

Aylmer's Victory.

(Maggie Fearn, Author of 'The Flag of Truce,' etc., etc., in the 'Alliance News'.)

Guy Aylmer stood by the side of the silver tarn, watching the countless tiny springs which trickled melodiously from between black ragged rocks, and hurried onward in limpid streamlets to empty themselves in the bed of the tarn. What a business they made of it! Always hurrying on and on, day and night, intent upon losing their identity in that larger bed of fathomless transparent water, but never succeeding in their apparent effort to exhaust themselves. For were they not perennial, having infinite resources in some hidden cavern that never saw the light of day? And were they not a curious interpretation of Aylmer himself? The young man seemed to think so; and, as he stood silently watching, he was tracing out this fancied resemblance. He was something like that monopolizing silver tarn, which received those incessantly running streamlets whether it wished to or not; and the inflow which he recognized as focussing to him was an endless persistent babbling string of thoughts.

He had come to that Yorkshire village bordering a stretch of wild moorland, all remote from the press and throng of the ever-hurrying world, that he might think about his strange life-crisis, and fight his battle in solitude; and on that mellow autumn day he stood by the great tarn and meditated.

Aylmer was young and good-looking, four-and twenty years to a day, and with his future before him. More than one, having climbed a rugged bit of moorland, and passing onward over the purple heather that spread itself out like a carpet, aromatic and beautiful, turned a second time to gaze silently on the absorbed thinker, and went their way with a vague wonder momentarily aroused why he should be so apparently indifferent to all his surroundings, and why his face appeared so moody and yet defiant. What issues had he at stake? What mysterious possibilities hedged him around?

He let the minutes steal by, and still kept his fascinated watch by the silver tarn; and then, still watching, he went carefully over in his excited fancy each point bearing upon the decision which had been forced upon him; and with careful alertness analyzed each and then he grouped them as an entirety, that he might again give himself the opportunity to judge the matter impartially; and, though the subject held for him and others the strongest arguments which might mar or bless—factors for good or evil—the chief facts were few.

Aylmer was all the family of his father's house. Brothers and sisters he had none, and his mother idolized him. His father had been one of those men who, as a class, see fortune pass by, and could never allure her to stop at his door. A gentleman by birth, a solicitor by profession, a poor man in reality, his dreams centred in his son; and it was Guy who must work out the family fortunes. This happy consummation seemed for a great while in the far distance; but as the years passed and Guy

grew from a slim youth into a well-developed man, the aspect of things changed. Mr. Aylmer had a brother, Eustace, 'who had done well for himself,' to borrow a proverbial phrase from the world-wise; and he began to evince a distinct interest in his nephew and his nephew's views of life. Eustace Aylmer had married late in life and had no family; and what more natural than that as time went on his brother should begin to cherish a hope that he would do 'something handsome' for Guy? There were a good many comfortable thousands in the bank to Eustace Aylmer's credit, and the big brewery was a fine representative of some thousands yet in embryo; so what wonder that the father should be alert and eager with the thought that by making advances to his brother he was furthering Guy's best interests? Anyway, so it was, and in a dim sense, without words being plainly spoken, Guy understood all this, and for a time tacitly acquiesced. Then with more precipitancy than Mr. Aylmer had dared to expect, his brother Eustace had made an offer—or, perhaps, it would be far more correct to say had declared his intentions respecting his plans for Guy; not imagining for so much as a moment that Guy, any more than the parents, would hesitate to accept them with a due sense of the benefits which would pecuniarily accrue. Guy should go to his uncle, and become initiated into the great and desirable art of beer-making, with a prospect of partnership in the near future, and a hint—in a confidential whisper—of succeeding his uncle at some far distant time, when Mr. Eustace Aylmer should propose to take his ease and leave the productive brewery in the then competent hands of his nephew.

Two years earlier all this would have been as the poetry of life to Guy Aylmer. It would have rung as sweetly upon his ears as it did upon his father's, and he would have packed his Gladstone, and gone to his stool in the office appertaining to the brewery and declared himself to be in clover. But two years had altered his outlook upon life and its possibilities. The change had been wrought in this way.

Two years before he had gone on a visit to the home of a chum of his, who had studied with him in the same classes; and while there, light-hearted and 'debonair' and bent on making holiday, his friend's brother had been brought home to die. Older by a brief three years only, the young man was early reaping the bitter harvest which folly and drink had hurried into fruition. Guy had stayed on, impelled by sympathy and the earnest solicitations of his friend; but for countless weeks there had afterwards continued to ring in his ears the shrieks and the curses which penetrated from the awful enclosure of the sick room; and when all was over, and the victim of the Nemesis of alcohol had been laid in his shamed and dishonored grave, he had seen the proud head of the father bowed to the very dust with grief, and the mother broken down under the anguish of a bleeding heart. So Guy had returned home sickened with a brief glimpse at the misery and sin of the tempter's power; and he had shuddered when the splendor of his Uncle Eustace's wealth was spoken of. A rich brewer! Fugh! the thought nauseated him. He vowed

that he would beg on the street sooner than build up a fortune by manufacturing drunkards.

As time passed, however, the vividness of the terrible drink tragedy which he had witnessed became blurred, and he had ceased to dwell on it so constantly until there came upon him, with startling suddenness, his uncle's offer; and it broke up the smooth surface of his enforced calm, and awoke from slumber a thousand antagonisms which he had almost thought dead.

It was then that Guy Aylmer surprised himself almost as much as he surprised his father by fighting desperately against what everyone who know of it called his 'fairy fortune.' There was a hot argument, a long sharp quarrel, and then an estrangement; following upon all of which, as Guy would not yield, came the command to take a fortnight's run into a strange country, bury his ghosts with his feud, and return home with a steady head and cool heart, ready to be made a rich man and one of fortune's favorites: in other words, a brewer.

And Guy, grateful for a reprieve and a quiet interval to put his mental home in order, started for Yorkshire, and so found himself by the silver tarn. But his thoughts were in a tangle still. He told himself he was sacrificing his future for a passing fad; that his emotion and not his reason had been wrought upon and excited, and that what he had to do was to pull himself together and present a sensible front to the world. But the trouble was he found he could not do it.

He might possibly have eluded his conscience if there had been no other consideration than those named, but another and a more vitally tender one stood picture-like before him, and his heart cried out against itself as he grasped the bitterness of it all. Yet the very sweetness and tender goodness of his vision helped him to keep his conscience from a living death—at least for a time. Aileen Adair, beautiful, regal Aileen, seem to hover about his path; her face, reposeful and perfect, was before his eyes, gaze where he would. He had never told Aileen that he loved her. How dared he? Penniless and proud as he was; sheltered in the guardianship of a wealthy home as she was, how could he speak? But love has a language apart from words, and, like Tennyson's landscape painter, Guy Aylmer might have said—

'If my heart by signs can tell,
Maiden, I have watched thee daily
And methinks thou lov'st me well.'

Had he been less true and honorable, this love would have been an added argument for yielding; but if his uncle's fortune were to make it easier to win Aileen, suppose at the same time it should also make it easier in the future to break her heart? Better, Guy told himself bitterly, better they two should never wed than that Aileen should be his and then live to rue the day she had married him. Aileen would probably curl her red lip ever so slightly with a fine scorn if he were to refuse to be his uncle's heir for some absurd quixotic notion; but he would not see it. If he listened to his conscience he would not look upon her face again.

Thus the days passed and found him for