

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

BY REV. H. F. ROR, AUTHOR OF "FROM JEST TO EARNEST."

## CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"Is it your purpose that I shall be dragged through these streets in the broad light of day to a police-court, and thence to jail?" demanded Haldane, a dark menace coming into his eyes, and finding expression in his livid face.

"Yes, sir," said the man of business, rising and speaking in loud, stern tones, so that all in the office could hear: "I mean that you and anyone else in my employ who abuses my trust and breaks the laws shall suffer their full penalty."

"You are a hard-hearted wretch!" thundered Haldane; "you are a pagan idolater, and gold is your god. You crush your wife and servants at home; you crush the spirit and manhood of your clerk here by your cast-iron system and rules. If you had shown a little consideration for me you would have lost nothing, and I might have had a chance for a better life. But you tread me down into the mire of the streets; you make it impossible for me to appear among decent men again; you strike my mother and sisters as with a dagger. Curse you! If I go to jail it will require you and all your clerks to take me there!" and he whirled on his heel, and struck out recklessly toward the door.

The busy reporter was captured by the first blow, and his nose long bore evidence that it is a serious matter to put that member into other people's affairs, even in a professional way.

Before Haldane could pass from the inner office, two strangers who had been standing quietly at the door, each dexterously seized one of his hands with such an iron grasp that after a momentary struggle he gave up, conscious of the hopelessness of resistance.

"If you will go quietly with us we will employ no force," said the man in uniform; "otherwise we must use these:" and Haldane shuddered as light steel manacles were produced. "These men are officers like myself, and you see that you stand no chance with three of us."

"Well lead on then," was the sullen answer. "I will go quietly if you don't use those, but if you do, I will kill myself and every one within my reach."

"A most desperate and hardened wretch!" ejaculated the reporter, sopping his streaming nose.

With a dark look and deep malediction upon his employer, Haldane was led away.

Mr. Arnot was in no gentle mood, for, while he had carried out his programme, the machinery of the legal process had not worked smoothly. Very disagreeable things had been said to him in the hearing of his clerks and others. "Of course they are not true," thought the gentleman; "but his insolent words will go out in the accounts of the affair as surely as my own."

If Haldane had been utterly overwhelmed and broken down, and had shown only the cowering spirit of a detected and whipped cur, Mr. Arnot's complacency would have been perfect; but as it was, the affair had gone forward in a jarring, uncomfortable manner, which annoyed and irritated him as would a defective, creaking piece of mechanism in one of his factories. Opposition, friction of any kind, only made his imperious will more intolerant of disobedience or neglect; therefore he summoned Pat in a tone whose very accent foretold the doom of the "intelligent Irishman."

"Did I not order you to give no information to anyone concerning what occurred last night?" he demanded in his sternest tone.

Pat hitched and wriggled, for giving up his forty dollars a month was like a surgical operation. He saw that his master was incensed, and in no mood for extenuation; so he pleaded,

"Misther Arnot, won't you plaze slape on it afore you gives me me discharge? If ye'll only think a bit about them newspaper men, ye'll know it could not be helped a'tall. If they suspicion that a man has anything in him that they're wantin' to know, they the same as put a cork-screw into him, and pull till somethin' comes, and then they make up the rest. Faix, sur, I niver could a'got by 'em alive wid me letther onless a little o' the news had gone into their rav'nous maws."

"Then I'll find a man who can get by them, and who is able to obey my orders to the letter. The cashier will pay you up to date; then leave the premises."

"Och, Misther Arnot, me woife'll be the death o' me, and then ye'll have me bluid on yer sowl. Give me one more—"

"Begone!" said his employer harshly; "too much time has been wasted already."

Pat found that his case was so desperate that he became reckless, and, instead of slinking off, he, too, showed the same insubordination and disregard for Mr. Arnot's power and dignity that had been so irritating in Haldane. Clapping his hat on one side of his head, and with such an insolent cant forward that it quite obscured his left eye, Pat rested his hands on his hips, and with one foot thrust out sideways, he fixed his right eye on his employer with the expression of sardonic contemplation, and then delivered himself as follows:

"'Be takin' up a few minits o' yer toime is a mighty terrible waste, but the sendin' of a human bain to the divil is no waste a'tall a'tall; that's the way ye reason, is it? I allers heerd that yer in'ards were made o' cast iron, and I can believe—"

"Leave this office," thundered Mr. Arnot.

"Begorry, ye can't put a man in jail for spakin' his moind, nor for spakin' the truth. If ye had given me a chance, I'd been civil and obedient the rist o' me days. But whin ye act to'ard a man as if he was a lump o' dirt that ye can kick out o' the way, and go on, ye'll find that the lump o' dirt will lave some marks on yer nice clothes. I tell ye to yer flinty oald face, that yer a hard-hearted reprobate that 'ud grind a poor divil to paces as soon as

any machshine in all yer big factories. Ye'll see the day whin ye'll be under somebody's heel yerself, bad luck to ye!"

Pat's irate volubility flowed in such a torrent that even Mr. Arnot could not check it until he saw fit to drop the sluice gates himself, which, with a contemptuous sniff, and an expression of concentrated wormwood and gall, he now did. Lifting his battered hat a little more toward the perpendicular, he went to the cashier's desk, obtained his money and then jogged slowly and aimlessly down the street, leaving a wake of strange oaths behind him.

Thus Mr. Arnot's system again ground out the expected result; but the plague of humanity was that it would not endure the grinding process with the same stolid, inert helplessness of other raw material. Though he had had his way in each instance, he grew more and more dissatisfied and out of sorts. This vituperation of himself would not tend to impress his employes with awe, and strike a wholesome fear in their hearts. The culprits, instead of slinking away overwhelmed with guilt and the weight of his displeasure, had acted and spoken as if he were a grim old tyrant; and he had a vague, uncomfortable feeling that his clerks in their hearts sided with them and against him. It even occurred to him that he was creating a relation between himself and those in his service similar to that existing between master and slaves; and that, instead of forming a community with identical interests, he was on one side and they on the other. But, with the infatuation of a selfish nature and imperious will, he muttered:

"Curse them! I'll make them move in my grooves, or toss them out of the way!" Then, summoning his confidential clerk, he said:

"You know all about the affair. You will oblige me by going to the office of the justice, and stating the case, with the prisoner's admissions. I do not care to appear further in the matter except by proxy, unless it is necessary."

## CHAPTER XII.—A MEMORABLE MEETING.

Mrs. Arnot had looked upon Haldane's degradation with feelings akin to disgust and anger, but as long, sleepless hours passed, her thoughts grew more gentle and compassionate. She was by nature an advocate rather than a judge. Not the spirit of the disciples that would call down fire from heaven, but the spirit of the Master, who sought to lay his healing, rescuing hand on every lost creature, always controlled her eventually. Human desert did not count as much with her as human need, and her own sorrows had made her heart tender toward the sufferings of others, even though well merited.

The prospect that the handsome youth, the son of her old friend, would cast himself down to perish in the slough of dissipation was a tragedy that wrung her heart with grief; and when at last she fell asleep it was with tears upon her face.

Forebodings had followed Laura also, even into her dreams, and at last, in a frightful vision, she saw her uncle placing a giant on guard over the house. Her uncle had scarcely disappeared before Haldane tried to escape, but the giant raised his mighty club, as large and heavy as the mast of a ship, and was about to strike when she awoke with a violent start.

In strange unison with her dream she still heard her uncle's voice in the garden below. She sprang to the window, half expecting to see the giant also, nor was she greatly reassured on observing an unknown man posted in the summer-house and left there. Mr. Arnot's mysterious action, and the fact that he was out at that early hour, added to the disquiet of mind which the events of the preceding night had created.

Her simple home-life had hitherto flowed like a placid stream in sunny meadows, but now it seemed as if the stream were entering a forest where dark and ominous shadows were thrown across its surface. She was too womanly to be indifferent to the fate of any human being. At the same time she was still so much of a child, and so ignorant of the world, that Haldane's action, even as she understood it, loomed up before her imagination as something awful and portentous of unknown evils. She was oppressed by a feeling that a crushing blow impended over him. Now, almost as vividly as in her dream, she still saw the giant's club raised high to strike. If it were only in a fairy tale, her sensitive spirit would tremble at such a stroke, but inasmuch as it was falling on one who had avowed passionate love for her, she felt almost as if she must share in its weight. The idea of reciprocating any feeling that resembled his passion had at first been absurd, and now, in view of what he had shown himself capable of, seemed impossible; and yet his strongly expressed regard for her created a sort of bond between them in spite of herself. She had realized the night before that he would be immediately dismissed and sent home in disgrace, but her dream, and the glimpses she had caught of her uncle and the observant stranger, who, as she saw, still maintained his position, suggested worse consequences, whose very vagueness made them all the more dreadful.

As it was still a long time before the breakfast hour, she again sought her couch, and after a while fell into a troubled sleep, from which she was awakened by her aunt. Hastily dressing, she joined Mrs. Arnot at a late breakfast, and soon discovered that she was worried and anxious as well as herself.

"Has Mr. Haldane gone out?" she asked.

"Yes; and what perplexes me is that two strangers followed him to the street so rapidly that they almost seemed in pursuit."

Then Laura related what she had seen, and her aunt's face grew pale and somewhat rigid as she recognized the fact that her husband was carrying out some plan, unknown to her, which might involve a cruel blow to her friend, Mrs. Haldane, and an overwhelming disgrace to Egbert Haldane. At the same time the thought flashed upon her that the young man's offence might be graver than she supposed. But she only remarked quietly,

"I will go down to the office and see your uncle after breakfast."

"Oh, auntie, please let me go with you," said Laura, nervously.

"I may wish to see my husband alone," replied Mrs. Arnot, doubtfully, foreseeing a possible interview which she would prefer her niece should not witness.

"I will wait for you in the outer office, auntie, if you will only let me go. I am so untrusting that I cannot bear to be left in the house alone."

"Very well, then; we'll go together, and a walk in the open air will do us both good."

As Mrs. Arnot was finishing her breakfast, she listlessly took up the morning "Courier," and with a sudden start read the heavy head lines and paragraph which Pat's unlucky venture as a reporter had occasioned.

"Come, Laura, let us go at once," said she, rising hastily; and as soon as they could prepare themselves for the street they started toward the central part of the city, each too busy with her own thoughts to speak often, and yet each having a grateful consciousness of unspoken sympathy and companionship.

As they passed down the main street they saw a noisy crowd coming up the sidewalk toward them and they crossed over to avoid it. But the approaching throng grew so large and boisterous that they deemed it prudent to enter the open door of a shop until it passed. Their somewhat elevated position gave them a commanding view, and a policeman's uniform at once indicated that it was an arrest that had drawn together the loose human atoms that are always drifting about the streets. The prisoner was followed by a retinue that might have bowed the head of an old and hardened offender with shame—rude, idle, half-grown boys, with their morbid interest in everything tending to excitement and crime, seedy loungers drawn away from saloon doors, where they are as surely to be found as certain coarse weeds in foul neglected corners—a ragged, unkempt, repulsive jumble of humanity, that filled the street with gibes, slang and profanity. Laura was about to retreat into the shop in utter disgust, when her aunt exclaimed in a tone of sharp distress,

"Merciful Heaven! there is Egbert Haldane."

With something like a shock of terror she recognized her quondam lover, the youth who had stood at her side and turned her music. But as she saw him now there appeared an immeasurable gulf between them; while her pity for him was profound, it seemed as helpless and hopeless in his behalf as if he were a guilty spirit that was being dragged away to final doom.

Her aunt's startled exclamation caught the young man's attention, for it was a voice that he would detect among a thousand, and he turned his livid face, with its agonized, hunted look, directly toward them.

As their eyes met—as he saw the one of all the world that he then most dreaded to meet, Laura Romeyn, regarding him with a pale, frightened face, as if he were a monster, a wild beast, nay, worse, a common thief on his way to jail—he stopped abruptly, and for a second seemed to meditate some desperate act. But when he saw the rabble closing on him, and heard the officers growl in surly tones, "Move on," a sense of helplessness as well as of shame overwhelmed him. He shivered visibly, dashed his hat down over his eyes, and strode on, feeling at last that the obscurity of a prison cell would prove a welcome refuge.

But Mrs. Arnot had recognized the intolerable suffering and humiliation stamped on the young man's features; she had seen the fearful, shrinking gaze at herself and Laura, the lurid gleam of desperation, and read correctly the despairing gesture by which he sought to hide from them, the rabble, and all the world, a countenance from which he already felt that shame had blotted all trace of manhood.

Her face again wore a grey rigid aspect, as if she had received a wound that touched her heart, and, scarcely waiting for the miscellaneous horde to pass, she took Laura's arm, and said briefly and almost sternly,

"Come."

Mr. Arnot's equanimity was again destined to be disturbed. Until he had commenced to carry out his schemes of striking fear into the hearts of his employes he had derived much grim satisfaction from its contemplation; but never had a severe and unrelenting policy failed more signally, and a partial consciousness of the fact annoyed him like a constant stinging of nettles which he could not brush aside. When, therefore, his wife entered, he greeted her with his heaviest frown, and a certain twitching of his hands as he fumbled among his papers, which showed that the man who at times seemed composed of equal parts of iron and lead, had at last reached a condition of nervous irritability which might result in an explosion of wrath; and yet he made a desperate effort at self-control, for he saw that his wife was in one of those moods which he had learned to regard with a wholesome respect.

"You have sent Haldane to prison," she said calmly. Though her tone was so quiet, there was in it a certain depth and tremble which her husband well understood, but he only answered briefly,

"Yes; he must go there if he finds no bail."

"May I ask why?"

"He robbed me of a thousand dollars."

"Were there no extenuating circumstances?" Mrs. Arnot asked, after a slight start.

"No, but many aggravating ones."

"Did he not come here of his own accord?"

"He could not have done otherwise. I had detectives watching him."

"He could have tried to do otherwise. Did he not offer some explanation?"

"What he said amounted to a confession of the crime."

"What did he say?"

"I have not charged my mind with all the rash, foolish words of the young scapegrace. It is sufficient for me that he and all in my employ here received a lesson which they will not soon forget. I wish you would excuse me from further consideration of the subject at present. It has cost me too much time already."

"You are correct," said Mrs. Arnot very quietly. "It is likely to prove a very costly affair. I tremble to think what your lesson may cost this young man, whom you have rendered reckless and desperate by this public disgrace; I tremble to think what this event may cost my friend, his mother. Of the pain it has cost me I will not speak—"