

THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

CHAPTER LV.

"Weep, foolish heart,
And, weeping, live,
For death is dry as dust; yet if ye part,
End as the night, whose sable hue
Your sins express, melt into dew,"

—O. HERBERT.

Blyth and Joy looked all round, but only the wheat-field and the waving branches of the elms were to be seen, or had described them. Nevertheless, with a sober and demure air they proceeded along the narrow footpath; Joy feeling specially guilty because the no in her heart had not yet been uttered with which she must have frozen the kiss that was so warm on her lips.

At the corner of the field was a stile, the path leading to which ran at right angles with theirs, so that the thickness of the tangled hedgerow had completely hid the lovers from any indiscreet eyes approaching.

A young man was trying to get over the stile as they came up. Or, rather, he seemed so ill that being taken with weakness in the very act, he was supporting himself on the top bar.

Joy almost gave a scream of surprise as she saw him.

It was Steenie Hawshaw; but looking like a ghost in a living man's clothes. Deathly white, with cheeks so yellow that the skin seemed drawn over them with difficulty only his eyes being wonderfully brightened and larger, and his cheek-bones tinged with a round, red flush in deceptive appearance of health, the poor fellow was coughing again as if the fit would rack him to pieces.

"Oh, Blyth, help him; he may fall!" exclaimed Joy, with a woman's quick pity.

More slowly, man-like Blyth had come forward, not liking to seem forcing aid on anyone. But now, urged by that dear voice of divine sympathy, he held out his arm like a strong bar for support, saying simply, in an honest, kindly way,

"Just take hold of me till you get down, will you, Hawshaw? That cough of yours would shake any man."

As Blyth thus stood quite close to the stile, Steenie collected himself. He had seemed ready to faint, and his brow was damp with bead-drops, but a faint flush now overspread his features, and, summoning all his remaining strength, he struck Blyth in the face with his wasted, nerveless fist.

"There! that's for you and your help," he gasped with excited, working features. "Take that in return for the day we met at Drewston."

Joy had grown crimson with fury at the insult, for her lover's sake. But Blyth, though he had stepped back a pace, forbore to show a sign of anger, after the first quick start. He said, very quietly,

"I will take that and another blow besides, Hawshaw, if in your conscience you think it right for you to give and me to receive. God judge between us as regards the poor, hunted woman that caused our quarrel!"

There was a minute's silence. Steenie Hawshaw had succeeded in getting down from the stile unaided, though he was so weak that he tottered. Then another fit of coughing came on so bad he had to hold his head, and it made them ache with pity to hear him. When it was over, Hawshaw laid his head against the top bar and sobbed.

Blyth and Joy watched him, feeling quite stricken with pity, and, as it were, ashamed of being so well and strong themselves. Had Steenie died then and there in the field they would hardly have been surprised so near the end of his life did he seem. Bodily weakness had overpowered him, besides the reaction after the impulse of his anger against Blyth. Then the forgiving manliness of the latter, added to who knew what stings of his own conscience about Magdalen, that had long tortured him, increased on seeing Joy, had broken down the poor wretch's pride utterly.

Ashamed of himself, he stopped, with an effort to laugh.

"Well, you've the best of me, Berrington, I'm dying; and, if not, I'd have been disinherited, anyway, for a wretched, pining baby up there at the Barton. Ha, ha—that's how the world goes."

He could not stir yet; hardly speak. Joy pitifully bent over him and wiped the damp from his brow with her handkerchief.

Hawshaw suffered her to do it, then spoke, with some relenting in his bitterness.

"You don't grudge me going through these fields, perhaps, Berrington. This path was sometimes said to be a public one, though we tried to stop its being used."

"You are welcome to it, at all events," answered Blyth, gravely. "But will you do either of two things? Let me give you my arm back to the Barton, for you are not strong enough to be left by yourself; or, if you can get as far as the Red House, I'll drive you back myself."

Without a word, Hawshaw looked Blyth in the face awhile.

Then he slowly said,

"I'll do neither; but I believe you're a good sort, after all. And, if I could live the past time over again, we might have been friends. Well, no matter now! But still I may be able to do you both a good turn. Have you been to the fair at Moortown to-day?"

"No," said Blyth, wondering. He had sent his farm-bailiff, though, and his thoughts flashed at once to wondering what foolishness that individual could have been about; although supposed a very superior successor to old Dick, who was now bed-ridden and in a state of dotage.

"Go both of you, then, and see the travelling show. There's an evening performance. I went last night, and—though I couldn't be sure—I hardly slept afterwards thinking of what I saw there. You go especially!" (to Joy) "if you don't, you may regret it to your dying day."

His two listeners tried to make Hawshaw speak more distinctly on the subject. And, by natural queries, objections, surmises.

But Steenie would by no means say more than—

"Go, I tell you, go! I never supposed two fine, travelled people like you both would care the snuff of a candle for the show; but still you go. Wait for the waxworks to be opened—never mind the other performances, the puppet-show and the fat boy and Zulus, a lot of them—you watch for the music in the waxwork tent. Good-by. I make no promise, for I may be all wrong—I couldn't be sure. But just you go and see."

With which oracular words, and no more of explanation vouchsafed, Steenie left them slowly, leaning on a stick heavily, and every now and then stopping to rest and watch the yellow butterflies fluttering by, and the darting swallows in mid-air, with a sort of envy.

Blyth and Joy watched him a little, then, seeing he was better, and apparently able to take his own way back, both looked at each other.

"What does he mean?" asked Joy, her woman's curiosity all alive.

"I don't know," answered Blyth, musing. "But we had better go and see."

CHAPTER LVI.

"The first company that passed by,
Say na, and let them go;
The next company that passed by,
Say na, and do right see;
The third company that passed by,
Then I'll be one of thee.
First let pass the black, Janet,
And eyes let pass the brow—
But grip ye to the milk-white wood
And, pu', the rider down."

—The Young Tamian.

The sun was setting behind the Moortown hills as Blyth drove Joy up to the little town.

There was a small square in the middle of the town, in which stood an old market cross, raised on three tiers or steps. And round this central spot—a strange contrast—were pitched seven large yellow wagons.

These blocked up the little side-streets, one leading from the gray church with its low tower, and another from the almshouses, and another ending the road up from the valley. The traffic was choked, and the country crowd, wedged into narrow space, seemed multiplied. The tops of the great vans were on a level with the little bedroom windows above the butcher's and baker's and grocer's shops, and even obscured those of the "Three Crowns Inn."

The evening air was noisy with the braying of a brass band attached to the great show, and preluding one of the various perform-

ances which succeeded each other. Mingled with this came the baying of many sheep on the air, that were being driven away in different flocks; the good-humored and sleepy voices of fat farmers standing about the inn door in groups broken by an occasional great laugh; the excited calls of the village gossips, noise of the children, and disregarded hoarse shouts of "Aunt Sally" and "shies-at-a-cocoo-nut" men, whose mean baits were altogether outdone by the big yellow caravan, which combined so many attractions in itself.

As Blyth Berrington, after putting up his dog-cart at the "Three Crowns," escorted Joy through the good-humored crowd of sight-seers, the business of the day was over, and the fun of the little fair in full swing.

Here was one yellow house on wheels, with the hideous fat lady, who resided squeezed therein, portrayed outside; resembling much, apparently a Yorkshire pig. If, by chance, she moved one of the blinds for air before the tiny windows of the carriage house in which she was boxed, or that, by chance, a glimpse of a stout bare arm could be seen, the excitement of the children outside, who could not afford to pay their pennies, knew no bounds. There was the popping of a shooting-gallery also to be heard in a different direction; another wagon had disgorged a movable wooden stage, on which marionettes had lately been put through their puppet dance; while some last sounds of most hideous clamor in a tent signified that some "real Zulus" were just ending their native war-dance, hoarse with shouts, and no doubt leg-weary, to judge by the violent stamping that shook the protruding boards of their temporary b. i. room.

Blyth and Joy passed all these attractions, and went towards the waxworks, as directed. The show was not yet open.

Feeling a little foolish, and still curious, yet prepared by their own anticipation for disappointment, they conversed together in whispers upon Steenie Hawshaw and his mysterious words; tried to pretend interest in the scene around; and half thought of driving straight home again to the Red House.

"These good people are all looking at us, and wondering what we are here for." If I thought it was a hoax—"said Blyth, half-gruffly, feeling uncomfortable in the situation.

"Oh, no, no, one so ill as Steenie would not hoax. Having come so far, we must see what there is to be seen," pleaded Joy, whose curiosity, though mixed with doubts, had only grown with the delay.

At that moment the brass band struck up again. The evening show of the waxworks was about to open.

The largest yellow wagon, which had unroofed itself, now let down a row of flaps shutters from its sides, displaying behind these a striking portrait gallery of the queen and all her ministers, both in and out of office, with strict impartiality. The floor of the wagon became a platform, on which the effigies of six gilded knights apparently brayed from trumpets, while very real, untuned sounds came from a group of mortal musicians behind them.

"Waik up, waik up," cried a red-faced showman, with a tall hat stuck much on one side of his head, perceiving Joy's beautiful face under her shady gypsy bonnet. "Walk up, and the gen'l'man will be 'appy to pay for you, I'll be bound." Then, in a hoarse-whispered shout to another assistant at the back, "I say, Bill, make room there inside. Here's a couple of real hoppers coming."

Blyth and Joy found themselves mingling with a crowd of better-class sight-seers, all eager to partake of the atmosphere of art and refinement in this department of the "travelling exhibition," reported to be much superior in its elegance to the other more vulgar entertainments in its company.

They stumbled up some wooden steps on to the platform, stumbled down more on the other side, and found themselves inside a dark tent, surrounded by mysterious curtains.

The showman now seized a long whip, and, as prelude, gave it a sharp flick over the heads of a group of Moortown children, whom he transixed with his eye.

"Do I hear a noise there; chattering and disturbing ladies and gents, besides all this assembled company? I'll turn you all out, every one, next minute—this instant—and return your money, at half-price. Money indeed! What do I care about money?"

Elegant behavior's the thing for these wax works."

The frightened children had been as mum as mice, huddled together; but flick! went the whip a second time over their innocent heads.

Joy was indignant, about to take their part, when a whisper from behind a curtain nearly thrilled her strangely.

"Be quiet yourself, stupid man, or I won't sieg! Do you hear—behave better at once."

The red-faced man, who had his arm sharply grasped from behind the curtain, looked nonplussed a minute. Then recovering himself (the little scene being perceived by few), he grew instantaneously milder, though placing his hat more rakishly than ever on one side of his head, by the way of self-assertion. He began now to draw back the curtains one by one from before various, inasmuch smiling waxwork figures. Then, turning the light from some strong reflecting lanterns, managed by his assistant, on each in turn, went on eloquently explaining their merits and meaning; rolling his r's as he declaimed with an unction, r-r-representing superfine education.

But Joy heeded not a clammy group, coting forth the story (recited at some length) of Amlet and the lovely, unfortunate Flophelia. She never gave a loyal glance at the Royal Family, reading life-size in real though faded ball-dresses, and all wearing bigger or lesser gilded coronets. The ghastly horrors of the last celebrated murder were lost upon her; though the murderer's head was shown on one black-draped pedestal glaring at its pale victim's face on another (the latter being represented with a red gash on his forehead, "to give the company present a hexcellent idea of the suffering of this poor gentleman.")

Joy could heed nothing, fix her eyes on nothing, but the curtain from whence had come that sharp whisper.

"You are not well, I think; it is very hot and stuffy. Would you like to come away? There is nothing, after all, to be seen here," asked Blyth, in a low tone, in her ear.

"No, no! He said we were to wait for some music, didn't he? We'll not go just yet; at least, unless you wish it, Blyth."

So Blyth, marvelling, and having come to the disgusted conclusion in his own mind that he was a fool for his pains, waited of course patiently at his dear sovereign's bidding.

They had still to wait some time.

Once more Blyth asked Joy presently, if she would now like to come away. And—hesitating, with a sensation of faintness stealing over her, not so much from heat and closeness of the place as from an indescribable disappointment and heart-sinking, when yet—no, surely!—she had not allowed herself to think, except anything—she again answered,

"Shall we just wait to see it all ended? Unless you very much mind, dear Blyth."

At last the showman had gone round all the waxworks in their separately draped little stalls. The curtains had been drawn back from all but one side; that where Joy still kept her eyes fixed in a fascinated way, while her ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, though all behind there was now still.

"And now, ladies and gents, for the last and crowning attraction of this performance. The gifted Countess Maddalena, a Spanish lady of high descent, who has been selected for a while to honor the boards of our Royal Travelling Theatre as a bright, particular star, will now sing a native song in the costume of an Indian princess."

With a sharp rattle the curtains were pulled back from the end. There was revealed a tiny, low stage, the interior draped as a tent, with bright, Eastern-looking colored stuff. And, on a low divan of cushions, the light thrown full upon her, sat—Magdalen!

CHAPTER LVII.

"While sadly I roam, I regret my dear home
Where lads and young lasses are making the hay;
The merry bells ring, and the birds sweetly sing,
And maidens and meadows are pleasant and gay.
Oh, its home, dearest home,
It's home I fain would be!
Home, dearest home, in the North country.
For the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grow best at home in the North country."

Joy had gripped Blyth's arm tight, and leaned heavily upon it for support. But she did not speak or move on seeing her mother. He, for his part, stood steady as a rock, though feeling most pitifully for the heart beating painfully beside him. The semi-