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JUSTICE AND MERCY; OR, THE FEAST OF ALL-HALLOW'S.

CHAPTER I.

It is evening in the village of Ravensbourne, a quiet soft evening in balmy June, with scarce a sound to break upon the peaceful silence of the scene.

Ravensbourne—for so we shall name the village in which we have opened our tale—was, or rather is, situated in the west of England, and presents to the lover of nature's beauties a scene as picturesque as any to be found throughout the length and breadth of our own sea-girt isle.

At the base of a beautiful hill stands the Manor-house, a building of ancient date, erected perhaps about the time of Elizabeth, and whose walls, (if walls could speak) could tell strange tales; in sooth, it was a gloomy pile, which assorted ill with the character of the scenery around; to our mind, it would have suited better as the home of some warrior chieftain of far-off days, or mayhap the wild romantic scenery of the snowy Alpine heights, than that of Ravensbourne.

"Oh! would that I might once again Behold my bright, my sunny Spain. Gold northern clime, I love thee not, Though here is cast my hapless lot. Oh! give me back my fairy home, From whence I never wish'd to roam; Oh! give me back my happy youth, Sweet days, so full of peace and truth. Ah! happy still might I yet be, Were I a maid of low degree; In some lone cot, some woodland glen, Far from the busy haunts of men. Low, treasured deep in memory's cell, On wretched joys I oft may dwell; I envy none those humbly born, On whom I once look'd down with scorn. Oh! give me back my own bright Spain, Let me behold it once again; I hate your land, 'tis cold and drear; I keep not a Spanish maiden here. I'll give thee gems both rich and rare, Shall be to thee a guerdon fair; One boon I ask, 'tis thine consent; Ah! hear a Spanish maid's lament."

The last words had scarcely died away on the still evening air, ere a loud shrill laugh was heard and a voice exclaimed,—

"Nay, Inez, dainty fair one, mine own pretty girl, cheer up, and take it not to heart that I cannot grant this foolish prayer of thine; go to, silly wench, this England at which you so rudely rail is as fair or fairer than thine own land; get thee to thy prayers, girl, and keep thy mind peaceful and contented, and, mayhap, when thou hast attained thy majority I may give my consent; but not one hour before, Inez—not even should those black eyes of yours wear themselves dim with weeping, or the rich tones of your beautiful voice become as shrill as your old guardian's, with singing those silly lackadaisical verses which you have composed to keep alive such foolish memories. Now get thee in, Inez," continued the old man, "and—" but even as he spoke a rustling sound in the long grass at his feet attracted his attention, and a young man, of some seven or eight-and-twenty years of age, stood before him.

"Your pardon, sir," he courteously began; "but I have lost my way, and am yet, I fear, too far from the Elms, the seat of my kinsman Sir Godfrey Harcourt, to reach it to-night."

"You are yet a distance of some ten miles, at least," replied the old gentleman, whom we will designate as Sir Robert Mortimer; "but are most welcome, as the kinsman of Sir Godfrey, to the shelter of my roof till morning."

With many expressions of gratitude at the proffered hospitality, the stranger followed his aged host; not, however, without having first fixed a wondering glance on the maiden, whose song he had listened to, and on whose pale, proud but beautiful features he had gazed with so much interest.

general character of the entire building,—low-roofed, with rafters of polished oak curiously carved; the floor, shelves, and chairs, all of the same, the cushions of the latter being covered with a faded velvet, once a rich crimson. Rare, too, was the collection of books which filled those shelves,—rare and valueless to the present owner of Ravensbourne, who loved better the sports of the chase than to pore over the works of learned men—as little then could he appreciate the character of his guest, who was well-read, his mind well-informed, and who had travelled through many countries, and was now returning from the place of his last sojourn, Valladolid, to his native land, after an absence of nearly twelve years.

But anon supper was announced; and one entered who drank in with greedy eagerness every word which fell from the lips of Eustace Vere, especially when he spoke in such witching terms of the land of her nativity, its vine-clad hills, its olive groves, and its gorgeous buildings; then the clear cheek of Inez mantled with a crimson tint, her large dark eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and she felt for the first time since she had left Spain that she had at last met with a kindred soul.

It was late at night ere the little party separated, and when they parted it was with feelings of mutual good-will on either side. So that, on the following morning, the friendly request on the part of Mr. Mortimer, that his young guest would become more intimate with and frequently call at the Manor-house, was immediately and gladly accepted.

CHAPTER II.

Forty years previously to the commencement of our tale, Ravensbourne Manor-house owned a master of a far different character to that of the venerable man who now possessed it.

Extravagant, dissipated, reckless, and profligate, Sir Guy Mortimer freely abandoned himself to every species of wickedness; carefully reared by religious parents in the tenets of the ancient faith, he at last threw off even the practice of those outward forms, to which, as to a second nature he had clung, long after they had ceased to be actuated by that interior spirit by which they should ever be accompanied.—The strong barrier of religion thrown aside, there was nothing to check Guy in his onward course of wickedness; he had imbibed the impious infidelity of France; his boon companions, his dearest friends were amongst those who tore down the altars of religion and raised them to the goddess of reason; and every power of a naturally strong and vigorous intellect was exerted on the side of error and crime.

Fortunately for their peace of mind, it so happened that the worthy parents of Guy Mortimer had paid the debt of nature ere the errors of their son were unblushingly brought forward.

At the time of his father's death, Guy was summoned to England, and all being over, found that his inheritance consisted of the old Manor-house with the greater part of the small village of Ravensbourne; and the last words of his father also bequeathed to his care and kind consideration an orphan girl whom his mother had adopted after Guy's departure from England.

With moody brow and folded arms, Guy Mortimer paced thoughtfully to and fro the library the morning after his return, and ever and anon fell from his lips the words accompanied by a bitter imprecation.

"A girl, forsooth, entrusted to my care and kind consideration—pshaw! Guy Mortimer lacks broad pieces for his own use. The girl, if she have wit and cleverness, must go and make her fortune as other girls go; but I will see the wench at once, and, after a few soft words and a few more weeks of comfort in a home to which she was not born, I will set her quietly adrift."

As Guy spoke he rang sharply the little silver bell which stood upon the table, and on the summons being answered requested an interview with Miss Melville.

A few moments more and a gentle step struck upon his ear; Guy Mortimer turned round with a frown yet upon his handsome countenance, but it cleared away as the stranger advanced, and, bowing gracefully, accepted his proffered hand. Lucy Melville was something above the middle height of woman, her countenance was sweet and expressive, her complexion fair, and those deep blue eyes and locks of golden hair reminded one of the Saxon beauties of former days. A look of touching melancholy sat upon her features, as though there were hope and fear warring together within her breast. Ah, gentle Lucy, there was room indeed for the latter feeling, hadst thou been able to read the future.—Guy Mortimer was handsome in the strictest sense of the word; he was a bold, bad man, with no small powers of penetration; he could quickly dive into the characters of others; one glance, however, and the frown disappeared from his face, and with a most benign expression of countenance, he bade her be of good heart, for

that if she had lost one friend in his parents, she had found another in himself. With many grateful words Lucy returned her thanks, adding that, whilst she had it in her power to be a solace to her aged friends who were now removed by death, she could do it without pain to her own feelings, and that she was aware that Lady Harcourt of the Elms would receive her with friendly hospitality, until, continued Lucy, "I can put those talents the Almighty has given me to some profitable use."

"Be it so, then, Miss Melville," replied Guy with apparent sang froid; "but remember, when you require a friend you will find one in myself."

Lucy bowed her acknowledgments, and ere the close of the day she sought the hospitable shelter of the Elms.

A perfect master in the art of dissembling was Guy Mortimer, else when ever he visited at the Elms, he could not always have acted the hypocrite, solely because he was smitten with the beautiful face and well informed mind of Lucy Melville, of whom, after the lapse of a few weeks, he was the accepted suitor—she, poor soul, in her ignorance of his real character thinking herself happy in becoming the mistress of Ravensbourne.

Ravensbourne, then, ere long, received Lucy as its mistress, and some months elapsed ere the mask fell from the face of her husband. Whispers first and then rumors that Guy had fallen from the faith of his fathers were now freely circulated; and the final dismissal of the venerable chaplain, and closing up of the chapel itself, told that the rumor was no idle tale. None could say that Lucy was aught but a miserable wife, and her twin daughters were ushered into the world certainly not amid rejoicing.

But Guy Mortimer was not even decent in his vice; he who had dissembled now came unblushingly forward, proclaiming himself an infidel outraging the moral laws of society, reckless, profligate—running headlong, as it were, in his mad career of ruin in this world and damnation in the next, when it was suddenly cut short, and retributive justice then had its day.

A long, long summer's day had slowly passed away. Lucy, wretched and forlorn, pining under ill-usage and neglect, had sat for hours in the library, dreading the return of one for whom her love had now changed into fear, and mournfully watching the last rays of the sun as he sank into his coral cave, behind the distant hills. Gradually every object seemed to become more and more indistinct in the rapidly approaching darkness. Suddenly, the French clock on the mantel-shelf ran down. A fear stole over her senses, for which she could not account. It seemed to her as though she were no longer alone, but that some impalpable, ethereal essence hovered near her. She would have rung for lights, but very fear rooted her to the spot on which she stood. The moon now rose slowly. How ghastly pale were its rays as they shone into the room, giving, as it were, life to the grotesque figures carved in those ancient panels, so that they seemed as if about to start from each recess in the wall.

And now a broad ray of silvery light flooded the whole apartment with its cold but glorious radiance. Lucy knows she is not alone, but is as one transfixed. She cannot move nor speak, but her eyes are on a phantom form beside her. The words, "I have blasphemed, and am condemned," fell upon her ear; and a hand, the touch of which is like liquid fire, falls upon her own! She saw, she heard no more. When consciousness returned, a group of horror-struck servants stood beside her. "Their master—where was he?" she wildly asked. "Tell me at once the truth—I know he is no more!"

How or by what agency she could have learned the truth those around her vainly strove to surmise, till with her own lips she related the scene she had witnessed.

Sir Guy Mortimer was indeed no more. In company with a few friends he had entered a boat, on a fine lake some few miles off. In the midst of his wickedness, whilst impugning the existence of the Deity, those broad waters, the handiwork of God around him, became the ministers of the wrath of the Most High. A storm suddenly arose. The scoffer and blasphemer ridiculed religion as the offspring of priestly invention, and madly called on God to avenge His own cause if he spoke amiss. Those words were his last. The lightnings of Divine justice were levelled against him. One flash of lightning—another, and another illumined the face of the deep. The two friends shrank in silent horror from contact with the blasphemer. They crossed themselves, and prayed—but still the impious words smote the air, and the lightning's vivid flash stretched Guy Mortimer, a blackened corpse, at their feet.

It was half-past nine, the precise hour at which the library clock at Ravensbourne had run down.

CHAPTER III. It is the Eve of All-Hallows. The chapel of Ravensbourne Manor is again re-opened. It is a little gem of art, of the Gothic order of architecture. Its painted windows, and its massive altar-service of richly-chased gold plate, show that no expense has been spared to make it what the temple of the Most High should be.

But now the scene has changed, as with the touch of an enchanter's wand. Flowers and candles, and gorgeous vestments, and chased altar-vessels, disappear; sombre lights, of yellow wax, alone are there; sable draperies hang around that altar of spotless white marble; a coffin, the emblem of our mortality, is borne slowly down the nave; the priest intones the sweet *Placem Dominum*, and the choir takes up the sad but soothing strain, *Dilexi, quoniam exaudivit Dominus vocem orationis mee.*

All Saints' Eve! Remembrances sweet and touching rise up at those words. Wherever the sun rises or sets, there does the ancient Church hold dominion; and whether it be by the converted Indian in his semi-barbarous state, the poor Chinese, beneath the lofty dome of a Continental cathedral, or in our own cold clime, within the more humble piles which religious persecution alone has left us, still are chanted the words, *Placem Dominum*—still ascend the psalm and prayer for the souls of the departed—still is offered the Holy Sacrifice, and fasts, and communions, and prayers, for the Church suffering,—for those who may not yet be admitted to the haven of rest—to the clear vision of God.

But there is one there to whom this most cheering doctrine of our faith brings yet no consolation. Clad in the garb of widowhood, Lucy Mortimer mourns as one who has no hope;—for, in the act of mortal sin, blaspheming, cursing, out of the Church, unshriven, unrepentant, unabsolved, Guy Mortimer had passed from time to eternity. God, who is essentially just as well as merciful, cannot be untrue to His own attributes, and hope never can sustain those who mourn. (or such a soul.

Yet surely there is no doctrine more cheering or consoling than this—in which communion is still held with those we love. Here is a golden chain, reaching from earth to the world of spirits. No link is broken; nothing is wanting; and prayer, like sweet-smelling incense, rises from morn to night before the throne of God—prayers from the loving hearts of mourning friends, prayers from cloistered souls, prayers from stoled priests; and yet, above all, He, the Sinless One, at once both Priest and Victim, is offered in the Holy Sacrifice for the souls of the departed.—But return we from our digression. Lucy was now the mother of three promising children, a son and twin daughters. The former was the heir to the estate, and it was her soothing task to train their minds to piety and virtue.

But the frail nature of the mother, and her natural delicacy of constitution, had passed to the youngest child, and in proportion as the girls grew in health and strength, the sickly boy pined away and died whilst yet a child; his mother did not long survive him; the estate fell into the hands of a cousin of the late possessor; and the twin sisters were confided to the guardianship of Lady Harcourt.

These sisters attained the age of womanhood—one married a Spanish grandee, the other a poor Scotch gentleman, with a long pedigree and a very short purse, and from the union of either sister sprang Inez de Lara and Flora Douglas, the joint heroines of our tale, who were thus connected in the second degree of relationship.

CHAPTER IV.

It is evening in the braw city of Edinburgh; but we have nothing to do, gentle reader, with its well-lighted streets, spacious thoroughfares, and noble mansions, so step with us a little aside from the crowd, and enter a house of smaller grade, down one of those dark, close streets which abound in every great city. One of the upper flats in this house belongs to those with whom we have to do, so note well that it is around us; see how gently tries to hide the poverty of that region around. Oh! this sad poverty is a thousand times more venomous than it is to those a class beneath them, to whom many a refuge presents itself, which to the former is denied.

Reclining on a miscalled easy chair—surely so named for courtesy—buried in an uneasy slumber, was an aged man; on a couch near him lay a woman, over whose countenance the gray shadow of death was passing; and beside her knelt a fair girl, ever and anon wiping away those heavy dew-drops which gathered so thickly on the pallid face.

The door opens, and Flora's heart beats with joy; she is not to be left quite alone then in the chamber of death for that almost childish old man seems scarcely conscious that his wife is dying; a priest enters, and prepares to administer

the last rites of religion to the sufferer, who, still conscious, prepares for a speedy transit from time to eternity.

"I have one request to make," she feebly whispered, when all the duties of religion were over. "I incurred the displeasure of Lady Harcourt by my alliance with a Scotch Episcopalian, who was also very poor; my own proud spirit induced me never to seek for a reconciliation. She is too just to withhold her friendship from Flora, whom I have reared as a good Catholic; will you make me a promise that you will write to her from me in behalf of my child?"

"I will," replied the priest; "and now, dismissing the things of time, think only of those of eternity."

Swiftly indeed was the spirit passing to that bourne whence no traveller returns, and advancing to the old man, the priest strove to make him comprehend that his wife was really dying. The effect of the announcement was startling; and, springing to his feet, he threw himself beside the bed, and madly called on her to live, whilst Flora vainly strove, out of compassion to her mother, to conceal the grief she felt.

Now rising from her kneeling posture, she threw her arms around the old man's neck, and strove to whisper words of comfort, when she herself most needed it; and when all was over she bravely performed the last duties, and gave not a moment to self, till the remains of her mother were laid in their last resting-place, and the father yet left was as well cared for as the humble earnings of a daily governess would allow.

Poor Flora! her sole inheritance lay in her mother's beauty and her father's pride, and two very dangerous things they are when they are coupled with extreme poverty.

She was indeed a fair specimen of a Scotch beauty—a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, with a countenance full of expression and a heart of love.

Yes, and we must add full of something else too, for it was full of pride—pride of a long and honorable lineage filled the heart of Flora Douglas; yet, foolish as is this pride, give it to us, dear reader, a thousand times before the pride of the purse.

Yes, Flora Douglas was full of it. To those who knew her well it appeared almost ridiculous, when coupled with her extreme poverty; the curve of the lip, the toss of the beautiful head, the very step and carriage of the girl, especially when her sensitive feelings were aroused by the insults which are sure to throng upon the poor, told you that she considered herself as superior to the moneyed person who inflicted the wound, as the little mongrel cur is beneath the notice of some noble dog of a superior breed.

And yet we could almost forgive Flora; her pride was more foolish than sinful, for there is a pride that leads to death, and there is a pride, call it self-esteem, or call it what you will, but this latter pride sits gracefully on the wearer;—it makes him respect himself or herself too much to be guilty of a base or dishonorable action; it cannot stoop to do anything or everything for this world's pelf, and never either shuns, or seeks, for mere love of lucre, the acquaintance of others on account of the length of their purse. Flora Douglas had a little world of her own, in which she had lived till within the last few years, when the stern necessities of her family had obliged her to seek a situation as a governess; for hours she would sit alone, singing her favorite ballads about 'Bonnie Prince Charlie,' and the fallen fortunes of her own house;—or, listening to her father, faithfully, perchance too faithfully, treasured up the anecdotes he told her, and which she often wove into the daily realities of life. On one such occasion, as, work in hand, Flora sat warbling one of her favorite ballads, she suddenly let the needle drop, and leaning her head on her hand, fell into a musing mood.

Her father raised his head as her song ceased, and, noting her fit of abstraction, exclaimed—"What ails thee, Flora,—why so quiet?"

"I was just thinking," she replied, "of an insolent speech addressed to me to-day by my namesake, Mrs. Douglas, who possesses more money than either wit or virtue."

"Your namesake, Flora," replied her father, brushing aside his white hairs almost with a gesture of impatience; "she is but a dirt Douglas, sprung from a discreditable branch, with whom we have nothing to do; she is not of our clan." Reader, this is no fictitious speech, and, as in the case of Flora, it failed not to have its effect on the mind of her who heard it.

Lightly, though her parents possessed nothing beyond a decent competency, had the life of Flora passed on, until her father, being struck by apoplexy, rendered it imperatively necessary for this, their only child, to seek for employment. Flora was not only accomplished, but solidly well-informed; and it was not very long ere she heard of a situation as daily governess, in which, for the weekly stipend of one guinea, she was able at least to procure the bare necessities of life for herself and her parents. "But it