A very long time ago he had discovered that his marriage had been a fatal mistake. Both he and his wife were of the world, living for the world ; but with this one fact the bond of sympathy between them ceased entirely.

John Kyrle was cynical, clever, and desperately ambitious. Mrs. Kyrle was foolish, frivolous, and dreadfully underbred.

At the present time there was as little union of sentiment as usual between the ill-matched pair, for Mr. Kyrle's sharp-cut physiognomy bore upon it a marked contrast to the complacent round face of his better-half. In lieu of a beaming smile of content, such as she wore on the eve of her daughter's marriage with Mervyn Tyrrell—a man after her own heart—Mr. Kyrle's lips were tightly compressed, while an ominous shadow bestrided his light-gray eyes and his high brow.

There had been an appeal made to him on the preceding night, an appeal most passionate and most eloquent, with that powerful eloquence that truth and feeling can give even to the most trivial words, while the voice that uttered it was the one that was dearest to his ears.

He had faithfully pledged himself to consider the subject, forced on his attention by the plaintive sobbing tones, and he had passed several hours shut up in his study to carry out the promise he had made. But for once his keen intellect seemed entirely at fault ; the difficulty he desired to solve remained still unsolved, and he was sorely perplexed. A timid knock aroused him ; he hesitated an instant before bidding the visitor enter, and he felt almost like a culprit and a craven when at last a light footfall crossed the floor and paused close to his side. Then he mustered courage and turned to look up with a sternness that was feigned in his glance, and a resolution that was mock on his mouth.

The girl who stood beside him was slender, almost fragile, in appearance, wanting slightly in physique, perhaps, but yet willowy and graceful in figure, and with a face fair as the morning. Her clear cheeks reddened and paled alternately, and her soft lips quivered like a child's, while her eyes, meek blue eyes, were fixed eagerly on his own.

Before he could address her, she was down in a white heap on the floor, with her clasped hands resting on his knee.

"You will not make me marry him, father ; you will have mercy upon me, and send him away !"

The wailing cry reached even the heart that had grown somewhat hard and insensible by contact with the world.

"Hester, listen to me," and Mr. Kyrle leant forward and took her trembling fingers into his own firm grasp.

"You are going to be cruel, father," she gasped, with her colour all flown and her face showing up an ashy white.

"Do not excite yourself like this," he said quietly, still holding her hands ; but she dragged them away hastily, and began wringing them in her excessive agitation.

"Tell me, will you or will you not save me from worse than death ?" she asked, with passion in her voice.

"I will tell you nothing, Hester, until you choose to be calm."

She drew herself together, as it were, with a visible shiver passing over her whole frame.

"I am calm now," she said, in accents that were comparatively steady.

"If you had told me a month—nay, even a week—ago that in pledging yourself to marry Mervyn Tyrrell you were acting under coercion, I could have and should have stopped the matter at once. To me it seems a most iniquitous marriage when a woman swears to love her husband, and deliberately perjures herself. But I understood that you accepted him voluntarily, and that his attentions were agreeable to you."

"I was a miserable coward, father, as I told you last night. He and I were thrown so much together, that it seemed impossible for me to refuse when he almost demanded me to marry him. And then my mother said that my refusal would break her heart."

"Her heart ?" broke in John Kyrle, with an ill-suppressed cynicism in his voice.

"And I have tried, tried hard to reconcile myself ; but the more I see of him, the more I dislike, nay, hate him. I shall go mad if I have to marry that man !"

"And what can be done to prevent it at the eleventh hour—on the very eve of the bridal ? Hester, I have thought over it, as I promised you, and I find it must be. I can do nothing."

"Nothing !" she almost shrieked, rising from her knees, and her slight figure swaying.

Mr. Kyrle caught her in his arms, and with one hand turned up her face towards him so that he might scrutinize it.

"Child, do you love some other man ?" he questioned gravely, with a keen glance. But her eyes looked back at him with frankness in their limpid depths.

"I wish I did !" she replied earnestly ; "for I would appeal to him to save me from this fate, since you refuse to do so. No ; it is only that I hate—loathe—this Mervyn Tyrrell !"

"But why ! He is not one I should have picked out for your husband ; but he is well-looking, and I suppose true and honest in the love he professes for you."

"What matters if he be true and honest, or if he loves me or not, since I abhor him with my whole heart and soul ! Father"—and she clasped his arm with both her hands, and gazed piteously at him—"do you really mean that there is no escape for me—that I must become his wife ?"

"Hester, a child of mine must not be called a jilt and dishonourable by the world, and it would be dishonour on your part to draw back now," Mr. Kyrle answered pompously, in a hard voice.

"Then God help me, since you won't ! Oh, that I might die before to-morrow !" she murmured, with a heartfelt pathos.

"Hester !"

For once the "father" shone out of the steely gray eyes, and a misty look came over them. The sight touched her at once.

"Forgive me for worrying you," she pleaded.

"I suppose you are right, and that everything should be sacrificed to honour. I will try and resign myself ;" and she turned quietly to go away.

Mr. Kyrle stooped and pressed a kiss on her forehead. He was not a demonstrative man, a fond caress was so rare that the girl looked up at him wistfully and in astonishment.

"My poor child !" he faltered.

"Are you sorry for me, father ! It is at any rate a comfort to know that you pity me, if you cannot help me," she said, with a faint effort at a smile that ended in a sob.

When she was gone, John Kyrle went back to his chair, and bent over an open book ; but the muscles round his mouth twitched nervously, and he brushed away with a shaky hand a drop that glittered on the page before him.

II.

"Hester, you are late," Mrs. Kyrle remarked, in a petulant voice, as she swept into her daughter's room on the morning of the wedding.

Hester did not seem to be conscious if she was late. She leant listlessly against the casement in a loose white wrapper ; her long golden hair was unbound, and her face was very pale and wan. But it was her eyes that were strange ; they wore a scared look, and deep lustre shades underlined them.

"Am I ?" was all she answered, without moving from her position ; and the tone of her voice struck painfully on her mother's ear.

Mrs. Kyrle—foolish, frivolous, and underbred—Mrs. Kyrle had plumed herself on having achieved a stroke of diplomacy ; and the serious tone of her daughter's voice depressed her exultation to an unpleasant degree. She had manoeuvred and managed with that wonderful skill that especially belongs to cunning and unscrupulous feminine nature to force Hester into a marriage to which her inclinations were violently opposed. And she had felicitated herself immensely on the success of her scheme. Yet there were sparks of maternal feeling lying at the bottom of her heart, although they were incrustated in a mass of worldliness and selfishness. The suffering that had been legibly written on Hester's face during the latter days had brought a few qualms to her conscience now and then, and not all the specious arguments that egotism finds to justify itself to its worshippers could quite smother the reproach of the still small voice that would assert itself.

"I am acting for her good, and she will thank me for it hereafter," was the stereotyped phrase by which she sought to salve the whispers of conscience.

"Turn, Hester, and let me see if you are looking your best, as you are in duty bound to do to-day."

There was no answer. The girl did not heed or even appear to hear the words, but stood gazing vacantly up into the blue sky, where some feathery clouds were floating slowly by.

"It is time that you were dressing," Mrs. Kyrle went on, in accents that had grown sharper through Hester's silence.

"Yes," answered the voice ; but the figure never stirred.

"Leave her to me, Mrs. Kyrle," and a girl in bridesmaid's gear came forward from the other end of the room. "Trust to me that Hester shall be ready by the time the clock strikes eleven."

"Thank you, Maude. I will leave you to your task ; and it seems to me that you will find it a difficult one !" and Mrs. Kyrle rustled angrily out of the room.

"Hester, you must dress !" and Maude Wymer threw her arm round the girl and tried to draw her round.

"Very well ;" and this time the figure did move. Hester walked firmly across the room, and delivered herself passively into the maid's and Maude's hands ; and in a little while she stood arrayed in her satin dress, with a coronet of orange flowers crowning her brow.

"You look lovely, Hester ; just a shade too white perhaps, but beautiful as a dream. Does she not, Anne ?" cried Maude enthusiastically.

"Miss Kyrle looks lovely, but she is a great deal too white ; she looks just like a bride of death."

"Oh, hush, Anne ! Hester, you had better sit here until it is time to go down."

"I should like to go to the window," was the quiet answer. "Please raise it, Maude ; I feel stifled."

"It is a delicious day ; the air is so full of fragrance, and the sun shines so bright. It is a happy bride that the sun shines on, you know," Maude said, pushing the sash up ; then she drew forward an armchair, into which Hester sank.

"You are crushing your dress ; and if you lean back like that, you will spoil your flowers and veil !"

The bride-elect looked up at the remonstrance, and gave a little wistful smile.

"You can put me to rights to-morrow, Maude ; I am so tired to-day !" and she wearily closed her eyes.

Maude Wymer gazed at her in dismay and surprise. Then she went and sat down a little way off. A thousand trifles, light as air at the time, seemed to her now as confirmation strong of doubts regarding this marriage that had occasionally arisen in her mind. She was an intelligent girl, and in a few minutes she realised Hester's pitiable position. Hester was going mad at her fate was the thought that flashed through her mind as she watched her sitting or sleeping so strangely then. Suddenly a throng of girls appeared at the door. They were Maude's sister-bridesmaids ; and after exchanging a word with her, they walked towards the window.

"Hester is asleep !" whispered one of them in astonishment, and the others moved softly and spoke in hushed tones as they gathered round the chair.

"How dreadfully white she looks !"

"She will have more colour when she wakes, perhaps."

Then a sort of curious awe, almost a dread, crept over them and they were silent. Hester was so still. There was not the slightest flicker of a golden lash ; white and rigid as a marble image, with her pale hands folded loosely and meekly together, Hester Kyrle sat before them.

At this moment the maid approached the panic-struck group. Surprised at the startled expression of the different faces, she pressed hurriedly forward ; and as if with an instinct of what was to come, she seized one of the hands ; the touch of it was sufficient. The woman fell on her knees before the motionless figure that was clad in the mockery of all bridal array, and she gave a piercing shriek that rang through the house, and fell on the ears of the marriage guests—a shriek which in the contagious panic of horror was taken up by each of the assembled bridesmaids.

The clock chimed eleven loud strokes, but Mervyn Tyrrell waited in vain for his bride to come to him. Then John Kyrle stood and gazed at his daughter, and he knew that the Heaven she had invoked to save her from Mervyn Tyrrell's arms had listened to her prayers ; for Hester Kyrle was dead.

III.

All the sunshine had gone from the earth, and the sky was of sombre gray with gathering clouds, on the day that Hester Kyrle was to be carried to her last resting-place. Mrs. Kyrle's grief was so violent that her reason seemed likely to give way ; remorse added to sorrow was making her burden too heavy to bear ; and the cold worldly woman gave way to bursts of passionate despair that evoked surprise in its hearers.

"But it is no wonder that Mrs. Kyrle suffers remorse," Maude Wymer said to her brother, as he took her to the house for a last look at the friend of her childhood, before the sweet face should be shut away from mortal eyes. "Mrs. Kyrle is as much a murderer as though she had cut Hester's throat with a knife !"

Then she recounted to him all her ideas on the subject of the marriage, the prospect of which had killed Hester.

"O Mark, if you had seen the angel's smile, so sad, so wistful, and so meek, that she gave a few minutes before she died." She paused, her voice choked by tears.

"And she died of aneurism of the heart ?" questioned Mark Wymer. He was a medical student, and so sudden a death excited his interest.

"Of course it was ; the doctor said so. At first they tried restoratives, fancying it was a fit of some sort ; but I knew better. I knew the instant I looked at her that Hester was dead ; I knew that she had reached peace. She was just as cold and as rigid a few moments before she died as she is now. I should like you to see her, Mark ; she was so beautiful in life."

"And she is beautiful in death," was Mark's first thought as his eyes rested on the dead girl, who, to gratify the half-crazy mother's wish, was habited in her wedding garb. Mark had been studying medicine in the London hospitals, and, like too many in his profession, he had come to regard the human body, practically and simply, as a curious piece of mechanism animated by vital principle. But he could not somehow look at the form before him in the same cold abstract manner. He could not gaze on it as a vis-à-vis of beauty such as he had never looked on before. There was not the faintest shade of death's livid hue on the pure white face. There was neither sharpening nor sinking of the classical features. There was none of that peculiar expression round the pretty lips, and in the fall of the eyelids upon the cheek, which is the sign that the conqueror death sets upon his victims ; and yet it did not look like life either. In the face and hands there was a marble rigidity, and the tints were transparent like parian.

Hester Kyrle was borne to her grave, and Mark Wymer returned home ; but when the day had gone by and dusk was gathering in, he wended his way to a friend's house, and that friend was a surgeon of high standing in his profession.

"Barker, do you know a sane man when you see him ?" he asked.

The surgeon opened his eyes in surprise.

"Just put your finger on my pulse and look at me. Am I all right ?"

"I should think you are gone mad."

"I have come on an errand which I fear you will think insane ; and I want you to assure yourself that I am *compes mentis* before I speak it."

"Well say that I am convinced of your sanity !"

"There was a young girl buried to-day, and I believe she has been buried alive. I have come to beg of you to help me discover the true case."

"What ?"

Mark reiterated his words. Enough that his persuasions prevailed.

The sexton was heavily bribed, and they then descended into the vault. When the coffin was unclosed, Hester lay in it with no change in her appearance. The surgeon touched the brow and the hands, then he held a small pocket-mirror before her mouth.

The glass was undimmed.

He shook his head ; the case was hopeless.

"One moment," cried Mark. "Put your hand under the arm and see if there is the same chill there as on the brow."

With difficulty the direction was carried out—the same chilliness was *not* there ; to decide the point the silken bodice was cut away in order to feel the heart.

There was no pulsation.

"Try under the arm again," pleaded Mark earnestly. The surgeon pushed his hand slowly along ; then he paused and visibly started, exclaiming eagerly.

"There is warmth here ! By heaven's she is not dead !"

"Now see here," said Mark. He lifted her right hand, straightening the elbow, and pointing the fingers in the opposite direction. After which he withdrew his hold of the arm, and it remained precisely in the same position.

"Hurrah, Mark ! It is nothing after all but a cataleptic fit. Let us take her home at once."

Hester Kyrle recovered consciousness after a great deal of suffering ; but the utmost skill and devotion were requisite to cure her. When at last her cheek bloomed again with the roses of health, and strength came to her frame, she gave her life right willingly in the keeping of its preserver ; and Mark Wymer won his wife from the very jaws of Death.

CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.

We cannot commend too highly our enterprising exchange. It deserves the support of all citizens. Its general reading matter is far above the average, and its points are equal to any illustrated paper we have seen. The last number contains a truthful cartoon of our Mayor, holding the lamps of death (small-pox, typhoid fever, diphtheria, &c.) in his hands. It alludes to an attempt of the chief magistrate to destroy the Board of Health, and, as the *New York* says, "take upon himself the dread responsibility of opening the sluice gates of epidemic disease upon our city. Let him beware—the responsibility lies upon him, and it is a terrible one. Happily he is not omnipotent in the matter, and the Board of Health will survive in spite of him." The rest of the number is filled with views and scenery of the most varied and interesting kind. To any family wishing an illustrated paper, we can cordially recommend it.—*Public Health Magazine*.