JOSEPH'S COAT.

BY DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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"Dinah, my dear, theer's only one thing—as Joe left behind him. Yo'll find it i' the top long drawer i' the next room. It's a grey colored coat. Bring it to me, there's a good gell; I want to see it again before I die. It's the only thing he left behind him."

Dinah passed into the next room, found the coat, and returned. Rebecca took it from her, unfolded it feebly, and caressed it with her hands.

"It was Joseph's Coat," she said. "When the wicked sons pretended as young Joseph was dead, they brought his coat to Jacob: Joseph's Coat. But he was alive all the time in Egypt, and his father lived to see him rich and well-to-do."

Her mind began to wander, and she fancied her son stood beside her.

"Yo'll be kind to your father, Joseph," she said, "when you come back from Egypt, and yo'll remember as it's my wish as you should marry Dinah."

Then she slumbered for a while, and Dinah full of fear and awe, stole downstairs to the kitchen, where Old Joe sat in gloomy silence, with an unlighted pipe between his teeth, and stared into the ashy bars of the grate.

"There's a great change in her, Mr. Bushell," she said.

Old Joe shook his head sadly.

"I've knowed as it was a comin'," he said, in a deep inward murmur; "I've seen it a comin' this many a day."

They passed upstairs together. Rebecca still slumbered. They stood for a time on either side of the bed in silence. By and by the dying woman opened her eyes languidly, looked round with no recognition, plucked feebly at the coat which lay beneath her hands, and then, with the last ray of intelligence which visited her soul in this world, recognized the garment.

"It was Joseph's coat," she said, and with these words she died.

Old Joe bore his wife's death stonily, and no man could tell whether he grieved or not. The funeral took place on Sunday, and the bereaved husband and his brother George were the only mourners. They walked behind the hearse in long hat bands and black clothes, saw the dead interred in the squalid graveyard of Ebenezer, and went back together.

"Theer was a will I made," said old Joe, sitting beside the kitchen fire, "i' my son's favor." He rose and took the document of which he spoke from a sham two volumes in folio of the History of England, marked on the inside for a chess-board. "Me an' Joe," he said, "used to play draughts on this. They used to reckon me a pretty good player, but he could beat my yed off. He was a very good draught player, was Joe."

He sat down the chess board lingeringly, and tapped it once or twice with his knuckles. Then, beating himself again, he opened the document.

"It was drawn up," he said, "by a lawyer, and all made out proper, this here will was. Everythin' on my Rebecca's death was to goo without reserve to my son Joseph, except a thousand pound to my brother George. And now theer don't seem no son Joseph for it to goo to, an' wheer it does goo I don't care."

At this intimation Brother George's heart experienced a soft and gentle glow. Things were looking well for Brother George. It was a maxim of his that fine words butter no parsnips, but he knew also that they cost nothing, and he expended a few on his brother's grief.

"Your piternal feelin's, Joseph, as a man might say, is a playin' on your heart-strings. But theer's many a young man as has stopped away for a year as has come back at the end of it, or leastaways, in course of time. Presps he mightn't ha' gone to Merriky after all. He might ha' listed."

"He's never wrote to nobody," said Joe, "not all the time he's been away."

"No," said Brother George, with no token of shame; "never a word as I've heerd on."

The elder brother sat silent, looking at the fire, with his massive hands depending loosely between his knees, and the will held between the finger and thumb of each hand. Without any sign of haste or anger, or any new resolve, he tore the document across leisurely, and with no look of emotion laid the two pieces together and tore them through. Then, in the same listless way, he took the poker, hollowed out the fire a little, pushed the paper fragments into the hollow, and beat down the fire upon them.

Brother George sipped whisky and water to conceal his smile. Any sort of facial demonstration was rare with him, but this action of Old Joe's was, in its way, a foretaste of triumph for the clumsy schemer, and that soft glow of satisfaction warmed his heart so well that he could not keep its reflection from his face. He might have grinned his broadest, for Old Joe never looked at him.

"Twelve months to a day,' said Joe, with his hands still hanging lax before him, and his eyes upon the fire, "twelve months to a day."

"What was twelve months to a day?" asked the other.

"From the time he went," said Old Joe listlessly, "to the time her died." "Then he said twelve months to-day" again, and sat silent for a long time.

A man with an atom of perception in him would have been keenly touched—must have been touched—by the complete forlornness of the old man's face, and voice, and attitude; but George, being by nature wooden, and by cultivation hardened, laid an unsympathetic hand upon his shoulder, and congratulated him.

"I am glad to see you bear it so easy, Joe-seph."

Old Joe looked at him slowly dropped his head again, and murmured, "Twelve months to a day."

"Have a glass o' grog," said George. It was not his own liquor, and he could afford to be generous with it. "It'll warm the cockles of your heart, and do you good."

He took the kettle from the hearth, mixed a stiff glass, and set it on the hob beside his brother.

"Jones her maiden name was," said Old Joe. "We was married at the parish church. A good wife for five-and-thirty years was my Rebecca. A good wife."

"Yes," said Brother George, "her was a fine personable figure of a woman, and a savin' manager. Yes, Joe, her was all that, an' her's no doubt better off."

To this generally spoken commendation the widower made no answer. Brother George fell to thinking as to what the mourner's fortune might amount to.

In the silence of the room a murmur broke upon his thoughts. "Eh?" said George.

"It was a twel'month to a day," said Old Joe vacantly. "I bain't well, George," he added. "I think I'll goo upstairs an' lay down a bit."

"Ah, do." said Brother George. "And I'll wait here till you've had a rest."

Old Joe, bent strangely, with his massive arms dependent like weights from his broad shoulders, bored his way slowly out of the room, and went heavily upstairs. George sat absorbed in halcyon visions. Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Call it two hundred thousand. A wooden man; a dull slow, unperceptive, unimaginative man. And yet, what visions haunted that dim brain of his and warmed his chilly heart! The summer afternoon wore down to summer evening, and George took a comfortable tea in his brother's parlor, and returning to the kitchen sat and smoked and sipped his grog, until it grew too dark for him to see the wreaths of smoke which curled about his head. He called to the ruddy servant who sat alone in the back kitchen.

"Sarah, go upstairs and call the master, there's a good wench."

"The girl clambered upstairs and tapped at the sleeper's door. There came no answer, and she rapped again. She called downstairs, saying that she could not make him hear.

"He's pretty sound asleep, then," said Brother George. "Leave him to it. I'll go away home."

"He put on the crape-bound hat, and walked gravely to his own house, and slept the sleep of the just. His dreams were bright with the gleam of two hundred thousand pounds. He sat at breakfast in the morning, and the sunbeams flowing through the window were mellow with the same auriferous shine. There came a hurried knock at the door, and George's servant, being engaged at the back of the house, left her master to answer it. He found his brother's clumsy Black Country serving wench standing on the door step with blanched cheeks and eyes full of terror.

"I've fetched the doctor," she gasped breathlessly, "an' he says he must ha' been dead afore you left the house last night."

George fell back against the wall of the passage.

"Dead!" he gasped; "who's dead?"

"Your brother Joseph," said the girl.

HERE THE PROLOGUE CLOSES.

CHAPTER VII.

Four-and-twenty years have gone by since the prologue opened; old Joe and his wife have lain side by side in Ebenezer graveyard, for years three-and-twenty. The baby is a young man with moustaches and a sweetheart, and his mother is getting on towards middle age, if an earthly pilgrimage of forty-two years may be supposed to have borne a pretty woman so far. Daniel's thin legs nowadays will scarcely carry him, and he is more than eighty years of age. His wife died half a score of years ago, and took her pious fraud to the grave with her. Errant Joe's uncle George is over sixty, and is mightily prosperous and somewhat swollen out with worldly grandeur. For over a score of years nobody has heard of errant Joe, and to the minds of his contemporaries he is as dead as Nebuchadnezzar. To Dinah he remains an unchangeable, fixed figure. Whilst other young men have grown into middle age, whilst they wear garments of the fashion of 1874 and have grown wizened or burly according to their nature, young Joe in her remembrance remains in the garb in which she last beheld him: no older, no stouter or thinner; a blue-eyed young fellow still, with blooming cheeks and a downy bit of whisker. If anywhere alive, young Joe is five-and-forty by this time, and young Joe no longer; but in Dinah's remembrances of him, Time stands still. In short, madam, you were just married when the tale opened, and yesterday you cried and smiled at the wedding breakfast of your second daughter. And you, sir, were in a round jacket and a broad collar at Eton, with no notion that the wave of a Conservative reaction would drift you into Parliament to denounce the Opposition in well-prepared impromptu epigram, or to demand from your place to be instructed by the right honorable gentleman at the head of Her Majesty's Government. A great space of time. Let it pass in this story—as it passes in much more tremendous chronicles—like a breath.

Dinah Banks, or Bushell, was a simple-minded woman, and all these years she had positively defrauded herself and child of a great fortune which was legitimately theirs. George, her son was not the sort of person to be defrauded of any rights he knew of, but he was as ignorant of these as poor Sir Roger before this time proved himself to be of his dear mother's Christian name. Since Daniel's early days, times had changed a great deal. He had little sympathy with the new crotchet of education; but it is hard for simple folks like Daniel to swim against the tide, and the lad went to the Grammer School in Birmingham and swallowed his modicum of Latin and Euclid and Algebra, and grew up quite a superior young person, with a natural disdain for home associations and a genuine contempt for his putative father which would have done credit to a princely fairy changeling. Daniel humored the lad in everything, as old fathers sometimes will humor sons; and the boy himself bullied where he could, and had his own way royally when he was sure of it. As he grew up, the fraud his mother had practised bore very bitter fruit. Her child scorned her in spite of her tenderness, and spoke scoffingly of her as an old maid with old-maidish fancies when she would stay him from participation in this or that boyish freak or folly. I have not the heart to tell how she suffered and in what mean ways. Things that to a sister would have been little troubles magnified themselves, to the mother's heart, and every day in all these dreary years her soul cried out for the child's love, and yearned unsatisfied. It was a proof, perhaps, of great sweatness of nature that she remained comely still, and that even in some eyes she grew more beautiful as Time touched her. It was commonly said of her that she wore a motherly rather than an old-maidish air, and, indeed, she had grown buxom and a little portly. Her eyes were sad, but wonderfully sweet and affectionate. She had offers of marriage in profusion; but declined them all, for no reason that the neighbors could divine, and lived solely for her child and her memories of his father. There are among women may thousands of such faithful hearts, who suffer much, but have their reward now and then even in this hard world.

Visible from the upper bed-room windows of the Saracen is a range of hills, of perhaps twelve or thirteen hundred feet elevation, the only notable thing in the landscape. They are not more than four miles away, and they naturally draw the eye of a stanger from the surrounding dead level. Under the shadow of that low range of hills, on the farther side, lies as charming a bit of country as you may look for in a quiet way in England—a rich undulating landscape, with meadow and cornfield, and noble timber here and there, all gathering an added charm from the fact that by a walk of half a mile you may command a view of another valley, lurid with vast columns of fiery smoke and the red tongues of furnace flame that leap at the low skies. Lying in any field about that pleasant stretch of country on a quiet day in summer, beneath skies whose blue is somewhat toned by the thin gauze of outlaying smoke-clouds, you may hear afar off the great heart of giant Labor beating: and standing still at night, when sound travels farther, you can catch the clank iron and the shuddering roar or shrill shriek of distant engines, or even the dull thud of the forge hammer. And even in the pleasant valley itself, when you might fancy that you had strayed unaware into the very heart of Agricola's realm, when the ferns are unrolling their crown-like scrolls, and the dog-rose is opening from the bud, and the air is sickly sweet with the heavy scent of the may, you come saunteringly to a little rise and look about you, and see pitstacks in the distance sending up their blue curls of smoke, and pit frames with gliding chains above them, filmy-fine.

On the lower slope of one of the hills I know a farmhouse so old that its outside walls have grown gray and rimy like the rind of a Stilton cheese. Great beams of timber cross its front, and here and there its lines have swayed picturesquely out of their first intending drawing. Dormer windows peep from the roof; the chimney stacks are Elizabethan, but the rest of the house is a sort of architectural dream made concrete. The building is all gables and corners outside, and therein are little flights of unexpected stairs in unexpected places, and a stranger finds himself intruding on rooms in which he has no business, and wondering how they got there. All the windows are diamonded, and the panes held together by little strips of lead. The floors are sunken in a curious way, and the inner walls warp to this side or that in such a fashion as to give you an impression of being somehow in a house at sea. But the old place is solid and sturdy, pinned together as it is by its huge oak beams, and it may stand for hundreds of years yet in defiance of wind and rain.

Behind this fine old house there is a fine old garden, where in their season ten-week stocks and gilly flowers and bachelors' buttons and other such homely blossoms grow with roses red and white, and lilies pale and golden. Here are hoary apple trees bearing wonderful fruit, plum trees, damson trees, pear trees, and a little forest of gooseberry bushes. And in great strips between the flower beds, or edged round with flowers and tangled aromatic bushes, there are spaces set apart for the culture of the homely cabbage and cauliflower, the pungent eschalot and others of its tribe. Everything seems more or less entangled with everything else in this delightful, disorderly old garden. The sides of its walks are edged with box and moss-grown, and its high brick walls, mellow with age, are thick with lichens. Walking here on any summer day you are at liberty to forget that there is any such thing as a forge, a foundry, a coal mine, a smoke cloud in the world. Yet even here, if you listen closely, you may hear great Labor's muffled heart beat two or three miles away, and beyond the hills at night-time the sky is livid red. There are gardens as old-fashioned and profuse in growth in many places, I dare say—gardens where the same homely blossoms blow, and the same scents perfume the air, and the same spirit of retired Quiet dwells; but they lack the charm of this retreat for the most part, because they have not its singular contrast of neighborhood. When by good chance you meet amongst those 'fair Circassians,' of whom so many fables have been told, a woman with any decent pretensions to good looks—when you see a star glinting through the late divided storm-wrack—when you see the pearl upon the Ethiop's arm—when you see (if ever you do) Mr. Leigh Hunt's beautiful symbol of the lily in the mouth of Tartarus—you know what advantages you expect to get out of the contrast. These advantages are here, in this old garden's neighborhood with smoke and and fire, and the amazing travail of the earth about it.

The Donne family had lived in the old house for many generations and farmed the land which surrounded it. The fact that in the parish churchyard there was a tombstone bearing there name, and dated as far back as the year 1613, proved that the family was substantial and respectable more than two centuries ago. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was not everybody who was honored with a tombstone. The stones came down from that date almost without a break: John Aldley Dunne succeeded by John Aldley Dunne for nigh a hundred years, and being followed by other Johns whose J's had long and curly tails. It was at the beginning of the curly J period the spelling of the names was changed, Audley being substituted for Aldley, and Donne for Dunne. They were many Dunne Aldleys, too, buried in the churchyard, and the two families had evidently been somehow tied together.

In the year 1870 the male branch of the Donnes became extinct, and there were now left but two women to bear the old name—

Mrs. Donne, a notable woman, widow of the late farmer, and her daughter Ethel. Now, in that part of the country people go, as a rule, for Scriptural appellations, and the old English feminine names are neglected. It may perhaps be accepted as corroborative of other evidence in favor of some old standing in the family that it held a distinctive feminine name again and again repeated. Below the record of John Aldley Dunne's years and virtues ran this legend: "Alsoe Ethyl hys wyfe, ætat 48, obitt June 2, 1621. Alsoe Ethyl, infant child of ye above." When the present Ethel was christened, Mr. Borge, her godfather, had objected to the name as bringing ill-luck with it. He founded himself on tombstone evidence, and pointed out the fact that four Ethels had died in maidenhood. His superstitions were derided; but Mr. Borge always protested "he knowed ill nd come on it," and was the more firmly fixed in his belief by the fact that the baby suffered from convulsions while teething. A pretty smart attack of croup and some extra trouble in regard to measles were currently held to have justified the Borgian vaticinations. But the baby grew to girlhood, and the girl became a woman, without anything more terrible than those infant maladies encountered by the way.

Ethel Donne was nearly nineteen years of age, and a very charming and beautiful young woman. Her beauty was not of the kind you see in London drawing rooms or at the opera, but much more robust and blooming and delicate. Her complexion bore looking at, and was admirably waterproof. Ill natured young women, her compeers, said her hair was carroty, from which I desire you to argue that it was of the color that painters have loved to paint—

In gloss and hue the chesnut when the husk
Divides three fold to show the fruit within,

as Tennyson says. Her eyes were hazel and full of mirth and honesty. Her skin was of red rose and white; not the dead lily color which poets have so often and falsely feigned, but white rose with the faintest live blush in it. Her features were not those of a Greek statue, fortunately, but they were fairly regular. The dear little nose, in particular, was very daintily modelled, and her lips and teeth—to speak of rubies and pearls is to desecrate the beauties of flesh and blood and ivory. To see her figure at the full advantage you should perhaps have beheld her in the act of hanging out the family washing to dry in that old garden, or with a hayrake in the meadows. To say that she was unaware of her manifold natural advantages would be to portray her as a very foolish young person. Shakespeare thought fit to put into the mouth of a fool the statement that there never was fair maid but made mouths in a glass; but it is probable that he himself believed it. For one prodigy of nature you can show me where a pretty young woman honestly thinks herself plain, I will undertake to find you five hundred natural minded, lovable young women who, being passably plain, think themselves pretty; and a very proper and kindly ordinance of nature this provision is. Let us think well of ourselves and be happy. The male animal has no right to conceit himself on the score of personal modesty. A very popular writer of essays, who is not beautiful, has made confession in print that he feels a pleasurable sensation in looking at his own reflection in a mirror. I may not have the courage to follow his bold example with a like confession.

But more than mere good sense, of which she had plenty, her own free nature saved her from the canker of self-consciousness, and she had a certain merry scorn of mere personal vanity. She was country bred, but not unpolished, though unvarnished. She had a natural art in music, cultivated, not to perfection, but to a fair growth; and being natural with her, it enabled her to accompany a singer with grace and fineness, and to sing a simple ballad in a way which even cultured listeners found attractive. Her secular music was mostly antiquated, and was made up chiefly of the songs of Purcell and Shields and Arne, with one or two of Haydn's canzonets. Her knowledge of sacred music went little farther than The Messiah, The Creation, and Mozart's Twelfth Mass would carry her. She read French fairly well; but her knowledge of the literature was confined to Lamartine's Heroes and Heroines of the Revolution and Volney's Ruins of Empire. Notwithstanding the latter she was orthodox, as Volney, after the elegant paradise with which he opens, was, indeed, for the most part, Greek to her.

In household virtues she was a treasure, and was mistress of all the arts of the dairy. She made rare butter and the crispest, lightest pastry; and knew how, if called upon, to wash and bake, and even brew. I remember her mother's damson cheese, and they say that Ethel was her mother's mistress. In short, a charming girl, with rare housewifely qualities, and fit to make a prince a wife, if princes had the good luck to be allowed to choose, as we happy plebeians have.

It is not to be supposed for a moment that all these charms and virtues were allowed to lie unclaimed by the adventurous young manhood of the region. Lovers clustered around her like flies about a honey pot, else were she not fit heroine of mine. The Quarrymoor farm ran into three hundred acres, and every inch was freehold, and she the heiress of it. Why should she not be courted?

The parish church was so suitable that there was a pleasant walk to it in summer time from three or four parishes in the neighborhood, and gay young bachelors from several townships, with their sisters and sweethearts, would stroll out on peaceful Sunday evenings, after a four-o'clock tea following on a one-o'clock dinner, and save themselves from any sense of spending the day unfittingly by dropping in at the old church, and would then saunter home again in the calm dusk, refreshed by a glance at country green and a taste of country air. Ethel drilled the choir and played the wheezy organ, and had delight in this part of her life. She searched for voices far and near, and strove to impress the owners into her band, and by-and-by got up quite a respectable assemblage of singers. Then it was decided that the organ should be replaced—you heard the bellows wheeze and rattle even when the instrument was in full blast; and it was settled between Ethel and the Vicar that, as a first step towards this consummation, there should be holden in the school-room a public soiree. This meant the traditional teaghtt, with the addition of ham sandwiches to the ordinary provisions, and a concert interspersed with readings afterwards. Ethel entered into the scheme with great fervor. The magnates of the immediate locality were impressed—none of them very tremendous people; and Mrs. Hick gave a tray of cake, and Mrs. Hince a ham of her own curing, and Mrs. Warmington, of the Mount, six pounds of tea, and Mrs. Jones a batch of household bread, and somebody else a basket of dairy butter. The ladies who gave gifts had the right to preside at the tables, and when the time came they were gay with festive ribbons and sat above their cates with proprietorial smile. But before the time came Ethel had much to do in rehearsing the choir in part-songs culled from her own little repertoire—Blow, Gentle Gales, and Spotted Snakes, and the like. The rehearsals were held in the school-room, and very pleasant they were with their mixture of fun and formality; but the foundress of the festival had her troubles, and chief among them was the want of a tenor who could take the high A natural without cracking on it. All the young gentlemen of the choir who sang through their noses could get at it more or less by dint of choking; but she yearned for somebody who would not choke, and in the nick of time he came.

"Miss Donne," said the Vicar one dusky evening, clamping noisily into the schoolroom, and beginning to speak as soon as he had passed the door; "I have brought you a recruit. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. George Banks. Miss Donne, Mr. Banks."

Ethel rose from her seat at the piano to receive him. The light was so dim that she could make out nothing but a tall and well-set figure—Mr. George was a volunteer—and a pair of pretty broad shoulders.

"Mr. Banks is a tenor, Miss Donne," said the Vicar, "and I have induced him to promise his assistance at our soiree."

"I shall be most happy to be of service, I am sure," said Mr. George Banks in a tenor voice of considerable sweetness. To Ethel's ear the tone had culture and refinement in it, and the speaking voice carried promise. It was softer and lighter than men's voices commonly are, but it was clear and round. The Vicar began to drag a form about the room and to light the gas, and Ethel saw before her a good-looking young fellow, with brown hair and eyes, a palish complexion, and a fair sweeping moustache, which gave him, perhaps, a handsomer look than his features deserved. The moustache was silky and long, and the young man's brown hair was parted in the middle and carefully groomed. He was dressed quietly and in good taste, and bore her scrutiny without embarrassment. Ethel's first view was eminently favorable.

"You have music with you," she said. "Perhaps you will give us a solo at the soiree?"

"With very great pleasure," he responded.

"I dare say, now," thought the girl, "that he can sing. They generally make such a fuss when they can't." It turned out that Mr. Banks could sing nicely; not so well as he thought, perhaps, but he was pleasant to listen to, and that for an amateur tenor is something. The high A presented no difficulties to him. "You will be a great accession to us, Mr. Banks," said Ethel gratefully. "I am very much obliged to you for coming."

"Not at all," protested Mr. Banks. But, walking homeward with Miss Donne and the the Vicar, the artful youth drew out the fact that the lady had a soprano voice, and hinted at the preparation of a duet or two. The Vicar seconded him, and Ethel felt a great desire to sing with somebody who really could sing. That was a pleasure she had never enjoyed; and Mr. Banks and the Vicar were, in brief, invited to the farmhouse, and by its hospitable mistress pressed to take supper. They consented; and whilst the meal was getting ready, Ethel and the newcomer tried over The Minute Gun at Sea, and arranged for themselves a tenor and treble rendering of All's Well. The Vicar was delighted, and his delight took a practical turn.

"Really, Miss Donne," said the Vicar, "we ought to raise the prices."

It transpired at table that Mr. Banks had a four miles' walk before him, and everybody was quite sympathetic with him on that account. He declared that he really didn't mind it, and in fact he set out upon it in evident high good spirits. The young man had finessed for this meeting with great skill, and, hearing of the coming soiree, had induced a friend to mention him and his vocal powers to the Vicar, had unobtrusively thrown himself in that good man's way, and procured an easy invitation. He had seen Ethel once by chance a year before, and of set purpose many a time since then, and had longed to speak to her, but had never been able to approach her until now. He could see that he had made a favorable impression to begin with, and he resolved to improve it.

There were more rehearsals before the eventful night came; and Mr. Banks, although much too wary to introduce any other men singers, who might have turned out unpleasant, brought an ugly old fellow who fluted like an angel, and he threw himself into the musical preparations with so much ardor that Ethel was charmed with him. He was the most active and obliging young man she had encountered, and the frequency with which he contrived excuses for meeting her did credit to the fertility of his fancy. She found no fault with this, and thought it all natural enough. She took Mr. Banks for a musical enthusiast; and so he was, by a quibble. He was musical after a fashion, and he was enthusiastic—in his admiration of himself and Miss Donne. He could not help thinking what a beautiful couple they would make. The young man's forte was not personal modesty. "Hang it all," he had been known to plead, "I haven't any sympathy with that confounded cant which tells a good-looking fellow that he ought to pretend to be unaware of his own advantages." He broke out thus pretty often upon Joe Keen, his chum. "I'm not an Adonis, I know," "No," John would answer, "you ain't, old man." "But I should pass in a crowd," Mr. Banks would flow on, silently contemning satire; "and I should be an ass not to know it." John was a long-haired young man, careless of his personal aspect, and at feud with society. He made war against convention by smoking in the streets, and by wearing a broad-brimmed felt and his shabbiest coat on Sundays. These habits and an open warfare with the Reverend Jabez Wallier, of Zion, gave John a republican, communistic, free thinking sort of reputation with the graver seniors of the town. George Banks and he had been at school together, and were companions still, with next to nothing in common. In an incautious moment Mr. Banks mentioned the approaching soiree and its date.

"I'll go to Quarrymoor with you," said John Keen; and George, who could not very well object to this, gave way to it with an ill grace. "You don't mean to say," said John, who had or affected the merest suspicion of the local drawl, "that you're going to get into a claw hammer coat for this business, do you?" George had been giving elaborate instructions to a Birmingham tailor about a new dress suit, which must be ready before Thursday.

"I'm not a barbarian," said he, "if you are. Of course I shall dress for it." John had a dry and aggravating slow smile, which looked as if it meant something. It came into play now, and now, as always, affected his companion unpleasantly. "What have you to grin at?" George asked, with some show of temper.

"What has anybody to grin at on this filthy planet?" asked John; but he smiled nevertheless, with a look of uncertain humor. George had an uneasy suspicion that his friend was smiling at him.

The evening came, and George appeared resplendent. Anxious as he was to meet Miss Donne, he was careful not to mar the eclat of his advent by too early an arrival, and only turned up when the tables had been cleared and put away and the seats arranged. Most of the natives had never seen a man in evening dress before, and they regarded him with critical wonder. After his first song a burly, red-faced man of genial aspect cried aloud: "Three cheers for the mon i' the shirt-front!" and the ditty was loudly redemanded. George sang again with a readiness which established him as a popular favorite, and when Ethel and he appeared together the enthusiasm was tremendous. It was a great night for Quarrymoor. A local celebrity had written a poem for the occasion.

Good people all, I hope yo'm well,
An' as yo' an' your say 'll agree:
For my own pars, I'm a taal to tell
About this heeur Swarree,

This composition ran into ninety verses, and the bard was so tickled with his own humor that now and again he laughed till the tears ran, and the audience roared with him and at him. He rhymed swarry with ham and buns and tay; he rhymed swarri with summer sky; and in the last verse he well nigh killed the Vicar by an evident, but unfulfilled, intention to make the much-tortured last syllable jingle with me and you. The majority laughed because the act of laughter is catching, and because the example was set them by the gentlefolks. Otherwise, they would have sat to see the word more knocked about even than it had been, conscious of a necessity for poetic license in its handling. The bard was the hit of the evening, and an hour later, when he could trust himself, John Keen congratulated him upon his success. "Well, mister," said the local lion with a sort of proud humility, "it eest everybody as can write poetry." John went outside and sat upon a tombstone, and gave his heart to mirth.

Meantime, Mr Banks made large strides in the good graces of Miss Donne. I suppose you would not give much for a story which had no chronicle of love-making. I think it is Agur the son of Jakeh who, in reciting the words of wisdom which his mother taught him, expresses his wonder at the way of a man with a maid. It was wonderful so long ago, and it is still wonderful. The literature of love-making is beyond computation, and the simple theme still pleases.

CHAPTER VIII.

It befel that, after the soiree at Quarrymoor, Mr. George Banks began to profess an extraordinary interest in matters antiquarian, and to poke about at odd hours in the old church, copying brasses and making sketches of a marble lord of the manor who lay on his back in a neglected corner of the building. John Keen, his chum had a sort of double barrelled profession, being both solicitor and mine surveyor; but his natural tastes were towards architecture, and it was to him that George was indebted for his new pursuit. John, having seen Ethel, followed George's example and fell in love with her. It came quite naturally to him to haunt the old church in the hope of seeing her, and George learned the lesson and availed himself of it. So the two young men used to dodge each other in a rather guilty way on leisure afternoons, and once or twice, with mutual ire and astonishment, met at the church.

I have already told you that George Bushell had inherited his brother Joseph's fortune. He throve mightily, and became a local magnate, signing himself J.P. and being much looked up to. He was a member of the Conservative Central Committee for the county, and had embarked in great mining speculations, and was in these days a staunch churchman. In affairs ecclesiastical, political and commercial he came into contact with the best sort of people, and was highly respected. If his money had betrayed him into any pretence of fashion, he would no doubt have been laughed at; but he behaved with much reticence and modesty, and people naturally spoke well of him. No repentances troubled him and young Joe, his ill-starred nephew, had faded out of memory years ago. Amongst other enterprises of his, he had bought shares in a local bank, and had bought so largely that he might almost be said to have been the bank's proprietor. He held mines under all sorts of business conditions, and he employed some twenty or thirty clerks at his offices. These, like everybody else in his pay, worked under his own supervision; and amongst them, and high in favor, was George Banks, who, of course, had he only known it, was George Bushell, and legal owner of the desk he sat at, the ledger he made entries in, and the vast estate upon which he was employed. Old Daniel, George's supposed father, had plenty of money, but he would not have the lad trained in idleness. The Saracen was but a little part of the old man's belongings, and George, being acknowledged heir to everything, was lordly with his fellow-clerks and flush of pocket-money. His financial position went with other things to make him a favorite with his employer, and he had freedoms and advantages which his compeers envied.

On the Saturday afternoon which followed the Quarrymoor entertainment, George called upon his employer. Mr. Bushell, intensely respectable to begin with, had by this time grown imposing in appearance. He wore the high collars and the large stock of twenty years' earlier date, and his hair was silvery. His hands, though large with earlier labor, had grown soft and plump and white; and his black broadcloth dress, if staid and old-fashioned, was of the best material and cut. He affected some homeliness of custom, and amongst them he preserved the habit of smoking a long churchwarden clay. This one practice was of considerable value to him, for it lent him a certain patriarchal and unaffected look, and greenhorns said that it showed simplicity of character. The Wrongful Heir sat in dull dignity, and the Rightful Heir smirked before him with propitiatory smile.

"I have called, sir," said the favored clerk with suavity, "to ask a favor. My father's affairs are growing a little too heavy for his hands, and he himself is getting old, sir, as you know. If you could spare me upon an occasional Wednesday afternoon, I could be of more service to him than I am at present."

"Mr. Banks," said the usurper, "no man can serve two masters." Mr. Bushell was familiar with many texts out of Scripture, and most of the passages which stuck in his memory appeared to make for his advantage, so he had regarded the sacred volume with respect, as a storehouse of useful aphorism. But the clerk knew his way with him.

"I am sure, sir," he answered, "that I am fully sensible of the favor I ask, and of course I know it is not business-like. But I should be most happy if you would allow me to make up the deficiency I propose to create on other evenings. My father is jealous about entrusting his business in other hands, and his affairs are becoming considerable."

Mr. Bushell, being well-to-do himself, naturally liked to have well-to-do people about him. He abhorred poverty. It wanted to borrow, which was bad; or to beg, which was worse; and it made itself disagreeable in many ways. It presented facilities for being grund down, which could not be looked for in people in prosperous circumstances; but this mere amelioration left the main evils of it unchecked.

"I'll think about it, Mr. Banks," said the usurper; and the Rightful Heir, having bowed and smirked himself away, walked to Quarrymoor attired in festal raiment. Three miles out he overtook John Keen, and on first sighting him was disposed to drop behind; but so slight a matter as the direction of the summer wind made that inconvenient. For John was lighting a pipe, and, in turning his back upon the wind to do it, he faced George. The young men met with a confused effort at indifferent goodfellowship, and of course each thought the other abominably in the way.

"Lovely weather, isn't it?" said George.

"Admirable," said John. There was a dry, aggravating air of self-possession about this young man, even when he was least self-possessed. He said little at most times, but he always gave George an impression that he was thinking with cutting smartness. In point of fact, John inspired a feeling of something very like terror in George's mind.

"Where are you off to?" asked George with a great effort.

"I'm going to make some sketches in Quarrymoor church," John answered. "There are some stunning brasses there, too, and the pulpit's very interesting." George sketched a little in a mechanical South-Kensington manner, and had wasted the evenings of a year or two of his life at the Birmingham Art school; but he scarcely knew whether his companion was chaffing him or not. Ethel practised on the organ on Saturday afternoons, and George was bound to the church to listen to her, and a guilty conscience needs no accuser. This talk about an interesting pulpit sounded like satire under the circumstances; but George controlled himself, and said simply:

"I'll come with you if you don't mind."

"Very glad, I'm sure," John responded hypocritically; and they went on in mutual distrust of each other. "This dandified duffer," thought John to himself, "can't be sneaking after Miss Donne, can he? She's worth a million of him." George, on the other hand, felt a sort of right over the young lady, and, like a lover, was ready to be jealous. Of course he acknowledged that his rights were as yet vague; but they were there somehow, and he wasn't going to have that fellow Keen trampling on them.

Quarrymoor church had a squa Norman tower of great antiquity, and its lines were too ugly to be made pleasant even by its clustering mosses and ivy. Yet it was pleasing to the eyes of these young men when once their ears had assured them that the shrine held their own divinity. Ethel was in the organ loft, improvising on the wheezy organ, unconscious of listeners. And if she had dreams which were not altogether in character with the place, I, for one, am disposed to be very hard on her. She was thinking of a young man with broad shoulders and a tenor voice, and the voice spoke to her even in the broken winded, asthmatic music of the old organ. It was dusky up there, though the sun blazed hot and dry outside; and in the cool dimness of the place Ethel saw the eyes of the tenor voiced young man, and thought them very tender and honest. In truth, their brown inclined a trifle too much to green, and they were something too near together, and had to the observant physiognomist a furtive and even frightened look. The rivals stole into the church on tipoe, and John began to sketch the recumbent lord of the manor, George making a pretence of watching him; and both of them yearned a little over the wheezy voluntary, which, after all, was played by Love's own hands. They said not a word to each other for an hour, and just as the sketch was finished they heard Ethel closing the organ. Then a ridiculous tremor fell upon them, and the girl coming in sight of them unexpectedly, shared it to the full; but, showing nothing of it, advanced and shook hands with both, and, leading the way to the porch, covered her own confusion by examining the drawing there, to John's satisfaction and George's enragement. But Mr. Banks was too good a diplomatist to display his anger openly, and explained suavely how his visit to the church was entirely due to Mr. Keen's artistic enthusiasm, how he was taking a walk and fell in with Mr. Keen, how Mr. Keen was going sketching, how he availed himself of that opportunity to take a closer look at the antiquities of which the Tiear had spoken, and how delighted he had been to listen to Miss Donne's playing.

"The poor old organ," said Miss Donne, is in a sad condition."

"Worst instrument I ever heard," said unsy, downright, John. Ethel was hurt at this. You may pity an old friend broken by time and asthma, but you do not care to hear anybody speak bitterly of his infirmities. George had more tact, and caught exactly the right tone of half-affectionate regret.

"I dare say," said he, "that you won't like the new organ half so well as this," Ethel looked at him almost with gratitude.

"How well he understands one!" she thought. "Oh!" she said aloud, unwilling to be thought sentimental, "it won't have the associations at first, but of course it will be a much finer instrument."

"I beg your pardon," said John, "for pitching into the old organ. I forgot that it was a friend of yours. That makes every difference." Ethel smiled at this, and John continued. "I've a queer old square box of a piano that I learned to play on. I can't have it tuned because the wires would pull off its legs if I did, all the chords are loose. I like it, somehow, though."

"That is precisely how I feel about the organ," said Ethel, readily forgiving him.

"Confound the fellow!" said George to himself. "He's getting sentimental now!"

Miss Donne did not ask the young men to enter the farmhouse, but bade them good bye at the gate, and they walked home together in rather an ill humored way. George betook himself to Dudley Arms and sought the delights of a shilling pool an hour or two earlier than usual, and, being out of temper, played badly; and, playing badly, lost; and, losing, strove to recoup himself by bets. Losing in that direction, also, he went home in a very savage condition, disposed to quarrel with any body. Old Daniel, who closed his house at eleven o'clock, had gone to bed an hour ago; but Dinah was sitting up for her son, and on his entry she saw that he was sullen and out of temper. Indeed, George's tenor voice did not often make the home musical.

"I've laid out a nice bit o' supper for you George," said Dinah, quaking a little, but affecting not to see the lowering look upon his face.

"I don't want any supper," said George, throwing himself moodily into an arm chair, and diving both hands deep into his pockets.

"Won't you eat a bit, my dear?" asked Dinah.

"No," said George, with undignified mockery; "I won't eat a bit, my dear. Who the deuce asked you to sit up for me?"

Dinah returned no answer; and the young man, whose sulks were always a little young womanish, felt a feminine sense of spite at her quietude. It angered him more than any retort would have done.

"Confound it!" he broke out, his tenor voice sounding in its petulance quite shrill and querulous, 'can't you leave a man alone? Sitting up to watch what time of night I come in, and spying on me when I go out! You can go to bed now, anyway."

"Yes, dear," said Dinah submissively, "I will. But I wish you'd eat a bit."

"Well, then," snapped Miss Donne's lover, "you'll have your wish for your trouble. Go to bed."

The last straw breaks the camel's back, but, before that consummation can be arrived at, a good many straws must have been heaped up. Dinah's womanly patience had endured for four-and-twenty years, and through all that dreary time she had kept her secret. She had often so yearned to tell it to her son, that her whole soul had seemed to ache with the effort of repression, and every fibre of her body had thrilled with unsatisfied longing. But she had never been so near to the actual revelation as she was now. Human affection, like everything else in the world, is intermittent, and has its ebbs and flows. The tide of motherly longing and unsatisfied desire of love had been running high all day in Dinah's heart. She did not cry easily; women who have endured real and lasting rows, rarely do, for tears have a knack of wearing out their channel