

# UNCLE DICK;

Or, The Result of Diplomacy and Tact.

## CHAPTER VI.

As a weather prophet Masters proved more reliable than those who fill a like mission on the daily papers.

It rained heavily all the afternoon. His landlady when she brought in his tea remarked that it was pouring cats and dogs—the latter, presumably, of the Skye terrier breed.

A temporary clearance of the weather came about in the evening. Masters was glad; he went to Ivy Cottage. The bungalow-like building was curiously situated in its own square piece of grass land, fronting the sea. The back of the house looked on to the road leading to the railway station a little distance away. Admission to the cottage was gained by doors at back and front of it.

The house agent entrusted with the letting of the place had described it as possessed of advantages not to be passed over lightly. There was one—an unsurpassed convenience in the matter of not missing a train—that certainly was undeniable and evident.

So close was the back of the house to the railway that from the windows an approaching train could be seen in time enough to allow of easy walking to catch it. Masters walked up the gravel path to the front door. Touched the push of the bell. A trim maid-servant responded. He enquired—“Miss Mivvins—is she within?”

The girl started. Hesitated as she looked at him closely—doubtfully—for a moment. Then opened a side door in the hall, requesting him to enter and be seated.

It was a charmingly arranged room to which he was thus introduced. Evidenced woman in every insignificant little detail; her gentle touch was visible in all things. He thought of the touch of one woman in particular.

Miss Mivvins' spirit seemed to have impressed itself in every fold of the curtains; in all the quiet harmony of coloring; in the inexpensive simplicity of the whole—as distinct from cheapness.

Expensive simplicity often stamps the quality of a room; it was not to be seen here. There was nothing cheap about the furnishing; nothing meretricious; nothing to catch the eye. Nothing of the enamel paint and varnish description; all in that apartment was plain and simply what it represented itself to be; its keynote, truth.

Masters was astonished, because he had had no idea that such signs of refinement existed in Wivernsea. But then he knew its lodging houses only, where the great god is Aspinall and an uneasy chair the only attempt at comfort.

He sat some moments waiting. Whilst doing so he thought again of the curious way in which the maid had looked at him. Perhaps Miss Mivvins was in a less comfortable place than he had thought. He had judged by the freedom she enjoyed, that no possible harm could result from his visit to her. Was he wrong?

Perhaps that accounted for her hesitation, when he had suggested calling with the books. What a fool he had been, not to think of that! Perhaps she would get into trouble by reason of his visit to her employer's house.

The more he thought of this the more uncomfortable he became. As a result of his deliberations determined that he would make his stay a short and formal one. There could surely be no harm accrue to her from that.

The rustle of a woman's dress warned him of her approach. Presently she entered. The moment his eyes rested on her he was amazed: she was dressed so perfectly. No scrap of color; no scintillation of a jewel.

He had a mere man's eye for woman's dress—sensible of the tout ensemble, not of detail—but he did not despise it. It seemed fitting to him that graceful women should be gracefully attired.

All harmony was grateful to his soul; it did not seem unnatural for Miss Mivvins to be gowned in accordance with her beauty. Still he experienced astonishment, grave astonishment, when she entered.

For the life of him he could not have defined the impression which took hold of him. But he knew that her gown was of some soft, rich, silken, costly texture. Resultant upon that was the belief that her place must be an easier one than he had begun to think it.

The extension of her hand to him, once more with it in his own, he felt thrilled. That feeling and his previous resolve to hurry away did not blend well. The thrill remained; the resolve faded.

He produced the books he had promised to bring with him. On the fly-leaf of each he had written her name; beneath it had appended his signature. So many people bothered him for autograph copies of his books, that it was a pardonable vanity if he had begun to think there was something around his signature which enhanced the value of his works. So he had penned the words—With kindest regards, from the Author between her name and his own.

At sight of what he had written she laughed. At first, gently; a gentleness which passed into real hearty mirth. Then, catching sight of his face, she laughed died away ashamedly! Had she whipped him he could not have looked more hurt. His hyper-sensitive nature was suffering.

That laughter acted on Masters as if the ceiling had opened and a shower of cold water had fallen—his face showed it. To be the subject of mirth was a novelty to him. He was glad that that was so. Felt that it was not a pleasant sensation to experience. That a very little of it went an extremely long way.

She flushed with annoyance at her own rudeness, with shame for having wounded the feelings of her visitor. He had not the faintest idea why she laughed, of course; want of knowledge so often leads to misunderstanding. She said hurriedly—

“I hope you do not—oh, how can I explain what I was laughing at? Mr. Masters, don't, pray don't—I beg of you—think I was rude—intended to be rude—or that I was laughing at anything even remotely connected with these books which, believe me, I shall always value, always prize.”

That earnest humble little speech of hers did not sponge away the look from his face. In her eagerness to acquit herself she placed her hand on his arm—it was for the second time that day. It was a habit of hers when moved. Was quite an innocent gesture; but there was—in his estimation, anyway—a distinct piquancy about its naturalness.

“Oh—Mr. Masters?”

She got as far as that. Then stood at a loss for words. She had spoken in such dead earnest tones that it would have been absurd to think her lying. Finding her tongue again, she continued—

“Pray, pray believe me! I was stupid, I know, but don't be so hard as to think me capable of insulting you. Don't! Please, don't!”

His forgiveness was hers that moment. The wonder remained—what she could have laughed at—but all else was forgotten. She had looked into his eyes; a pretty woman's trick; mostly always successful. When performed with such eyes as Miss Mivvins' failure was absolutely impossible.

“I don't think you rude. Don't think you insulting. I could not think any ill thing of you if I tried.”

She had badly wanted to hear some just such thing. But there was that in the tone in which he spoke it that made her flush again. She drew in her breath; drew back a little.

“I am so glad!”

Miss Mivvins spoke impetuously—nervously. She to be nervous! And that, too, in speaking to such a boyish, ingenious individual as was Masters! It was quite too absurd! She continued—

“I—I should not like you to think badly of me.”

She was obviously ill at ease—the obviousness was the worst part of it. She knew that herself; knew quite well. It was because he believed in her! Because he trusted her so implicitly; had an almost childlike faith in her.

With all the other men she had known, on whom she had exerted

the power of his fascination, her woman's ways and wiles had seemed fair and fitting. They were but part of the game and understood by both sides of it. The men had been men of the world—her world—armed and armoured against her coquetry and charm.

Flirtation in those instances had been carried to the point of a fine art—it was part of the life she lived. But it had been flirtation, pure and simple. Though it was amusing enough, while it lasted, it had been fencing with blunt points.

No one had any wounds—not a scratch. Experience had taught them all to play the game skilfully. No one had been deceived into taking things seriously. No soul was a scrap the worse.

But Masters was of another world than hers. Superficiality seemed unknown to him; he put his heart into what he said and did. Playing with life was evidently a thing unknown to him, he was in earnest; always would be; that was his temperament. Honest himself, he believed her to be likewise.

“What a character! Of course it appealed to her—she would not have been a woman if it had not. He would face her woman's weapons—even her most innocent little deceptions—unsuspecting; unarmed. To shower on him the full force of her artillery would be grossly unfair.

She was constrained to throw off the conventional. To don the mantle of guilelessness—such as he wore himself. He made it impossible for her to act otherwise. But the experience was quite a new one to her; it was the novelty that made her nervous. To be trusted—implicitly—was delightfully disconcerting.

Her manner filled Masters with wonder. The key to the mysterious nervousness was not in his possession. Again there flitted across his mind the idea that it arose from his visit to her employer's house.

His resolution to stay but a little time occurred to him. It would be best to go. Yet he abhorred the idea of so speedy a parting; if only he could—He paused. Thought a moment. Risked it; said—tentatively—

“The rain has ceased. It is damp below but bright above.”

A pause. His reference to the weather seemed out of place. She did not know the difficulty he was experiencing in screwing his courage to the sticking place. He continued—

“I am walking to the end of the parade and back.”

Having voiced as much, his talking works seemed to run down. He somehow hoped that she would suggest joining him in his walk. That his ignorance of women was of vast magnitude was evidenced by the nature of that hope.

He was very transparent—so much so that there was no difficulty in guessing his thoughts; she smiled. Ingenuousness was scarcely the word for him! He should have known the impossibility of her offering to accompany him—however much she might desire to do so. As she did not speak he went even further, saying, with nervous awkwardness—

“It is a warm evening—will you walk with me?”

The smile left her face and her eyes opened wide. She was startled at the suddenness of his request. Still more at the nature of it. Then remembered the nature of the man. Felt, too, that there was owing to him something for that unkind laugh of hers. Then there was the trend of her own feelings! After a moment she tossed discretion to the winds; said—

“I shall be glad to—if you wish it.”

The words spoken, she was amazed at their utterance. Her ready acquiescence pleased him. It voiced that honesty he thought so precious in her, which was so sadly lacking in other women. He suspected that another member of her sex would have raised scruples, merely that he might flatter himself that he had overcome them.

The absence of such coquetry in Miss Mivvins was refreshing—refreshing as the rays of the sun after electric light; so he liked her womanhood to other women's. He little knew what a white sepulchre she felt herself to be. His admiration of what she did not possess positively hurt her.

Leaving the room for outdoor covering she presently returned with a long warm cloak and her hat. Had got them from the hall; came back with them over her arm. Having assented she lost no time.

He assisted her to put on her cloak—an expensive, fur-lined wrap. He could not but notice that, as with trembling fingers—a nervousness born of his touch of her—he helped to button the garment down the front.

Microbes multiply in darkness; sunlight kills them. Her natural

manner, open as day, crushed the germ of suspicion. They left the house and walked along the parade; in the direction of the seat at the end of it.

(To be Continued.)

## COSTLY SHOOTING.

Expense of Entertaining the King is \$50,000 a Week.

Shooting, while a capital sport for those whose purses are limited, especially if they have ambitions to be the hosts of royalty. That season just now in swing has cost several notable families in English society at least \$50,000 apiece for the privilege of entertaining his majesty for a week with the guns. The majority of these families, however, consider the honor cheap at the price, and many of them are justified in doing so, for they owe to the King their social position in England.

Of course, the \$50,000, which is the lowest estimate of the cost of entertaining his majesty is not all spent in the week when he is on the ground. As a matter of fact, the preliminaries account for the better part of the amount. Something like \$25,000 is paid as rent for the moors and coverts and at least \$5,000 for the mansion called the shooting-box. The moors generally extend to at least 20,000 acres and the modern hosts of English royalty would hardly dare to invite King Edward to anything smaller. Such an enormous piece of ground requires a dozen keepers costing \$5,000 a year and the preservation of game, food, repairs and incidentals will account for another \$5,000. For the keep of the mansion itself an enormous figure is required, especially as a little army of servants is needed, frequently numbering as many as 35.

Then there is the question of the fellow-guests. The King is invariably consulted in this respect and in almost every case a full dozen are invited to meet and amuse his majesty. These dukes and lords and generals arrive in their motor-cars each with his own chauffeur, footman and valet, while each lady brings her own maid and private secretary, and many of them their own private hairdresser. The King and some of the dukes go so far as to bring with them their own favorite gun-leaders and royalty is always accompanied by its private butler. It is not overestimating to say that each guest averages five servants, and the host of a shooting party of a dozen guns would, therefore, not have to provide for twelve, but for 72 persons.

When the enormous cost of one of these royal shooting parties is taken into account, it is not surprising that the hosts of his majesty calculate that each brace of birds will cost him something like \$50 and that to get the cost as low as that, the moors will have to be plentifully stocked and his guests crack shots.

## LORD KITCHENER.

An Incident Which Shows the Character of the Man.

Lord Kitchener is one of Britain's greatest generals; but he is respected, rather than loved by those serving under him. Stern and reserved in his manner, he is, however, very just. Rank does not influence him. The bluest-blooded subaltern is treated as impartially as an ordinary “Tommy.”

During the South African campaign, a private of exemplary character reported himself as unfit for duty. The doctor, however, thought otherwise, and ordered the man back to work. Later on the soldier found himself growing much weaker, and spoke to the sergeant.

“Why not tell Lord Kitchener?” was the reply. “He's in his office.”

This the soldier feared to do, but the sergeant went straight in and laid the case before Kitchener.

“Send the man here, and fetch Drs. A. and B.,” commanded “K. of K.,” without looking up from his work.

The two doctors examined the patient in the presence of his lordship, and pronounced him to be suffering from typhoid fever.

“Now send for Dr. C.”

This was the doctor who had practically accused the patient of malingering. He, too, examined the patient, and then said nervously—

“Sir, I fear I have made a mistake. This man is suffering from typhoid in an early stage.”

“Remove him at once to the hospital,” was Kitchener's reply. “And you, Dr. C., apply to the adjutant for your papers, and return to England at your earliest convenience.”

## CEYLON COMBS.

Men Wear Them But the Women are Innocent of the Adornment.

Perhaps there is nothing in Cingalese customs, writes H. W. Cave in “The Book of Ceylon,” that strikes the stranger from the West as so extraordinary as the custom which requires the male population of the low country to wear long hair twisted into a coil at the back of the head and a horseshoe-shaped tortoise-shell comb at the top, while the women remain innocent of the form of adornment. One of the great ambitions of the men of humble position is to possess and wear a huge comb of the finest lustre and most perfect manufacture; and many mark their higher social position with an additional comb, which rises to a considerable height above their glossy coil.

The custom supports a large number of manufactures. The artist in tortoise-shell obtains his raw material from the hawkbill turtle. His methods of detaching the scales were once so barbarous and cruel that a special law had to be passed forbidding them.

The poor creatures used to be captured and suspended over a fire till the heat made the scales drop off, and then the turtles were released to grow more.

The practise arose from the circumstance that if the shell were taken from the animal after death the color became cloudy and milky. This, however, can be obviated by killing the turtle and immediately immersing the carcass in boiling water.

The plates, when separated from the bony part of the animal, are very irregular in form. They are flattened by heat and pressure. Being very brittle, they require careful manipulation, especially as a high temperature, which would soften them, tends to darken and cloud the shell. They are therefore treated at as low a heat as is possible for the work. Thickness is obtained by softening several plates and then applying pressure, when a union of the surface takes place. Under heat the shell is also molded into various artificial forms.

## CRUEL HUSBANDS.

Men Who Have Imprisoned Their Wives for Years.

The Lisbon papers have been devoting columns of space to the misdeeds of Count Margallo, one of King Manoel's Lords-in-Waiting, who, inflamed by jealousy, is alleged to have imprisoned his young wife in an upper turret room of his chateau of Alemjeto, whence she was released by the police in a condition bordering on idiocy.

Such high-minded proceedings as these read curiously now-a-days. Yet a few generations back, apparently, such an incident would have passed almost unnoticed.

No one, for example, thought anything the worse of our own King George I. for condemning his wife, the beautiful and talented Princess Sophia, to lifelong imprisonment, because of her alleged intrigue with Count Konigsmark.

Then, too, there was the case of the Earl of Belvedere, who shut up his young Countess in Gaulstown Castle, Westmeath, and kept her there a close captive for two-and-thirty years. Once she escaped, and fled to her father in Dublin.

But such were the exaggerated notions held at that time regarding a husband's authority over his wife, that he handed his daughter back unpretendingly to the earl, who had her immured more closely than ever. His death brought her release at last, but the erstwhile lovely, light-hearted girl had been transformed by then into a decrepit, white-haired old woman.

More shocking still was the fate of Harriet Staunton, whose husband imprisoned her in the windowless attic of a lonely Kentish farmhouse, where she presently succumbed to starvation and ill-usage. This abominable crime, however, did not go unavenged, no fewer than four persons being placed upon their trial, and condemned to death, and, although the capital sentences were afterwards commuted, two of the culprits, at all events, died in gaol.

## OBLIGED AT ONCE.

The proprietor of a hotel, hearing of the whereabouts of a guest who had decamped from his establishment without going through the formality of paying his bill, sent him a note:

“Dear Sir, — Will you send amount of your bill, and oblige.” To which the delinquent replied: “The amount is \$38.75. — Yours respectfully.”

The great difference between men is more likely to be in perspiration than in inspiration.