

EARTH.

BY ERNEST W. SHURTLEFF.

With what a glory breaks the dawn
Above the purple eastern hills!
Each day the world anew is born,
With all her thousand streams and rills.
With all her vernal glens and woods,
Her mighty sea, her quiet lakes,
Her stately mountain solitudes,
Where mortal step no echo wakes.

Oh, what a varied language swells
From out her broad, harmonious breast!
Her tongue of life and grandeur tells
Of joy and beauty, peace and rest.
On every side her music flows,
On every side her charms are seen.
From icy Winter's frosts and snows
To golden Summer's shades of green.

No power profanes her voice sublime,
No stain her growing beauty mars,
As in the azure dome of Time
She smiles among the sister stars.
O man, thou child of mortal birth,
Thou child of sorrow and of fear,
He whose broad arm upholds the earth
Is not unmindful of thy tear!

THREE DAYS OF MY LIFE.

There is no doubt about it. I certainly was awfully savage. What a concatenation of circumstances—all tending to bring about the ruin of one unfortunate individual—myself, Harry Cavendish, of the Inner Temple, briefless barrister-at-law! First, my uncle George, who had adopted me with the declared intention of making me his heir, married, had a son, and, some two months since, wrote to inform me that his duties to others would now prevent his continuing the allowance he had hitherto made me, expressing a hope that the brilliant education he had bestowed would speedily enable me to carve my way to position and fortune. Then, this very morning, in dropped Fred Summers, careless as usual, and said—

"Pon my life, old fellow, I'm awfully sorry, but I can't meet that little bill of mine! I did think the governor would relent; but he won't; so I'm obliged to come upon you, Cavendish, for the time being. I hope it won't be very inconvenient; but you're such a brick of a fellow, and so lucky in having that munificent old uncle to back you, that it takes the squeamishness out of one to ask a loan of you!"

Off he went; and I began to look matters in the face. I found the prospect by no means enlivening. My exchequer was at its lowest ebb, with no means of an immediate replenishment, and various gentlemen who before my uncle's marriage had been ready enough to supply my slightest requirements were pressing for an acknowledgment of past favors. Then, worse than all, there was this wretched bill of Fred's due within a week, and already twice renewed. By Jove, what a position! How was it possible for me to find two hundred pounds! I might as well try to raise two thousand in the present circumstances.

Ah, happy thought—my yacht! Surely the fellows must have sold her by this time! Luckily for me, seeing that matters were likely to become less prosperous upon the accession of my fair young aunt, I had, some three months since, handed it over to Delahay Brothers, shipping-agents, Wapping, to be by them disposed of to the best advantage. As I had heard nothing of their progress in the matter, I concluded it would be well to give them a personal reminder. I glanced at my watch—it indicated the ominous hour of five; would they be open! I determined to chance it. Anything is better than sitting still, a prey to one's miserable thoughts.

What a vile afternoon! November to the backbone, and a fine fog brewing overhead! With desperate determination I thrust my arms into my overcoat, and, pressing my hat low upon my brows, sallied forth in search of that *terra incognita*, Wapping.

Splashing, doubling, turning up one slimy street leading to another slimmer still, now wrong, now right, now wrong again, weary, disgusted, I plunged along my unknown way, and at last, to my infinite surprise, found myself facing an archway bearing the welcome characters which indicated the offices of Delahay Brothers. Good!—the counting-house was not closed! Hope once more triumphant, I entered, and addressed myself to a young man who was putting the finishing touches to a somewhat elaborate toilet, while enjoying a light repast of tea and bloaters.

"What is your business, sir! Office closes at four. I am here at this time only for my own personal convenience, though I shall be proud to assist you if you desire any information. Joseph Sparks, sir, at your service."

I proceeded to gather what particulars I might anent my "fairy barque." The young fellow was very civil, and took a great deal of trouble. I found, to my discomfiture, that the boat had been advertised upon three separate occasions, but that no one had yet made any offer for it. I asked if there was no better way than advertising. Mr. Sparks thought not. It was such a small thing—quite a toy, in fact, and of no particular use to anybody. Having learnt when Mr. Delahay was visible, I offered Mr. Sparks a tangible evidence of my appreciation of his services, told him I would look in again, wished him good-night, and departed.

The return journey was simply abominable. The fog, which had been gradually increasing throughout the entire day, now hung in a heavy suffocating mass around. How I managed to

steer my way through the intricacies of those narrow streets on such a night will for ever remain a mystery to me; but at last, after repeated blunders, I gained the friendly threshold of my door, to find the fish spoiled, the mutton cold, and my housekeeper vehement at my want of punctuality.

Having concluded my repast, I was still sitting before the *débris*, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, when Charles Maxwell showed his jolly face in the doorway.

"What! Dining at this hour, you patrician dog! What an aristocrat you have become! Here, lend a hand with this coat, old fellow; it's raining like bricks, and I'm drenched to the skin. I quite expected you at my place to-night; but, as you did not turn up, and I wanted particularly to see you, there was nothing for it but to beard the lion in his den. But what's wrong, Cavendish! You look about as lively as a glow worm at sunrise!"

Seated before the fire with a cigar and a glass of brandy-and-water, and my jovial friend at my elbow, I managed to "pull myself together" pretty tolerably, and told him the sum of my misfortunes.

"Well," said he at last, having heard me to the end, "your uncle has served you a scurvy trick; but I don't think your position is so bad; you will pull through in time."

"In time—yes; but time is just the thing which I cannot get. The whole matter has got wind; and every fellow that I owe twenty pounds to is draining me. I can't tell you what a beastly week I have had; and, as for work, I have not done a stroke—nor shall I until the annoyance ceases."

Charley was silent for a time, and then he asked—

"How would it be if you made a clean breast of it to your uncle! Surely he would give you a lift in the shape of a loan, or a bill, or a something!"

"Not on any account, Charley," I replied. "He is the last man now to whom I would apply for assistance."

"Well, of course, you know the ropes best; and, that being so, we must try to get on another tack. Now, all things considered, there is only one person I know who is likely to help you."

"And he?" I interrogated.

"Is my father," said Charley, removing the ash of his cigar.

"My dear Charley," I exclaimed, "how could I expect Mr. Maxwell to interest himself in the affairs of a perfect stranger!"

"There you're mistaken," said Charley. "He doesn't look upon you as a stranger, for ever since you pulled me so magnificently through that little affair at Richmond"—Charley alluded to his first and last escapade, in which I was so fortunate as to be of some use to my quondam "fag" and much cherished and devoted friend—"he has repeatedly spoken of you; and I am here to-night at his express desire to ask you to accompany me back to the hall to-morrow. My sister's marriage comes off on Thursday; and we shall have some capital fellows there; so we want you to make one of the party."

"Your governor is very good, Charley, and I am glad he thinks well of me; but I am not, I assure you, in the mood to play the part of wedding-guest."

"Wedding-guest" be hanged!" exclaimed Charley. "The wedding is such a short business—it will not tax your gallantry much; and afterwards I can promise you some fine sport amongst the pheasants. Besides, my father will, I know, be annoyed if you do not put in an appearance, for you have refused all his overtures hitherto. So shall we consider the matter settled!"

"Well, yes, Charley, I suppose so. I will run down with you thankfully. It will be a real blessing to be out of the sound of that incessant bell. But you must understand, my dear fellow, that I forbid your mentioning my difficulties to your father. I should not like—even were he so kind as to offer it—to accept a loan; and I fear there is nothing short of that will lift me out of the mire."

"You leave everything to me, like a sensible chap, and I will undertake that the matter shall be put on a proper footing without one grain of your *amour propre* being injured. And now to arrange. I start by the 11.25 from Euston, and will, with your permission, pick you up *en passant*."

"All right, Charley; as you please. And now, the programme of our journey being satisfactorily settled, tell me how it is that I have not heard before of your lovely sister's engagement and approaching marriage."

"Lovely sister!" laughed Charley. "Who told you Stephanie was lovely?"

"No one, I believe; but I gather that she is both lovely and lovable from the admiration and affection she seems to have excited in your fraternal breast."

"Well, you are not far wrong in your conjecture—everybody admits that Stephanie is beautiful; and her beauty, to my mind, is the least of her attractions. I wish to Heaven—"

"What do you wish, Charley?" I asked, seeing the cloud that in an instant had dimmed the brightness of his handsome boyish face—for Charley was a boy still, in spite of his twenty-six years.

"Oh, nothing," he replied, colouring, "except—"

"Except what, Charley?"

"Why, this—that I wish I could feel she were happy!"

"What makes you think she is not?" I asked,

concerned to see him so evidently troubled.

"She has not surely been coerced?"

"No, not exactly," he replied. "You see the marriage comes about in this way. I have not alluded to it before, even to you, because it has always been a sore topic in our family. In the first place, I must tell you that Stephanie is not my sister."

"Not your sister!" I exclaimed.

"No—nor any blood relation; still to my father and to me she is most inexpressibly dear. She is the child of my father's second wife. My mother died at my birth, and my father married, when I was a boy of seven or eight years, the widow of a Spanish nobleman, the Count de Gonzala. After his death, the Countess came to England with her little girl, my step-sister Stephanie; and one year after their arrival my father brought them to the Hall. My step-mother has been dead now nearly six years; and, much as we regret her loss, we should be content if we could still retain Stephanie with us. But she can inherit her father's property only by marrying her cousin the young Count Gonzala on or before she attains the age of twenty-one, or, in the event of the Count refusing, by selecting for herself a suitable husband within the given period; otherwise the estates pass into the hands of the Church. Now Stephanie will be twenty-one next Thursday, and it was my step-mother's wish that the cousins should marry. She thought it right that the possessor of the title should have some share in the estates also; consequently Stephanie has been brought up to look favorably upon her cousin. They have rarely met, but I believe a short time since she was content with the arrangement. He is a handsome well-informed, man, of grave and gentle manners; but neither I nor my father can endure him. He is a priest-ridden Catholic, and, in spite of his apparent devotion to Stephanie when near her, there always seems to be a want of sincerity in all he does and says. But what a yarn I am spinning! You must be bored past recovery."

"Not at all, Charley. I am most deeply interested. Fill your glass and go on."

"Well, as I was saying, I thoroughly distrust him, and, added to this, Stephanie herself is changed of late. She is not half the girl she used to be; I believe she is wretched, and I cannot help thinking that she has some one she likes better. She was away in the summer at Torquy, and ever since her return I have observed how very altered she is. I saw, as soon as she came back, that there was something wrong; but I didn't find out what it was at once. Many things have since confirmed me in this impression. One circumstance struck me particularly, that she never from the first would voluntarily allude to that visit; and the change in her is never more marked than when by a chance word it becomes a subject of conversation. Strange, is it not?"

"Very," I answered.

"Well, anyhow it is no use to groan over what can't be helped. We must make the best of it now. By Jove, there goes the first of the small hours! What a lecture I shall get from Mother Jones! She told me this morning that she feared I was falling into bad habits, because she had found a crumpled playbill in my linen-drawer. *Au revoir*, old fellow; don't forget 11.25 to-morrow."

He was gone; and I passed the remainder of the night considering how far I was justified in becoming a guest of Charley's father, being already deeply in love with his sister, by whom I had been refused only five months before.

How strangely the whole thing had happened! Until to-night I had never met that Stephanie Gonzala, whom I had met in Devonshire, was the same sweet sister of whom Charley Maxwell was always raving, and of which, in fact, I was just a little tired. Of course I was ignorant of Charley's domestic history, and had supposed that his sister shared his name as certainly as she possessed his affection; but to night had brought to me a two-fold revelation—that of her connection with the Maxwell family and also, as I fondly hoped, of her interest in myself.

One remark of Charley's rang in my ears—"I cannot help thinking that she has some one she likes better, for she has never been the same girl since her return from Torquy." Could it be so? Could she indeed have cared for me! She had rejected me coolly enough, simply assuring me that she was already engaged; and I left her, impressed with the comfortable idea that she at least had passed through the ordeal unscathed. But how if Charley's conjecture was really true, if I had indeed supplanted her cousin in her affection! Was it too late to prevent a marriage which could only seal the misery of us both! Ah, how I loved her! How desperately I had tried to forget her during all those past miserable months! And this was the result! With the first gleam of hope I was prepared to face all difficulties, dare all consequences to win her. I forgot the perplexities by which I was surrounded. I forgot the coldness of her rejection. I forgot even the obstacles raised by time itself to my success. I only felt that, if she loved me, I would compel her to be mine.

But with the morning hours came reflection and common-sense. How could I possibly enter Mr. Maxwell's house in such circumstances! For, were the real facts of the case known, neither father nor brother would desire my presence. As I was obliged to acknowledge that, were Stephanie's love to be had for the asking, I should not dare to claim it. What right had I to influence the future of any girl! What had I to offer in exchange for confidence and affection! A pretty conceited fellow I should appear in the eyes of old Maxwell if I asked for

the hand of his daughter, and offered my debts and liabilities in lieu of marriage settlements. Over and over again I determined to tell Charley all and to forego the journey; and then would come the maddening thought that on Thursday Stephanie would be lost to me for ever.

The hour named by Charley for our departure still found me wavering betwixt love and honor. When he drove up to the door love was in the ascendant, and I had determined to discover for myself whether Stephanie was a willing or a reluctant bride.

Pickering Hall is situated in the heart of Westmoreland, and we reached it about seven in the evening. I fear I must have proved but a sorry companion to poor Charley, since I had been wholly occupied in conjecturing what sort of reception I should receive at the hands of Stephanie. About mid-way however I had startled him by remarking that this sister was not unknown to me. His astonishment was unlimited, and he very naturally inquired why I had not named the fact earlier. I told him where I had met her, and that until the previous night I had been ignorant of her connection with himself. Charley was quite satisfied, and rattled on about Stephanie for the rest of the distance, delighted that I had seen her.

Lights were flashing brightly from the windows as we drove through a stately avenue to the old Hall. The carriage had scarcely drawn up before the entrance when, the door opening, we were received on the threshold by the hospitable host himself.

"Welcome home, Charley, and doubly welcome since you bring Mr. Cavendish with you! And, shaking us heartily by the hand, he led the way to the library."

A very noble and distinguished looking old gentleman was Charley's father, whose three-score years had but silvered his locks, without detracting from the brightness of his eye, the ruddiness of his cheek, or the firmness of his step.

"And now, Mr. Cavendish, a glass of sherry after your journey; then, Charley, you had better take your friend to his quarters—they adjoin yours; and, if you can both manage to reappear in fifteen minutes, we shall just save the fish."

I scarcely know in what frame of mind I descended to the drawing-room. To be near Stephanie, to know that again I should hear her voice, gaze into her eyes, feel the magic touch of her soft fingers, was in itself delirium; but I was conscious too that I was acting an unworthy part, and that, if my love for Stephanie were known, I should very speedily receive my *comept*. All these ideas were present to my mind as I entered the room. It was full of people; but I saw only Stephanie. She was standing by her father, in the soft radiance shed by the gleaming wax-lights above, unconscious of my presence. I had time to note, while advancing to her, the quiet gaiety of her demeanor. Never had she appeared to me fairer and certainly never brighter than now. Feeling myself to have been an utter idiot for having supposed her pining or wretched for my sake, I approached her. She smiled; and for a moment I held in mine the hand that I so dearly prized.

"This is kind, Mr. Cavendish. My father has long desired the pleasure of welcoming Charley's old friend to Pickering."

I bowed, but uttered no word. We met as strangers, and she turned away; but surely it was no self-deception—her lips had trembled over the formal greeting, her cheek had paled, and her breast heaved with repressed emotion!

That evening passed with the usual amount of chit-chat, music, and flirtation; and I retired at last firmly convinced that I had better beat a hasty retreat or prepare to play a more difficult role than I was perhaps equal to.

The next morning, breakfast being over, I turned out into the grounds to gain a few undisturbed moments in which to decide what course I should take; for to stay where I was and see Stephanie give herself into the keeping of the smooth-tongued Spaniard was a task beyond my strength. How best to withdraw from my present position was the question which necessarily arose. I was still cogitating the matter when Charley tapped me on the shoulder.

"What, in the blues again, old fellow! But listen—I have some news that will change the sombre hues of your mind to *coulour de rose*. Last night, before going to bed, the governor and I had a chat about your affairs. I told him exactly how you stand; and, without any suggestion from me, he declared he would help you. So come with me into the library and see him: he is quite disengaged now," and Charley was about to lead the way when I stopped him.

"My dear boy," I said, "your father is good and generous to a degree; but, much and greatly as I value this evidence of his friendship, I cannot accept such a favor at his hands. I was wrong to have come here, in the first instance. I had scarcely entered the house before I felt that I should never have accepted your invitation; and when you joined me here I was considering how best to make my excuses to Mr. Maxwell and betake myself to town."

"Well, you are, without exception, the most comical fellow that I have ever dropped upon!" cried Charley indignantly. "Why cannot you quietly take the goods the gods send you! But I insist upon you seeing the governor! He will wipe away all your pride at a word; no one can resist his jolly warm-hearted way of doing a kindness." And once more I was propelled towards the house.

"Wait, Charley—let us take another turn to the lake. I have something I must say to you."