

HASTY CONCLUSIONS.

"Good morning."  
 "Good morning."  
 "Any success since I saw you yesterday?"  
 "None."  
 "Then don't hang about any longer; join the service at once. Why, man, if you only keep square, you'll be sure of a commission in a few years. Turn in here, and have a drop of something."  
 So Walter Barnard turned in, and, with a glassful of ale, took the Queen's shilling, to serve in an infantry regiment for a term of twelve years.  
 About three weeks previous, Walter Barnard enjoyed the benefits of a good home. Parents, indeed, he had none, being left an orphan at an early age. The loss, however, had been supplied by a kind and independent guardian, who gave him a fair education, and started him in one of the best houses in the City, where he gained the confidence of the principals, thus satisfying the mind of Mr. Maylie, his guardian, to whom, besides feeling grateful for the benefits he had bestowed upon him, he paid the respect due to a kind foster-father.  
 Saturday till Monday was always spent in the family of Mr. Maylie, which consisted, besides his guardian, of Grace, a young girl first approaching womanhood, an only child, on whom her parent lavished his whole love and care, her mother having died shortly after giving her birth; and three servants, who had lived with their present master years before he had retired from business.  
 As a natural consequence in such cases, Walter and Grace became inseparable companions, till one evening—they had been reading Tennyson's "Enoch Arden"—they stood revealed to each other in the light of lovers. Not that the discovery had come upon them for the first time, but the surroundings and influences of that evening somewhat prematurely disclosed the state of their hearts.  
 "And now Gracey, darling," said Walter, as they prepared to separate for the evening, "I must request you to keep our secret until I obtain preferment; then I will ask your father's consent to our engagement."  
 Grace at first demurred but her lover's solicitations induced her to accede to his request.  
 The next day being Sunday, Grace, who never held a secret before, fancied while she was at church the whole congregation knew of her engagement to Walter, and it was only on his laughing and reasoning away her foolish thoughts, that reassurance came.  
 "My dear little Gracey," he said, "should your father refuse his sanction, we must not despair, but work and strive on to win his approbation."  
 It was the custom to have breakfast an hour earlier on Monday, so as to enable Walter to reach the City in time for business; and, on such occasions, he invariably had the pleasure of Grace's society alone, Mr. Maylie not rising early enough to join them.  
 One morning, Grace not appearing, and Walter fancying he would be late, inquired of the servant whether Miss Grace had not made her appearance.  
 "Oh, sir," she replied, "Miss Grace is in her room, crying about something master has said to her. There's the bell again—he's in a awful temper!"  
 Walter mused to himself on the cause of the outburst, and concluded that Grace, unable to keep the secret, told her father, who he considered would look upon him as ungrateful for stealing his daughter's love.  
 The servant here re-entered, and informed him Mr. Maylie desired his presence immediately.  
 On knocking at the door, a harsh voice responded "Come in!" and Walter saw Mr. Maylie himself pacing the room.  
 "So sir," he exclaimed, as Walter crossed the threshold, "this is the return for all my kindness to you!"  
 "Believe me, sir, I am sorely grieved. Allow me to explain."  
 "Explain! What can you explain, you ingrate, to treat me in this manner?"  
 Walter felt his blood rise. He loved Grace with the ardor of a young and generous nature, purely and devotedly. Her father might object to their union, but he felt that his guardian was not justified in applying to him the epithet that he did; and replied, "Mr. Maylie, I feel deeply grateful for all your past kindness. I know I have much to be thankful for; but if I did, in an unguarded moment, commit an indiscretion, I will make atonement. Believe me, my motives were not dishonorable."  
 "Dishonorable!" said the guardian. "Why, the very act shows unprincipled motives. No! sir, I will no longer shelter a viper beneath my roof! Elsewhere you may seek protection. I need not say that you have no longer a situation."  
 "Very well, sir; may you never repent your unjust and cruel treatment!"  
 Walter, as he left the house, felt his heart turned to gall and wormwood. With a hastily-written note to Grace, whom he did not endeavor to see, bidding her farewell, and giving her every wish for future happiness, he went forth to the world.  
 Like others left alone, he discovered there are times when no amount of individual exertion will secure to the unknown a living.  
 Walter traversed the great city for several days without success; so we find him, at the commencement of this story, cousing, in

return for food and clothing, to shoulder a rifle for his country's good.  
 A week afterwards he was at the depot of his regiment.  
 The new life, so novel to him in its aspects, and the bustle of barrack routine, for a time exercised a beneficial influence upon his spirits; and although the majority of his comrades were low and coarse, still he found them possessed of many sterling qualities, which caused him to overlook their faults.  
 On first taking up his berth in the barrack, he was the subject of quizzing and banter, the rank and file never failing to punish those who set themselves above them, on account of birth and education.  
 Walter's quick observation detected this, and he reasoned, correctly to himself, that the wisest plan would be to sink his own individuality; and when they found how readily he performed the menial duties of the barrack-room, and other fatigues incidental to the private soldier, he rose considerably in their estimation, more especially when he assisted them in their letter-writing. In fact, to a great number he was the means of many an anxious parent hearing news from their "soldier" son.  
 At the end of six months, he was ordered to form one of a draft to join the service companies in South Africa.  
 After a long and monotonous voyage of eighty days, he reached that country. Then it was Walter experienced the hardships of a soldier's life, having eight days' march to the headquarters of his regiment, stationed at King William's Town, over steep and rugged roads, under a scorching African sun; but he arrived in good health and spirits.  
 Some months subsequently, rumours came that the regiment was recalled, and Walter determined, come what would, he must endeavour to see Grace, although he felt she could be to him nothing more than a stranger.  
 One evening, at dusk, he was warned to proceed early the next morning to an adjacent fort, some miles distant, to bring back a deserter. On his arrival at his destination, he was detained two days on account of the man's sickness. To kill time, he was listlessly turning over some old copies of the *Times* the officers of the detachment had given the men, when the following advertisement, in the second column, startled him:—  
 "Should this meet the eye of W. B., he is earnestly requested to return to his home. All will be fully explained and atoned for by Grace and her father."  
 What could it possibly mean?  
 The mail for England was going out from the detachment that day; and, writing a short letter, he briefly indicated his present position. With renewed hope, his half-buried love for Grace returned stronger than ever.  
 Six long weeks, and the long-looked-for letter came. A loving epistle from Grace set forth the cause of her father's harshness.  
 "And now," the letter went on to say, "you must know, the morning you left, he received a communication, stating some bonds were missing, and a forged cheque had been found in your desk. Imagine, then, what must have been father's feelings! You were innocent, as the sequel proved; for the crime was eventually traced home to one of the clerks, who has since paid the penalty of his dishonesty, by penal servitude. And now, dear Walter, pray come home at once; father will atone, in every way, for his unjust conduct to you."  
 Then the usual conclusion caused the heart of Walter to beat happily. The image of his soul's idol—the faithful Grace—rose before him, and made him eager to start for home; but the usage of the service rendered that for some few weeks impossible. However, he wrote home at once, thanking her for her loving letter, and trusting he should have the happiness of again beholding her ere many months had elapsed.  
 "Wind blows cold across the marsh to-night, sir!"  
 "It does; but—by Jove!—they are not cold over there! Look how that fire rages!"  
 Walter was travelling express from Liverpool to Burnside. The words of his two fellow-travellers caused him to look round in the direction indicated. The next station would be within a few hundred yards of his home, and he was picturing to himself the happy and smiling face of Grace, ready to give him welcome, on the platform.  
 About half a mile ahead was the old house where he had spent so many happy days, fast being devoured by the raging element. Never did train seem to go so slowly; but it went on its even course, and, in a few minutes more, Walter Barnard was rushing wildly across the fields.  
 There was no mistake. Too truly the flames were playing greedily around the home of his childhood. The engines seemed to be of little avail; and as he approached the scene of conflagration, he could plainly discern a man descending a ladder, bearing in his arms, apparently, the inanimate form of a woman.  
 Walter felt it to be Grace thus rescued from so dreadful a death, and he offered up a heartfelt prayer for her preservation.  
 And now a shout arose from the crowd assembled, and Walter saw that the ladder, burning some distance from the top, had given way, but the man, with his burden, had by this time reached the ground in safety.  
 Darting forward, he beheld, not the face of her he loved, but that of a total stranger.  
 The words of the fireman, who had just de-

seeded, came upon his ear like a death-knell. "I couldn't find the young lady anywhere."  
 "See!" shouted people in the excited crowd. "Up there—look!"  
 Above, in the topmost room, appeared Grace Maylie, signalling to those below to save her from the imminent danger in which she stood.  
 A revulsion of feeling now came over Walter Barnard. He was comparatively calm and collected, and felt, if he could not save Grace, at least he could perish with her.  
 "Hi! you there, bring that ladder round here."  
 The loud, clear tones, so distinct from the frantic shouts of the crowd, caused a moment's hush, and curious faces turned round to look at the soldier, before unnoticed.  
 "Now, then, look sharp!"  
 The men obeyed wondering of what avail would be the ladder, that would reach little more than half-way up.  
 "Now some rope!"  
 When it was brought, Walter, securing one end to his arm, coiled the remainder round his shoulder quickly, and ascended the ladder, the top of which was fixed near a water-spout, running at an acute angle for the distance of about eighteen feet.  
 To climb along the spout with hands and feet was not a matter of so much difficulty as contending with the rugged brickwork, that tore his hands at every fresh grasp.  
 Meanwhile the crowd below were hazarding conjectures as to the durability of the pipe to bear the strain; and now the intensity of their excitement was increased as the climber came to a pause.  
 Walter, in placing the ladder, had overlooked the fact of the pipe abruptly terminating, by passing through the brickwork, and yet a distance of about eight feet more had to be overcome, and the flames, which had hitherto kept from this part of the building, were now swiftly approaching.  
 Grace had recognised Walter, in spite of his uniform; but the dread of his falling should she speak paralyzed her.  
 "Grace, darling!" he exclaimed, as he cast his eyes upward, and saw the long, earnest look of love that came down to him; "listen, and keep calm. When I throw up the rope, you must try and seize it."  
 The crowd watched with breathless anxiety at this critical juncture.  
 Slipping the coil of rope off his wrist, so as to grasp it with his hand, lowering himself to the extent of his arm, and letting go the pipe with his right hand, he dexterously threw up the rope, which Grace succeeded in catching.  
 Again pulling himself up with both arms, he told Grace to wind the rope several times around a beam that protruded near the window. Another minute and Walter stood beside her.  
 "Bear up darling, for a few minutes, and you will be safe."  
 Walter rushed into an adjacent room, and quickly brought sheets, some of which he attached to the rope to lengthen it. Then turning to Grace, and kissing her, he said "Now, Gracey, you must shut your eyes for two minutes when I place you in this blanket—then you will be safe."  
 Letting the rope slip over the beam, Walter was enabled to lower her in safety, and descended himself, immediately Grace had been received below, amid the excited cheers of the crowd.  
 It was several days ere Grace had overcome the terrors of the fire; meantime, Walter learned from his guardian the details of the anxious search that had been made for him on the discovery of the real culprit.  
 Three weeks afterwards, a quiet wedding was celebrated in the little village of Burnside, in which Grace and her soldier-lover bore the principal parts; and both parent and children were taught a lesson in coming to "hasty conclusions" in matters of great moment.

tical. Plunge the most clever and excellent piece of royalty into the literary and artistic element, and he is nearly always uncomfortable or intensely unappreciative. Said the late Austrian Emperor gravely to Liszt, who had been playing before him, "I have heard Hirtz, and Thalberg, and Chopin, but I have never seen anyone perspire like you." When Landseer went to Portugal, the King sent for him in order to compliment the great painter of animals. "Ah, Sir Edwin," said Royalty, "I am so glad to see you. I am so fond of beasts!"  
 A VISION AND A WARNING.—I was at a wedding many years ago, and there was the usual festivities consequent upon such an occasion; but I noticed that the bridegroom's face wore a restless expression, and that he looked now and again over his shoulder like one expecting some one, and that one not a welcome guest. His name was George Cleugh—a fine, manly, strapping fellow, not long out of his teens. The bride was a winsome country wench and she strove by light-hearted gaiety to dispel the gloom from her husband-elect's brow. I discovered the cause of the bridegroom's gloom from one of the guests present. It seemed that he had for three nights successively dreamed a fearful dream. In his vision a brother who for many years had been lost to sight, having wandered to foreign parts suddenly appeared on his wedding night, and in a solemn tone had warned the lover-husband of his death at twelve o'clock that evening. We waited, some of us with superstitious dread, and others with marked unbelief, the advent of the hour of twelve. It struck, and at that moment a fearful change became apparent in the bridegroom. His face became deadly pale, and he shivered as with ague. He took a few steps forward, and cried aloud, as if to some invisible person, "I come! I come!" and then fell dead on the floor.  
 Can men of science and philosophy explain this occurrence, of which I was an eye-witness? Is there a subtle chain binding the finite and infinite so closely as to amount to foreknowledge through the medium of dreams? I heard afterwards that his brother had died years before in Chill, though none were aware of it before the hapless bridegroom's decease.  
 CHARLES DICKENS OVERTAKEN.—The life of Charles Dickens has many points of interest; his death gives a most salutary lesson. An eminent medical writer gives a short summary of the various shocks to the system of Dickens, which naturally weakened him and predisposed his frame to the paralysis which ended the great *Illustrator's* earthly career. On leaving the platform after reading "Copperfield," so laborious, earnest, and pathetic were the exertions made by Dickens, his whole soul being thrown into the work, that the pulsations of his heart numbered 96, being 24 in excess of the ordinary pulse, 72; after "Marigold," 99; "Sikes and Nancy," 118; "Oliver Twist," 124. Thus, while his audiences were rejoicing over talented histrionic display, the efforts of the reader himself were driving nails into his coffin, breaking down the nervous system.  
 A SCOTCH PARADISE.—Otago is sacred to Scotchmen. Here is a story which, besides being good, is true in illustration of the fact. The other day tenders were called for some public work in Otago. One Macpherson was successful. Mr. Macpherson was accordingly invited to attend and complete his contract. To the amazement of all the officials, a full-blooded Chinaman with a noble pig-tail put in an appearance. "Where's Mr. Macpherson?" asked the clerk. "Me!" replied John. "How came you to be called Macpherson?" "Oh, nobody get nothing in Otago if he not a Mac," answered the unabashed Celestial.  
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 MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS.  
 PERFORATED STAMPS.—A correspondent writes: "I have lately been informed of how the perforation of postage and receipt stamps came into force. It would appear that a person who was commonly known about London by the name of 'Fire' Fowler—simply from his doing the fires for the London papers—wanted to tear a piece of paper into some particular shape. He had no knife or scissors, so he hit upon the plan of perforating the paper in numberless holes with a pin, thus enabling him to dis sever the paper. Some one seeing the process at once seized the idea, and to this we are indebted for this clever invention."  
 CLEANLINESS RUN MAD.—That a love of cleanliness is sometimes the ruling passion in the feminine heart was never more strongly exemplified than when a poor fellow in our town met with a serious accident which necessitated his being carried home by some of the by-standers. The tidings of his condition having been gently broken to his wife, she met the sad procession at the door, and with clasped hands and streaming eyes bewailed herself after this fashion—"Oh, my poor old man!—oh, my poor old man! Will he ever get over it? Can't ye bring him in the back way, instead of over my clean doorstep?"  
 ROYAL APPRECIATIONS.—The Prince of Wales made a little speech at the Royal Academy dinner the other day—a speech kindly and gramma-

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