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David McCarthy,
Seaside, Res. Co., N. B.

43-4 P

With Edged Tools

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN
Author of "The Coward," "Roderic's Career," "From One Generation to Another," Etc.

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"Don't," she said gently, "please don't say any more. I know all that your life has been, and why. You did quite right. What is a little trouble to me, a little passing inconvenience, the battle of a few idle tongues, compared with what Jack's life is to you? I see now that I ought to have opposed it strongly instead of letting it take its course. You are right; you always have been right. John. There is a sort of consolation in the thought. I like it. I like to think that you were always right and that it was I who was wrong. It confirms my respect for you. We shall get over this somehow."

"The young lady," suggested Sir John, "will get over it after the manner of her kind. She will marry some one else, let us hope, before her wedding dress goes out of fashion."

"Millicent will have to get over it as she may. Her feelings need scarcely be taken into consideration."

Lady Cantourne made a little movement toward the door. There was much to see of much of that women's work which makes weddings the wild, confused ceremonies that they are.

"I am afraid," said Sir John, "that I never thought of taking them into consideration. As you know, I hardly considered yours. I hope I have not overdrawn that reserve."

He had crossed the room as he spoke to open the door for her. His fingers were on the handle, but he did not turn to look at him, but passed him toward the shaded lamp, with that desire to fix her attention upon some inanimate object which he knew of old.

"The reserve," she answered, "will stand more than that. It has accompanied me with compound interest. But I deny the debt of which you spoke just now. There is no debt. I have paid it, year by year, day by day. For each one of those fifty years of unhappiness I have paid a year of regret."

He opened the door and passed out into the brilliantly lighted passage and down the stairs, where the servants were waiting to open the door and help her to her carriage.

Later on he dined in his usual solitary grandeur. He was as carefully dressed as ever. The discipline of his household, like the discipline under which he held himself, was unrelaxed.

"What wine is this," he asked, when he had tasted the port.

"Yellow seal, sir," replied the butler confidently.

Sir John nodded with an air of self-satisfaction. He was pleased to have proved to himself and to the "damned butler," who had caught him napping in the library, that he was still a young man in himself, with senses and taste unimpaired. But his hand was at the small of his back as he returned to the library.

He was not at all sure about Jack; did not know whether to expect him or not. Jack did not always do what one might have expected him to do under given circumstances. And Sir John rather liked him for it. Perhaps it was that small taint of hereditary which was in blood, and makes it thicker than water.

"Nothing like blood, sir," he was in the habit of saying, "in horses, dogs and men." And thereafter he usually threw back his shoulders.

The good blood that ran in his veins was astir tonight. The incidents of the day had aroused him from the peacefulness that lies under a weight of years (we have to lift the years one by one and lay them aside before we find it), and Sir John Meredith would have sat very upright in his chair were it not for that creaking pain in his back.

He waited for an hour with his eyes almost continually on the clock, but Jack never came. Then he rang the bell.

"Coffee," he said. "I like punctuality, if you please."

"Thought Mr. Meredith might be expected, sir," murmured the outer humbly.

Sir John was reading the evening paper, or appearing to read it, although he had not his glasses.

"Oblige me by refraining from thought," he said urbanely.

So the coffee was brought, and Sir John consumed it in silent majesty. While he was pouring out his second cup—of a diminutive size—the bell rang. He set down the silver coffee pot with a pebbled clatter, as if his nerves were not quite so good as they used to be.

It was not Jack, but a note from him.

My Dear Father—Circumstances have necessitated the breaking off of my engagement at the last moment. Tomorrow's evening I shall take place in the above named circumstances were partly under your control, I need hardly offer an explanation. I leave town and probably England tonight. I am, your affectionate son, JOHN MEREDITH.

There were no signs of haste or discomposure. The letter was neatly written in the somewhat large calligraphy, firm, bold, ornate, which Sir John had insisted on Jack's learning. The stationery bore a club crest. It was an eminently gentlemanly communication. Sir John read it and gravely tore it up, throwing it into the fire, where he watched it burn.

Nothing was further from his mind than sentiment. He was not much given to sentiment, this hard-hearted old sire of an ancient stock. He never thought of the apocryphal day when he, being laid in his grave, should at last win the gratitude of his son.

"When I am dead and gone you may be sorry for it," were not the words that any man should hear from his lips.

More than once during their lives Lady Cantourne had said:

"You never change your mind, John," referring to one thing or another. And he had invariably answered:

"No, I am not the sort of man to change."

He had always known his own mind. When he had been in a position to rule he had done so with a firm iron. His purpose had ever been inflexible. Jack had been the only person who had ever openly opposed his desire. In this, as in other matters, his indomitable will had carried the day, and in the moment of triumph it is only the weak who repine. Success should have no disappointments for the man who has striven for it if his will be strong.

Sir John rather liked the letter. It could only have been written by a son of his—admitting nothing, not even defeat. But he was disappointed. He had hoped that Jack would come—that some sort of a reconciliation would be patched up. And somehow the disappointment affected him physically. It attacked him in the back and intensified the pain there. It made him feel weak and unlike himself. He rang the bell.

"Go round," he said to the butler, "to Dr. Damer and ask him to call in during the evening if he has time."

The butler bowed himself with the coffee tray, hesitating, desirous of gaining time.

"Anything wrong, sir? I hope you are not feeling ill," he said nervously.

"No, sir," cried Sir John. "Hang it, do I look ill? Just obey my orders, if you please."

My Dear Jack—At the risk of being considered an interfering old woman, I write to ask you whether you are not soon coming to England again. As you are away from home, I have known each other since we were now almost the only survivors of our generation. My reason for troubling you with this communication is that during the last six months I have noticed a very painful change in your father. He is getting very old. He has no one but servants about him. You know his manner; it is difficult for any one to approach him, even for me. If you could come home—by accident—I think that you will never regret it in after life. I need not suggest discretion as to this letter. Your affectionate friend,

CAROLINE CANTOURNE.

Jack Meredith read this letter in the coffee room of the hotel of the Four Seasons in Wiesbaden. It was a lovely morning; the sun shone down through the trees of the Friedrichstrasse upon that spotless pavement, of which the stricken wot. The fresh breeze came bowling down from the Taunus mountains all balsamic and invigorating. It picked up the odors of the syringa and flowering currant in the Kurgarten and threw itself in at the open window of the coffee room of the hotel of the Four Seasons.

Jack Meredith was restless. Such odors as are borne on the morning breeze are apt to make those men restless who have not all that they want. And is not their name legion? The morning breeze is to the strong the moonlight of the sentimental. That which makes one vaguely aware a tear from the other to get up and take.

By the train leaving Wiesbaden for Cologne, "over Mainz," as the guide book hath it, Jack Meredith left for England, in which country he had not set foot for fifteen months. Guy Osward was in Cashmere. The smile was almost forgotten as a "fine day" wonder except by those who live by the ill of mankind. Millicent Chyne had

degraded into a restless society back. With great skill she had posed as a martyr. She had allowed it to be understood that she, having remained faithful to Jack Meredith through his time of adversity, had been heartlessly thrown over when fortune smiled upon him and there was a chance of his making a more brilliant match. With a clarity which was not without a keen shaft of irony father and son allowed this story to pass uncontradicted. Perhaps a few believed it. Perhaps they had foreseen the future. It may have been that they knew that Millicent Chyne, surrounded by the halo of whatever story she might invent, would be treated with a certain careless nonchalance by the older men, with a respectful avoidance by the younger. Truly women have the deepest punishment for their sins here on earth, for sooner or later the time will come, after the brilliancy of the first triumph, after the less pure satisfaction of the skilled sinner, the time will come when all that they want is an enduring, honest love. And it is written that an enduring love cannot, with the best will in the world, be bestowed on an unworthy object. If a woman wishes to be loved purely she must have a pure heart and no past ready for the recollection of that love. This is a sine qua non. The woman with a past has no future.

The short March day was closing in over London with that murky suggestion of hopelessness affected by metropolitan evening when Jack Meredith presented himself at the door of his father's house.

In his reception by the servants there was a subtle suggestion of expectation which was not lost on his keen mind. There is no patience like that of expectation in an old house. Jack Meredith felt vaguely that he had been expected thus, daily, for many months past.

He was shown into the library, and the tall form standing there on the hearth rug had not the outline for which he had looked. The battle between old age and stubborn will is never won. But old age in shame raises the siege. It starves the garrison out. Sir John Meredith's head seemed to have shrunk. The wig did not fit. His clothes, his shoes, his ways bearing the suggestion of emptiness, seemed to hang on ancient lines as if the creases were well established. The clothes were old. The fatal doctrine of not worth while had set in.

Father and son shook hands, and Sir John walked feebly to the stiff backed chair, where he sat down with a forced silence. He was ashamed of his infirmities. He was the instinct of the dog that goes away into some hidden corner to die.

"I am glad to see you," he said, using his two hands to push himself farther back in his chair.

There was a little pause. The fire was getting low. It fell together with a feeble, crumbling sound.

"Shall I put some coals on?" asked Jack.

A simple question, if you will, but it was asked by the son in such a tone of quiet, filial submission that a whole volume could not contain all that it said to the old man's proud, unbending heart.

"Yes, my boy, do."

And the last six years were wiped away like evil writing from a slate.

There was no explanation. These two men were not of those who explain themselves and in the warmth of explanation say things which they do not fully mean. The explanation that each had held during the years they had left behind had perhaps been modified on both sides, but neither sought details of the modification. They knew each other now, and each respected the indomitable will of the other.

They inquired after each other's health. They spoke of events of a common interest. Trifles of everyday occurrence seemed to contain absorbing details. But it is the everyday occurrence that makes the life. It is the putting on of the coats that reconciled these two men.

"Let me see," said Sir John, "you gave up your room before you left England, did you not?"

Jack drew forward his chair and put his feet out toward the fire. It was marvelous how thoroughly at home he seemed to be.

"Then," continued Sir John, "where is your luggage?"

"I left that to the club."

"Send along for it. Your room is—quite ready for you. I shall be glad if you will make use of it as long as you like. You will be free to come and go as if you were in your own house."

Jack nodded with a strange twisted little smile, as if he were suffering from cramp but the legs. It was cramp—at the heart.

"Thanks," he said. "I should like nothing better. Shall I ring?"

"If you please."

Jack rang and they waited in the fading daylight without speaking. At times Sir John moved his limbs, his hand on the arm of the chair and his feet on the hearth rug, with the jerky, half restless energy of the aged which is not pleasant to see.

When the servant came it was Jack who gave the orders, and the butler listened to them with a sort of enthusiasm. When he had closed the door behind him he pulled down his waistcoat with a jerk, and as he walked downstairs he muttered "Thank 'eavens" twice, and wiped away a tear from his bibulous eye.

"What a time you were doing with yourself since I saw you?" inquired Sir John conversationally when the door was closed.

"I have been out to India, merely for



"Shall I put some coals on?" asked Jack, the voyage. I went with Oscar, who is out there still after big game."

Sir John Meredith nodded.

"I like that man," he said. "He is tough. I like tough men. He wrote me a letter before he went away. It was the letter of one gentleman to another. Is he going to spend the rest of his life after big game?"

Jack laughed.

"It seems rather like it. He is cut out for that sort of life. He is too big for narrow streets and cramped houses."

"And matrimony?"

"Yes, and matrimony."

Sir John was leaning forward in his chair, his two withered hands clasped on his knees.

"You know," he said slowly, blinking at the fire, "he cared for that girl more than you did, my boy."

"Yes," answered Jack softly.

Sir John looked toward him, but he said nothing. His attitude was interrogatory. There were a thousand questions in the turn of his head; questions which one gentleman could not ask another.

(To be continued.)

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