THE BELLE OF RUBYWOOD.

CHAPTER XII.

He buttoned his coat with trembling fingers, stuck his hat tightly on his head and sprang into the path, running as if for dear life. Panting, he reached the stile and leaped into the road.

"Where is it?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Farmer Holt's," replied the man, in like manner, never removing his eyes from the flames, which, as they turned the bend of the road, could be seen shooting above the trees.

Wynter Leigh groaned aloud:

"Rubywood!" he cried, "and a three weeks' drought. Not a stick will be saved!"

Then he outran them all, gained upon fresh groups farther on, and burst at last like a greyhound, wet with perspiration and panting, in front of Rubywood, which was wrapped in flames.

For a moment he was so stunned by the dreadful din and confusion as to be incapable of action, but the next he had reached a small group in the front of the house, from which came the most agonizing groans and exclamations.

The light of the flames, which were now completely surounding the homestead, fell upon the faces of the farmer and Mr. Heatherbridge—the former crying and wringing his hands, the latter roaming to and fro with helpless painful anxiety.

As Leigh ran up, the farmer turned his face, which was contracted with anguish, and cried:

"My child! Oh, save my lass! Let the house go, but save my lass!"

Muriel in there!

"Where is she?" thundered Leigh in the old man's ear.

"There! Save her—save her!" cried the distracted father, pointing to Muriel's window and sinking on his knees.

Leigh slipped off his coat and sprang toward the flames.

A shout of warning and terror rose from the throng.

"Come back! It's madness! You'll be burned and suffocated, man! Come back!"

He plunged into the seething, hissing mass of flame.

They saw him as he sank in the blaze and smoke, a cry of horror, echoed by a dull shriek from the father, mingled with the crackling of the flames.

Mr. Heatherbridge sank upon a bench and hid his face in his hands, miserably helpless.

Suddenly a shout, half of terror, half of encouragement, brought him to his feet, and he saw two figures—those of Muriel and the man who had gone to her rescue—in the middle of the doorway.

The next moment he ran up, in time to see the father clasp his rescued daughter to his breast, sobbing like a child.

"Where is he— where is he?" he gasped. "Let me see the man who has given me my lass's life!"

A dozen hands, pushed a blackened fire-singed figure before him.

The farmer held out his hand, but suddenly fell back, white and breathless.

"Wynter Leigh!" he exclaimed.

"Wynter Leigh!" gasped Mr. Heatherbridge, while the crowd caught the name and sent it round.

"Aye," said the scorched, blackened lips. "I am Wynter Leigh, Mr Heatherbridge, and I am back in time to give you your wife."

The farmer clasped Muriel with a hand of steel, but remained speechless for a moment, then groaned.

"Miserable man!" he cried. "My poor lass, I've got thee. Heaven be praised, but I've lost thy dowry!"

He had forgotten in the stupor of the moment that such a being as Wynter Leigh existed. And, in the pangs of avarice which seized him when he remembered that he had lost the ten thousand pounds, forgot ever to be grateful for his daughter's rescued life.

"A hundred pounds to any man who will bring me the tin box out of my room. Two hundred pounds! A thousand pounds! It's my lass's dowry!"

"Her dowry!" said Leigh, with a short, hoarse laugh; "come, Mr. Heatherbridge, that's worth saving. Will you try a venture for that, or shall I Suppose I complete the gift, and make you a present of wife, dowry and all!"

And laughing scornfully in the weak man's face, he ran towards the house again.

A cry, full of intense, overflowing agony from Muriel did not stop him but brought his blackened face round to her with a look which none who saw it can ever forget, and the next moment he had plunged into the dense smoke for the second time.

The excitement now was intense All was forgotten save that within that furnace was a brave, true-hearted man, who had risked his life for a second time and for no other reason than to save the money intended for the benefit of the man who had stolen the woman he loved.

Not a man spoke, but all waited—one—two—three minutes.

Ah! there is something.

Crash! crash!

The huge oaken rafters split and fell!

Then a figure was seen standing upon the charred framework of the window ledge.

Then half a dozen of the bravest darted forward with a tarpaulin and stretched it beneath him, shouting to him to jump for his life.

* * * * * * *

The day broke, and the sun fell upon the scorched face of the hero of

He was lying motionless, but awake, his hands, blackened and the night.

blistered, stretched upon the coverlet, his breast bandaged, and his thick hair singed and charred.

So great was the pain that he dared not open his lips for fear of uttering the groans which he stifled between his clenched teeth.

He had been carried there—to his old room—by the tender, careful hands of men who would have died for him, and who were now massed beneath his pillow, waiting to catch a glimpse of the doctor's face.

Before the day had gone he was happily unconscious of his agony, and was raving in dilirium, calling on Heaven to save his Muriel, and fighting with his hands through walls of flame.

Then a white-clad figure with a tearful face hovered round his bed, with lips that murmured prayer for him and longed to kiss his face.

In the morning he awoke, weak and exhausted, but conquering, and the first object his eyes saw were Farmer Holt and beautiful Muriel leaning over him.

"Thank Heaven!" he said. "I dreamed you were lost, after all," and he shuddered. "Where is Mr. Heatherbridge—your husband?"

The old man, who had aged ten years in appearance during the excitement of those few fearful hours, answered him:

"Why, my lass has no husband yet, Maester Leigh, and she's come to ask your pardon and be one for her."

The sick man raised himself upon his arm and stared at him.

"Not married!" he breathed.

"No, nor won't be till you get better," said the old man. "And not then if we get our deserts."

"Do you mean," said Leigh, trembling, "that you will give her to me?"

"I mean that I hold her yours, seeing that you saved her life and her money, while the man who ought to have done it stood by like a ninny. She's yours, Maester Leigh—that is, if so be as you will explain one thing."

Wynter Leigh nodded, but he did not speak or remove his eyes from the loved head beside him, and to which his hand was wandering longingly.

"I want you to tell me who that fine lady was that came down here after you," and the old man's brow contracted.

Wynter Leigh shook his head, then smiled suddenly.

"Ah!" he said, with a world of meaning. "That was my cousin, who came from Australia to bring me news that would have been as precious as rain in droughts if it had not come too late. She brought me word that my uncle had died and left me thirty thousand pounds and an Australian farm."

"She did?" exclaimed the old man, his eyes sparkling.

"And now may I have her?" asked Leigh, with the eagerness of a boy; and, without waiting for an answer, he laid his hands upon the bowed head.

"Take her, and a wicked old man's blessing, too," muttered Farmer Holt, and he trudged from the room.

"Muriel," Wynter whispered.

She raised her face, all flushed with the light of joy, and her lips sought his hand.

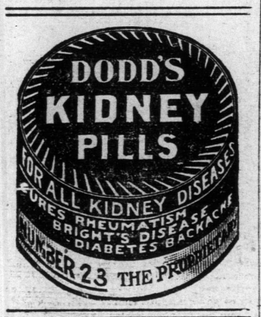
"No, no!" he said hastily. "Not till it is well, Muriel."

But she took both hands tenderly and kissed them fervently.

* * * * * * *

The Howe knows craven-hearted Mr. Heatherbridge no more; he has flown, dismayed and yanquished by no mightier a giant than simple Jaffer, who has returned to Goody, and who is always willing to explain how, while he took Mr. Leigh's letter to Muriel, he met Mr. Heatherbridge, who, with great dexterity, managed to change the letter for a tradesman's circular and so deceive Muriel, who received the flowery announcement as a meaningless kindness of poor Jaffer, and little guessed that it had been palmed off on him as the letter he had been sent to deliver.

TH END.



On Second Thought.

BY JAY E. HOUSE.

It costs a circus $500 to show in our town. But it hasn't been so many years since the circuses got a good deal of their money in the same way.

The band at Milliken, Colo., wants a tuba player. Fat men take notice.

After a man is 35 or 40 he carefully scrutinizes every piece of bait he sees for the purpose of locating the hook.

A good deal of time is wasted in teaching dogs to turn back somersaults.

A man's salary should be based on the amount he can spend without making a fool of himself.

Suggestion to boys: An orator gets his picture in the papers every four years. That of a good third baseman appears nearly every day.

What has become of the old fashioned woman who said: "His father's overcoat wouldn't make him a pair of pants."

Nearly every man has an dea that if he stays away there won't be any party.

Fletcherize, if you care to, but keep it in mind that the general public is little interested in the number of times you chew each mouthful of food.

A prune is just what it priends to be, but canned apricots often come upon the table wearing a disguise.

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