

## HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")

## CHAPTER XXVIII.—CUT OFF WITH A SHILLING.

Never was a little maid-of-all-work more excited than Anne on the night on which her mistress was expected home from Torquay. A secret—quite a great secret—had been burning a hole in her heart ever since Monday, and to-night she expected this secret to result in something grand. Anne felt that the days of poverty for the family were over; the days for scraping and toiling were at an end. The uncle from Australia would give her mistress everything that money could buy; he must be a very rich man indeed, for had he not given her a sovereign? Whoever before had even dreamed of giving little hard-worked Anne a sovereign? It meant unheard-of wealth to this childish soul of sixteen; it filled her with delight, had, carefully put away in a little gingham bag, it lay golden and warm now against her heart.

But Anne's honest little heart had another and less selfish cause for rejoicing. It was she who was bringing this uncle and niece to meet again; but for her prompt interference Daisy and her great-uncle would never have discovered their relationship; but for her the uncle, so blessed with riches, would not have known where to seek for his niece. In a big place like London was it likely, was it at all likely, that they would meet? No, no, he would look for his poor dead sister for a while, and then go back to Australia, and perhaps give his money to some one else. Anne felt that the family owed her a great deal; but she had full confidence in them, and felt sure that in their rise in life they would not forget her. Missis could keep plenty of servants now she would have a cook and a housemaid, and probably some one to help in the nursery. This was what a family whom Anne thought immensely wealthy, did in a house just round the corner. In that case she, Anne, would be promoted to the proud position of head nurse—head nurse with wages—well, say wages as high as £13 a year. Even to think of being raised to so dazzling a height made Anne's head a trifle giddy. On the strength of it, and all the riches in prospect, she became quite reckless in proposing missis's tea. She put out the best table-linen, and all the silver the house possessed, and she filled a great dish with water-cresses, and had hot buttered scones and a seed-cake and eggs—rather fresh for London—and finally half a pound of sliced ham.

She was standing contemplating her well-laden board when the cab drove up, and out stepped her master and mistress and little Harold—Harold looking white and thin even yet, but still with an altogether improved expression on his little face. Anne was so excited, knowing all that was to come, that she caught Harold up in her arms and kissed him, which proceeding he bore with more patience than appreciation. Then ensued bustle and confusion and pleasant excitement. Charlotte Home felt so well and rested from her change, her husband was so delighted to have her back, and little Harold was so manifestly better, that Anne flew about nearly wild with delight. "They'll be a dead, dead happier by-and-by, and 'tis 'ill long of 'er Anne," she kept whispering to herself.

And now, tea being over, and Harold tucked up comfortably once more in his own little cot in the nursery, the small maid began to be devoured with impatience for the expected ring. It came at last; Anne with her own hands unfastened the door, showed the rich uncle into the dining-room, and danced up-stairs to find her mistress. Charlotte Home was unpacking a trunk in her own room.

"What do you say, Anne? A gentleman is down-stairs, and wants to see me? But I am so dreadfully busy. What does he want? Do you think he has come about the drawing-rooms? They will be vacant next week."

"I don't think 'tis about the drawing-rooms," answered Anne as demurely as she could speak. "I haven't put no card 'tup yet. Please, 'em, he looks a most benevolent gentleman, and he axed for you, yer 'low'n self, 'em, most partic'lar 'bout."

"I wish he had not come this evening, everything is in such confusion. Anne, are you sure your master is out?"

"Yes, 'em, sure and certain; and of you

please, 'em, it wor fur you as the strange gen'leman axed."

"Well, I suppose I must go down. He may have heard of the drawing-rooms through Mr. Hinton, and it would not do to lose a good lodger."

Charlotte went to the looking-glass to smooth her hair. She felt travel-stained and dusty; she was only a worn, pale-looking woman at the best of times. She ran down-stairs, and Anne's heart beat as she heard the dining-room door shut behind her.

Mr. Wilson—Sandy Wilson as he preferred to be called—had got himself up with due care for his interview with his niece. He had a perfectly new and shining broad-cloth suit on, a diamond pin was in his necktie, and a very massive gold chain could be seen dangling from his vest pocket. His full face, always florid, was now flushed with extra color from agitation. Yes, Daisy might be dead, but the next best thing was to see Daisy's child. When the door opened he came forward eagerly with outstretched hands. A pale, slight, cold looking woman had come in. He drew back in dismay. She showed but too plainly by one swift glance that she thought him a stranger, and a vulgar one. He owned to himself that he looked at her with a kind of shock. This Daisy Wilson's daughter! This pale, dark, thin woman, the child of that little, bright, curly-haired, golden-headed sister, whose face was as the sun, whose gay, rounded figure he had seen fitting before his eyes during all the weary years of his exile? It could scarcely be possible. Perhaps it was not possible?

"I have come to see Mrs. Home," he began.

"And I am Mrs. Home," answered the distinct, quiet voice.

No, there was no hope; his Daisy's daughter was not in the least like her. Well, she was at least her child. He must take what comfort he could out of the relationship without the likeness.

"You are Daisy Wilson's child?" he said, and now again his hands were outstretched, and the smiles had returned to his face.

But Mrs. Home, completely in the dark, rather startled than otherwise, made no gesture of welcome. Her hands were not held out, her lips remained unsmiling.

"My mother's name was Wilson," she admitted. "Yes, it was Daisy Wilson. I did not recognize it at first, as of course she was never called it to me."

"Ay, ay, likely enough; but she was never anything else to me, just always little bright Daisy Wilson. I thought I'd find her before me, something as she used to be, a bit stoutened, perhaps, but not greatly altered. I have pictured her for the last six-and-twenty years just as I saw her last, the bonniest bit of a thing the sun ever shone on."

"You knew my mother then?" said Charlotte.

"Knew her, lass, knew her! good heavens, what next? Did Daisy never speak to you about me? I don't believe it. Before I left it was Sandy, Sandy, from morning to night. It was not in her to forget. Tell me, lass, did you never hear of your mother's big brother, Sandy Wilson, who went to Australia?"

Charlotte's eyes began to dilate. "My mother often spoke of this brother," she said slowly. "My mother would have liked to have met you had you known him. She never fretted for any one so much, except when my father died. My mother's brother is dead for many, many years. They are together now."

"In spirit, lass, in spirit, I doubt not, but not otherwise. Why, is it possible you don't know me? Aren't you prepared? Did not your little lass tell you? I am your mother's brother. I am alive as you see; I am Sandy Wilson."

"You!" Charlotte looked at him half incredulous, half pained; but then a sudden joy came over her, she forgot the vulgarity in the love for her dead mother which still shone out of those honest blue eyes. She glanced up again; those eyes were her mother's eyes; instantly they acted as open sesame to her heart. She held out her own hands now and her eyes filled with tears. "Forgive me, Uncle Sandy, if you are indeed he. I did not know you, I could not know you; I have believed you dead for many, many years. But you have a look of my mother. She would welcome you to-night, so I must in her name."

"You will kiss me in her name, my lassie? Ah! that's good; 'tis long since I kissed one of my own. Yes, I've come back. I never did die, you see, though I knew that the report had reached England. I let it be, I did not trouble to contradict it."

"But it was wrong of you, Uncle Sandy. You said you loved my mother, and that report of your death gave her terrible pain."

"I am sorry for it, lass; I never guessed about the pain, though I might have thought of it, sweet soul; but I knew she was married to a very rich man. I was poor, so poor as to know what hunger meant, I thought she could do without me. I went up to the bush and stayed there until I had made my fortune. After a time I got accustomed to knowing that every one in England would think me dead. I used to

laugh in my sleeve at the surprise I meant to give Daisy when I walked in rich some day. Well, well, what an old fool I made of myself! I never once thought of her dying. She is dead, and I am left; there's no one to welcome me back, after all."

"She has been dead for over six years now; but come to the fire, uncle. I welcome you in my mother's name and my children will love you. Now you must sit there and I will ring for Anne to bring in some tea."

After this the uncle and niece talked together for some time. Anne brought in the tea, and looked at them with eyes rendered round and large from excitement. They both nodded to her, for both felt pleased. Uncle Sandy had discovered that his niece had a voice like her mother, if not a face. It was delicious to him to sit so close to his own flesh and blood, and Charlotte who had heard of Uncle Sandy during all her early days, who had seen her mother's eyes filled with tears when she mentioned him, felt now that for her mother's sake she could not make enough of this newly recovered relation. His rough, honest, kindly nature was finding its way too, very straight, to her heart. There was nothing innately common or vulgar about Uncle Sandy. Charlotte was a keen observer of character, and she detected the ring of the true metal within.

"To think I should have mistaken my uncle for some one going to see after the drawing-rooms!" she said after a pause.

"Ay, lass, you looked fairly dazed when I came up with my hand stretched out hoping for a kiss," he said; "but no wonder; I never reckoned that that little maid-servant of yours would have told you nothing—nothing whatever. But what is that about drawing-rooms? You don't mean to tell me that you, Daisy Wilson's child, let lodgings?"

The color flew into Charlotte's pale, proud face.

"We do not need all the room in this house, so I generally have some one in the drawing-room," she answered—"the drawing-room and the bedroom beyond."

"Are your rooms free now, Charlotte?"

"No; but in a week they will be."

"Suppose you let the old uncle have them? I will pay any rent you like to ask. The fact is, I have lost my whole heart to that little Daisy of yours. I want to be near the child. I won't spoil her more than I can help."

"Then I was called down to my drawing-room lodger," answered Charlotte with a faint smile.

"Yes, and I don't expect he'll want to leave in a hurry. The fact is I have been so utterly friendless and homeless for such a number of years, that it is nearly as good as finding Daisy to be with her child. But, my dear lass, you will forgive a frank old man asking you a frank question. It's all moonshine about the house being too big for you. These houses are not so very monstrous, to judge by the looks of them. You have three children, so you tell me; if you let two rooms you must be a bit crippled, put as good a face on it as you will."

"We also want the money. The want of the help this brings in, in the matter of rent, is our true reason for letting," replied Charlotte.

"You see, Uncle Sandy, my husband is a clergyman—a clergyman and curate. Such men are never over-burdened with money."

Sandy Wilson had small, penetrating, but very bright blue eyes; they were fixed now earnestly on his niece. He took a glance round the little parlor where they sat. He was an old Australian, accustomed to bush

life, but even he noticed how threadbare was the carpet, how poor and meagre the window-curtains. Charlotte herself, too, how thin and worn she was! Could those pale and hollow cheeks mean insufficient food?

"How old are you, niece Charlotte?" he suddenly demanded.

"I was twenty-five my last birthday."

"Forgive me, my lass, you look very old for that; I should have taken you for thirty. The fact is you are poor. Nothing ages like poverty. And the greater fact remains that it was full time for old Uncle Sandy to come home and prove himself of some use in the world."

"We are poor," answered Charlotte; "we certainly are very poor. But poverty is not the greatest of troubles."

"No, but it puzzles me why you should be poor. When I left my little sister, she had been married about three months to that rich old Mr. Harman. He seemed devoted to her. He had surrounded her with wealth; and he assured me when I came to bid her good-bye, and she put her dear arms round my neck, that my little darling should never want for anything. He was a good old man, ages too old of course for my bright little Daisy. But it seemed better than leaving her as a governess. It was my one comfort when parting with Daisy, to feel that she could never want for anything that money could get her."

"My mother has told me that during my father's life she lived as a rich woman," answered Charlotte.

"That means she did not afterwards. Did the old gentleman die bankrupt? I don't see how he could, for he had retired from business."

"No, my father died a very wealthy man."

"Then he did not leave her well-off? You don't surely mean to tell me, Charlotte Home, that that old man dared to do anything but leave a large sum of money to your pretty young mother and to you? Why, he told me with his own lips that he would make most ample provision for her."

At these words Charlotte's white face grew yet whiter, and a piteous look of terror came into her eyes, but all she said was—

"Nevertheless, after my father's death we were poor."

"Oh! the scoundrel! 'Tis well he's out of Sandy Wilson's power. To think of my Daisy not profiting by his wealth at least. How much did he leave to your mother, Charlotte?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" Here Uncle Sandy sprang to his feet. "Mr. Harman left my Daisy nothing—nothing whatever! Then he did die bankrupt?"

"No, Uncle Sandy, he died rich."

"And her name was not mentioned in the will?"

"No."

"Ah! there was a will. Have you seen it?"

"No; why should I? It all happened long, long ago."

"And your mother never saw the will?"

"I don't think she did."

"Then to whom, may I ask, did he leave all his wealth?"

"You forget, Uncle Sandy, that my father was married before. He had two sons by his first marriage. These sons came in for his fortune. They were—they said they were sorry for my mother, and they settled on her one hundred and fifty pounds a year for her life."

"Ay, I suppose you have got that pittance now?"

"No, it was only for my mother. When she died six years ago it ceased."

Sandy Wilson began to pace up and down the little parlor.

"Nothing left to Daisy. Daisy's name not mentioned in the will. Brothers sorry—pretend to be. Give my Daisy a pittance for her life—nothing to the child. Charlotte, he suddenly stopped in front of his niece, "don't you think you are a good bit of a fool?"

"Perhaps I am, Uncle Sandy. But I never recognized the fact before."

"You believe that story about the will?"

"I tell you the tale as my own mother told it to me."

"Ay, Daisy was always too credulous, a foolish little thing, if you like. But you—you are of different metal. You believe that story?"

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