

AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

(Concluded.)

When I asked for him next morning I was told he had gone to Nice for a day or two. Mrs. Macallister, I knew, was in bed with a very bad cold, and so could not be approached. There was nothing left but to apply to Amy herself. And I don't think Gibbon ever felt the absurdity of his position as much as I did.

"You can never be mine, then lend me ten pounds. You have refused my offer, please advance my travelling expenses." That was how my request seemed to sound.

But there was no help for it, and when I saw Amy and Miss Macallister strolling down the Casino garden, I asked if I might accompany them. Amy appeared surprised to see me.

"You are not gone, Mr. Calthrop," she said. "I thought you left last night. I was afraid you had run off without wishing me good-bye."

After a little while they returned to the hotel for lunch, and I joined them at the meal. I tried to appear cheerful, talked and joked, or attempted jokes. I felt that I was overdoing my part. I took the first opportunity, and begged for an interview—just a few minutes. Amy looked a little surprised, perhaps displeased, but she didn't refuse. There was a lovely flush on her face as she came into the empty billiard-room. My own cheeks were blazing, I fancy, as I explained my position.

"I am afraid I spent a good deal in Florence," I said feebly as I finished.

"Florence?" she said. "I didn't know you had been there."

"I went there," I said, "to find you."

This intelligence seemed to strike her.

"Oh," she said softly, "I am so sorry, so very sorry. I thought our meeting here was quite accidental. I am afraid I have been very thoughtless—"

She looked fixedly at the green cloth.

"Of course I shall lend you the money with pleasure. Will twenty pounds be enough?"

I accepted ten pounds, murmured something about speedy repayment. Then I said good-bye, and named the train I should leave by.

"We will come to the station to see you off," Amy said.

As a matter of fact we went down from the hotel together—all three of us. I was wondering all the time if Miss Macallister knew of my predicament and how I got out of it. We got to the station before the time. I talked chiefly to Miss Macallister, who said she was awfully sorry I was going.

When the train came in and I had taken my place, she left us.

"I am going to get you some papers," she said.

Left alone with Amy, I could think of nothing better to say than "I will return the money as soon as I can."

"Oh, don't," she said quickly—"don't send it by post; it might be lost. Bring it to me; myself when I am back in London. That will be in May, you know."

"I hope you will enjoy your stay abroad," I said lugubriously.

The dimple in her cheek betrayed a rising smile.

"Do you know, Mr. Calthrop," she said, "when you wanted to see me this afternoon I was quite frightened. I thought you were going to ask me to—reconsider my determination, you know."

"Ah," I said, "men do that sometimes, don't they?"

"I believe so," she said. "Not generally the next day, but in five or six months' time."

The train began to move off. Miss Macallister came up with some papers and a novel, and threw them in at the window.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Au revoir," said Amy.

"I don't think either of them heard what I shouted."

"And did you take the money back yourself?" I asked.

Calthrop got up from his chair and looked at me, smiling.

"The name was not Amy, you remember," he said; "it was Helen."

"Oh!" I said. "Then it was Mrs. Calthrop—"

The lady I named came into the room.

"Are you gentlemen never coming into the drawing-room?" she asked.

"What is keeping you so long?"

Calthrop looked guilty.

"My dear," he said after a little while, "I have been telling Montague about the ten pounds you lent me once."

Mrs. Calthrop turned to me.

"Did you never hear that story before?" she asked. "My husband is always telling it; and I believe he embellishes it more and more every time."

THE GOSPEL TO THE CRITTERS.

By Ella J. Hunter, in the Portland Transcript.

"Jeremiah! Brother Jeremiah!" rang out Susan's clear, decisive tones. There was no answer. Jeremiah sat on the barn door-sill and meditated. Susan stood in the front porch, shading her eyes with her hand, as she looked up and down the green meadows of the farm. She called again, with a more persuasive accent, "Jeremiah."

Still no response. Gathering her scant skirts close about her, she took the footpath through the glistening pasture to the lower lot. If Jeremiah was not within call, he was certainly there, puttering with the young

lambs. The sun shone hot on her bald, uncovered head. She tied her handkerchief over it, gypsy fashion.

Jeremiah watched her furtively, his wizened old face lit up with silent glee. She was well down the meadow path before he dared breathe naturally. It was a great achievement for him to have got ahead of Susan. He was weak of mind, at least this was his sister's opinion, and she treated him accordingly. She was well round the turn by the brook before he spoke. He was not going to shorten his triumph by any rashness.

"She meant Baptis' meeting," he ejaculated. "I knowed it by her voice. It sounded kind o' flinty, like it does when she holds forth on the ternal condemnation she takes such comfort out on. I aint er goin' to their blamed meetin's! I aint er goin' to hear the new preacher. I aint er goin' to the revival! I aint er goin' to the Baptisms!"

These were bold words, but he added quaveringly the plaintive after thought, "If Susan'll let me stay home. She's been powerful quiet, has Susan fur weeks, till she took at me agin this mornin', an' it must mean somethin'. She's been a tryin' ter make a Baptis' out on me this forty year, an' she aint discouraged yet. But I won't, no I won't."

Jeremiah gazed at the distant landscape. He shook all over with a nervous tremor.

"There aint no call for me to be dipped. I'd come up jus' the same sinful critter—same way that Susan's head is all bald under that 'kerchief. It don't make her head any different, 'tonly looks so. I'd be a-lyin' an' a-cussin', an' a-swearin' just as usual, an' a-bringin' condemnation on the church. I aint er goin' to get in no such fix."

Jeremiah lived in a small world. For him, Susan represented public opinion. In her eyes his mild deceits were lying, his repertoire of 'ternal, blamed and confounded, unpardonable blasphemy, while his lurking desire for something stronger than the yarb tea she bade him drink, was, to her, the sign and seal of Satan's dominion over him.

Susan was not unkindly. She was merely unflinchingly conscientious. It weighed on her mind that Jeremiah had not made a "profession." She had reasoned and expostulated with him in vain. The old minister and the deacons had wasted their breath in argument. Jeremiah baffled them all. The dull, vacant look which was his natural expression was his shield. It proved to the elders of the church that he was not wholly responsible. It puzzled even Susan, but it did not dishearten her.

Years ago, she had overheard Jeremiah soliloquizing on the subject of Baptism. He was a clever mimic. He repeated the arguments given him word for word. He reproduced the preacher's stutter and the deacon's snuffle. Then he gave, in his own voice, far-away rambling replies, chuckling derisively as he did so. He spoke so like Susan that she touched her lips wondering. She doubted the evidence of her senses. Since then, with good reason, she was suspicious of Jeremiah. He was weak-minded, certain—she had believed that too long to detect its fallacy—but he was not without intellect. She was more severe with him after that—she was confident he was personally responsible.

She was coming back now. Jeremiah watched her apprehensively. His clothes seemed suddenly to become much too large for him. He shivered away down into his boots. Susan came straight towards him. "Jeremiah," she said reproachfully.

Jeremiah opened his eyes. "Is that you, Susan," he said, as in a dazed, half-awake stupor.

Susan's eyes met his sternly, but this child-like awakening from slumber disarmed her. A tiny motherless lamb thrust its woolly head into the pocket of his homespun coat. Jeremiah's early visit to the lower lot must have tired him. She was always anxious about his health.

"Jeremiah, I've been a-calling you, an' been way down to the fold after you," she said.

Jeremiah shifted his eyes uneasily. "Strange now, I didn't notice you a-calling," he faltered.

"I want the double team fur meetin' this evenin'," continued Susan, unsuspiciously, "an' I don't want to hear no excuse about the horses bein' lame, neither."

"Certainly, you shall have 'em, sister. Danno but I'll drive in myself as fur as the tavern. Maybe the folks there'll want butter."

Susan's eyes flashed. "Jeremiah, at your age, a-hankerin' after that low-lived tavern. You'd much better be thinkin' of other things—"

"Your blamed, 'ternal condemnation, fur instance," quoth Jeremiah shortly.

Susan's lip trembled, but she kept back the reproof resolutely as she turned to the house.

The little old man groaned aloud. Susan turned, half-relenting, only to be greeted with a jeering shout of "run along, sister, afore your shoes wear out." Then she sped as if pursued by a demon. Again Jeremiah groaned—a real heartfelt groan. "It aint noontide yet, an' I've swore an' I've lied, an' I've sassed Susan. Lor', I don't mean ter be so wicked—somehow it does itself."

His penitence, though genuine, was but of a meagre sort, for he was of a sceptical turn of mind. The little he knew of religion he had gathered at compulsively attended meetings. He humbly went about his work. He laid the lamb in its basket tenderly. He was gentle with all dumb creatures. The mare whinnied gratefully as he shook down her hay, and allowed him to stroke her black foal. The wide brown eyes of the brindled cow were full of sympathy for him. It pleased Jeremiah that the cow would not allow Susan to milk her. He had an odd conceit about the animal, and sometimes boasted that "the brindle wa'n't no Baptis'." The young calf caught at his finger and sucked it. Jeremiah begged a little milk of the brindle. He carried it up to the hay-loft in a flower-pot saucer. The proud mother cat came purring to meet him. There were five wee, blind kittens in the hay nest. She lapped up the milk gratefully.