

The Vicar's Nephew; or The Orphan's Vindication

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Hewitt was very grave and silent in school on Thursday morning. He passed over mistakes and wrote wrong figures on the blackboard, and had dark lines under his eyes, as if he had slept badly or had a toothache.

In the middle of the history class the curate came in hastily with an anxious look, and said: "Come out here a minute, will you, Hewitt? I want to speak to you."

They went out of the room, and for some time the boys yawned and fidgeted, looking at their desks.

"Hullo!" said Charlie Thompson, who was looking out of the window. "That's the Roscoe girl."

Jim Greaves sprang up with a quick, startled cry; and then sat down again. Jack glanced carelessly out of the window. Maggie Roscoe was walking away down the road, clinging to the curate's arm, and sobbing bitterly.

"I wonder what's wrong with her?" he thought; and then, after a moment: "And what's wrong with everybody? All the school's in the dumps to-day."

Mr. Hewitt came back and went on with the class; but his hand was shaking as he held the book.

Presently he pulled himself together and began irritably cross-examining the boys and finding fault over trifles. He was usually a patient teacher, if a dull one; but now everything seemed to annoy him. When the morning classes were finished, he called up Jack and reprimanded him sharply before the school. A window had been found to be broken.

"You were seen pitching up stones in the road yesterday. That makes the third pane of glass this term."

Jack shrugged his shoulders. He had not been throwing stones, and had picked up the pebbles only because of their colored markings; but if Mr. Hewitt chose to put himself in the wrong by taking things for granted, why should one undecide him?

"It was the cat that broke the window, sir," one of the boys put in. "I saw her; there was a dog after her, and she jumped up and sent a flower-pot through."

"Oh," said Mr. Hewitt absently; "is that so?"

Jack went out with the sullen face which he had not worn since Saturday. What a mean lot they were! Let them once get a spite against a fellow, and they would always be ready to put anything on to him, without stopping to ask who was to blame. And he had got to be at the orphans' as an ass like that.

Yes, but he would be a man some day; and then he would never be at anybody's orders any more. Uncle and the other cads could do their worst; what did it all matter when their time was so short? Nothing matters when one is going to be free. He had never thought of that before; now it burst upon him suddenly, a splendid light of promise. He walked down the lane with shining eyes; only a few more years now, and he would be a man.

By the afternoon Mr. Hewitt had recovered his self-command; but he was more gloomy than ever, and gave short, impatient answers to the questions put to him. Some of the older boys seemed as much upset as the schoolmaster; and at closing-time the class melted away silently, without any of the usual tricks and laughter. Jack, for his part, shouldered his books and ran home at the top of his speed. If he made haste he could get his preparation finished and be out before sunset.

He jumped over the garden gate with the long, easy spring for which all the Porteharwick boys envied him, alighting on the gravel with perfect

poise and balance. Then he looked back to measure the length of the jump with his eyes. It was a creditable one for a boy of fourteen, and the consciousness of it thrilled him with delight. To be made so cleanly, to have every limb so strong and supple,—is that not a joy? He looked down at his firm, brown wrists, wondering how thick a bunch he would twist off from the fuchsia with one turn of the close-knit muscles. But when he put out his hand to try, the beauty of the slender crimson buds restrained him; he had never before noticed how lovely was the droop with which they hung, how protectively the young leaves were spread out above them, like the curved wings of a sea-gull. He raised the branch gently, slaking all the fairy buds, and drew it across his cheek.

A horrible cry broke out suddenly; and he let the fuchsia bough fall back. The cry was repeated; it came from the stable yard, and the voice was Spotty's. Some strange dog was barking at her—and Spotty was blind. He turned and dashed headlong towards the yard. The old dog's cries sounded in his ears, more and more piercing and lamentable as he came nearer; now there was another sound as well: the sharp, stinging, regular hiss of a whip. He stopped short an instant by the gateway, catching his breath; then opened the gate and entered the yard.

Spotty was cowering on the flagstones, muzzled and chained to her kennel. She could no longer struggle much, and only moaned and shivered as the whip came down with its even sickening thud. The vicar seemed to put all his strength into every blow.

Jack sprang forward with a furious cry. The deliberateness of the thing, the muzzling and the carefully shortened chain, had set his blood on fire. The blind creature was helpless enough without all that. In one moment he would have snatched the whip and struck his uncle across the face with it. Then he saw what the face was like, and drew back and stood still.

The Vicar looked twenty years younger. The lifeless eyes were shining, the nostrils had dilated, little quivers of delight played at the corners of the mouth. He was like a man who has drunk the elixir of life.

Suddenly he looked up with the whip lifted in the air, and saw Jack's white face. He started violently, pausing an instant, then brought the whip down with a final hiss and thud. Spotty did not even moan; she was quite still now.

The Vicar stooped down over the dog, drawing a long breath. The hand holding the whip shook a little, then grew steady. When he stood up again his face had returned to its grey and lifeless habit.

"The boy is ill, Josiah; he looks like a ghost," he said, and twisted the lash round the handle. "I don't think she'll forget that lesson."

Jack neither moved nor spoke. Spotty had begun to stir again and whimper faintly, her tongue hanging out against the wires. The Vicar knelt down and took off his muzzling; unfastened the chain, fetched some water and held the basin while she lapped.

"She'll be all right," he said, still looking away. "It's a most unpleasant thing to have to do; but it's more merciful in the end to give a dog one thorough thrashing, and not need to repeat it. She'll obey another time."

Then he realized that he was apologizing to Jack; and turned round sharply.

"What are you doing out of doors before you have finished your lessons? I won't have the preparation neglected, Jack; I've told you that already. Mind it's done before I come in."

He went away and left Jack standing, white and rigid, with the dog shivering at his feet.

Jack went up to his room at last, to sniff timidly, and recognized her only friend. She crawled up closer to him for comfort, and licked his foot, whimpering softly. Then Jack sat down on the flags beside her, and sobbed with his head against her neck. He had not cried like that since he was quite a little thing.

He got through his preparation somehow before his uncle came in to tea. The Vicar always examined the lessons and was generally, with good reason, dissatisfied with them; but he found no fault to-day, though they were done even worse than usual. The evening dragged wearily on; it seemed to Jack that the clock would never strike nine. When bed-time came at last, he went up to his room, and sat down in the dark on the edge of his bed.

All the evening he had been watching his uncle's face, vainly trying to see in it again the face that he had seen in the stable-yard. Now, sitting still, with a hand over his eyes, he could see it. It stood out of the darkness, the blunt mouth sharpened and quivering, the nostrils full of life, the eyes awake.

There was, then, one thing in the world that uncle really enjoyed. For it was pleasure that was in the face, not anger. He looked quite different when he was angry. He would look angry, for instance, when he should find out about the stolen knife.

Cold sweat broke out suddenly all over Jack's body. He put up both hands as a shield.

At last he rose, lit his candle and undressed. He lay down in his bed, and the forgotten candle guttered all away and went out with a trail of acrid smoke, while he stared up into the darkness, as still as though asleep.

As he lay, the horrible thing that

had come upon him hammered itself down and burned in upon his understanding. When the theft of the knife should be discovered he too would be flogged. He would be handled as Spotty had been handled, and gloated over by that greedy mouth; he on whom no touch had been laid since the mavis flew away. As for all that had happened earlier, it was of no moment; he could look back indifferently on the self of a week ago, as on a stranger; he had lived just five years.

There was no escape; and no one would understand. No one, no one would ever understand that he was not the same now as last week; that the boy who had been flogged so often and had laughed at it was dead, and that the new Jack in his place had never yet been touched or shamed.

There was no hope for this white, unspotted new self; only last Saturday it had begun to live, and now would lay hands on it and it would die.

Awaking next morning he sat up in bed and wondered amazingly what it was that had happened to him yesterday. It seemed inconceivable that Jack Raymond, of all boys in the world, had lain the whole evening and until late into the night, wide-awake in the dark, telling himself over and over again, as it were, something new and terrible, that he was going to be flogged. He shrugged his shoulders and jumped out of bed. "I must have gone daff," he thought, and dismissed the subject from his mind, as if for the consideration of old women, girls, and molly-coddles generally.

As soon as he was dressed he went out into the yard to look after Spotty. He had rubbed her carefully with liniment yesterday, and made her bed as soft as possible; and she was now able to wag her tail feebly when he stroked her. "Never mind, old girl!" he said consolingly; "he's a beast; but I've got to put up with him too, and I don't care a hang!"

Having given Spotty what comfort he could, he went into the garden to see how the pippins were getting on. It was a lovely morning, fresh and dewy, and the clean salt air seemed to sweep the remnants of last night's mawkishness out of his head.

The tool house, where the pipples lived, was almost hidden by the growth of tamarisk and fuchsia. As Jack stooped to lift up a fat and cheerful puppy, footsteps crunched the gravel on the other side of the bushes, and his uncle's voice sounded close against his ear: "Have you seen my nephew this morning, Miller?"

There was a tremendous hammer beating somewhere, beating so that the earth shook, so that the air was full of the sound. But that was only for a moment; before the postman's footsteps had died away along the path, he realized that the hammer was beating in his own pulses, and he leaned idly against the fuchsia hedge. It was all true, then, this dreadful fancy of last night. It was ridiculous, it was impossible, there was no understanding it; but it was true. He had changed, and the world had not changed with him. The things that were daily commonplace to every one had become death and damnation to him.

But the day passed, and nothing happened; evidently the Vicar had still not missed his knife. For three days Jack waited, hourly, momentarily, for the thunderbolt to fall. Every sound or movement in the house caught at his heart with a cold hand; the very lifting of his uncle's eyelids would bring the sweat out on his forehead. Once he got up in the night and dressed himself, on fire to go into the Vicar's room and say: "Wake up! look in your desk. I have stolen your knife." Then, whatever should come, this suspense would be over. But when he opened his door, the silence of the dark house drove him back, chilled with fantastic dread. On Monday, the fourth morning, he came down to breakfast so pale and heavy-eyed that Mrs. Raymond was frightened.

"The boy is ill, Josiah; he looks like a ghost," Jack assured her wearily that there was nothing wrong with him. Indeed, what was wrong with him he himself could not have told her, even had he dared to try.

"You had better not go to school to-day," said the Vicar kindly; he made a point of always being kind when anybody was unwell, and Jack hated him the more for it. "You can do a little Latin at home if you feel up to it; but not if it makes your head ache. Perhaps you were too much in the sun yesterday."

Jack went up to his room in silence. It was some time before he could get rid of his aunt; she fussed about with well-meant impertinence, till at last a ringing of the front-door bell and a sound of voices in the hall sent her downstairs to see who had called at so unusual an hour. "To see the master on urgent business," Jack heard the servant answer. He shut the door and sat down, glad to be alone.

(To be continued.)

ALLIES' FLEETS GROW. Increase in Ships for Year Nearly 100 Per Cent.

England	31	Germany	20
France	8	Austria	2
Russia	0		
Japan	5		
Totals	44	Totals	22

Shortly after the war began England took over four more superdreadnoughts which had been under construction in British yards for foreign governments—two for Turkey, one for Chili, and one for Brazil; which consequently increased the preponderance of the Allies in this dominant type of battleship to the ratio of 48 to 22.

Meantime all belligerent nations have been hurrying the completion of ships under construction and laying down as many new ships as their facilities will permit. The number of ships to date can be fairly well estimated from the number known to have been in process of building last July; the number laid down subsequently is a carefully guarded military secret about which speculation is necessarily inaccurate.

Still considering only vessels of the dreadnought type—which really determine naval supremacy—the present relative strength is about as follows: (In this table allowance is made for the loss of the British superdreadnought Audacious, the only vessel of this class known to have been lost by either side since the war began.)

England	45	Germany	26
Italy	13	Austria	4
France	7		
Japan	6		
Russia	5		
Totals	76	Totals	30

Even if the Japanese fleet, which is not participating at present, and the Italian fleet, which came into the war but recently, be omitted from the computation, it is interesting to note that since the outbreak of hostilities the preponderance of the British-French-Russian alliance has increased from 17 to 33 capital ships—a gain of nearly 100 per cent. in one year.

Moreover, a consideration of what the future will probably bring should be even more disheartening to the Teutons. The shipbuilding facilities of Great Britain alone are stupendous.

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TRIBUTE TO BRITISH EFFORT.

A French Editor Describes His Visit to Great Britain.

The Petit Journal publishes the last of a series of articles by M. Pichon on his recent visit to Great Britain. M. Pichon says:—It took many months for an estimate to be formed of the quantity of material necessary to assure victory, but from the very beginning of the war Lord Kitchener understood that millions of men would be required, and he accomplished an extraordinary feat. One of the greatest merits of British statesmen is that they frankly admit their mistakes. They hide nothing, and apply themselves resolutely to the task of finding remedies. "Conversations I have had with Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Balfour leave no doubt as to the unshakable firmness of their decision. When one has had the opportunity of examining closely their efforts one feels that one is face to face with a people who will never cease its endeavors, a people who will continue the fight until the day when German militarism is completely exhausted. To this end it will employ all its resources, all its determination, and all its bravery; and, come what may, it will go on to the end, no matter how long the war may last. All the authorities are assured of the final triumph of Great Britain." Concluding, Mr. Pichon says:—"At the banquet which terminated our stay in London, and at which Lord Robert Cecil, M. Cambon, and our excellent colleagues of the British Press made such strong and reassuring speeches, we expressed to our friends our great gratitude to them and our full confidence in them. I repeat this here, so that the representatives of the British Admiralty, by whom we were conducted, may know that we shall never forget the hours of fraternal communion which we passed together in the emotion and serenity of the same hopes."

Choice of Hostelries.

"What is the best hotel?" the newcomer inquired.

"The one down the street," replied the native, reflectively, "has the best dining-room for dancing. But the one around the corner has the best roof garden and skating rink. And oh, yes, I nearly forgot—there's an old-fashioned tavern up three or four blocks, where you might get something to eat."

He (addressing the little sister of his betrothed).—"Don't you know me, little one? Who am I, then?" Little One (brightly).—"I know. You're my sister's last chance."

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GAIN WEIGHT MAKING SHELLS.

Say London Society Women on Work on Munitions.

Some society women who offered their services to the British Government and whose capacity for war work has had some three weeks' test in Messrs. Vickers' factory at Erith, have been recounting their experiences.

Mrs. Moir, the wife of the chief of the new inventions branch of the Ministry of Munitions, is working on bases. That is, turning the base of the shells until they are of the right measurement and smooth. "There were no difficulties in the work," she said. "The only thing is that the shells are hot and heavy. But," she added, "we find that we are putting on weight."

In the same department is Lady Colebrook, Lady Gatacre, Mrs. England, a sister of Lord Loreburn, and Mrs. Grieg, the wife of Col. Grieg of the London Scottish.

In another room of the great factory is Lady Gertrude Crawford, now a master turner. She is responsible for the correct circumference of the shells. Lady Scott, the wife of the late Capt. Scott's widow, who now occupies one of the apartments in Hampton Court Palace, is over the road in the electrical department. Lady Scott is, of course, known as a sculptor, and her trained fingers are now employed on the sights of guns.

Soon this particular factory will be worked entirely by women, who will work in shifts from 6.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m., and from 2.30 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.

Most of these women live at a hostel known as Dunesy House, a charming old place standing in its own garden.

IN ACTIVE SERVICE.

200 French Deputies are Serving with the Colors.

Doubts have arisen in France as to the wisdom of allowing members of the Chamber of Deputies to serve in the army and while doing so return to Paris from time to time and criticize the Minister of War and the conduct of the war. Two hundred deputies, or one-third of the membership of the Lower House of Parliament, are in active service, some as privates, but most of them as junior officers rarely above the grade of captain. They were reserve officers before the war.

A few of them are restless intriguers, who in their double capacity of military men at the front and with the right to leave their commands for Paris at any time the Chamber is in session, cause a great deal of embarrassment, both to their military superiors in command in the field and to the Cabinet.

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From Erin's Green Isle

NEWS BY MAIL FROM IRELAND'S GREEN SHORES.

Happenings in the Emerald Isle of Interest to All True Irishmen.

The death has occurred of Mr. William Henry Lynn, R.H.A., one of the foremost architects in Ireland, after a brief illness.

The death in action at the Dardanelles is announced of Captain A. J. W. Blake, 6th Battalion Connaught Rangers, a native of Clontarf.

Dublin electricians have come out on strike in consequence of the refusal of the employers to grant an increase of \$1.75 per week in their pay.

The "Irish Heraldry Society" has been formed to fill the long-felt want of a body entirely devoted to the Irish branch of this field of research.

Dr. Ward, a military doctor, home on furlough, was fatally injured in a motor accident that happened at the Ravine Bridge, Lisdoonbarna.

At the meeting of Clones No. 2 Rural District Council, the Dublin resolution declaring "we will not have conscription" was adopted.

Recruiting has commenced in Belfast for the 8th Battalion Princess Louise's (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) now in training at Dunoon.

Probably the greatest record in criminology has been reached by a woman who recently made her 25th appearance in the Belfast Custody Court.

Damage estimated at \$150,000 was caused by a destructive fire that broke out at the confectionery works of Messrs. Andrew & Co., Belfast.

The Month Farmers' Association has gone on record as protesting against the action of the Government in commandeering the hay supply.

A company is seeking Parliamentary power to employ the falls of Lough Erne at Belek and of the Shannon near Limerick, for lighting most of Ireland by electricity.

Meetings have been held in different parts of the county in furtherance of the recruiting campaign under the auspices of the City and County of Dublin Recruiting Committee.

It is stated that a section of the members of the Dublin Technical Education Committee has attempted to stand in the way of the manufacture of munitions in the city.

More than 60 per cent of the County Down Hunt are now with the colors, and most of the remaining members are past the age at which they would be accepted for service.

Official intimation has been received that Private Henry Swinford, of the Irish Guards, has received the D.C.M. in recognition of his daring exploit in putting a machine gun out of action.

In the Dublin Registration Area, the births registered last week numbered 196 and deaths 156. The deaths in the registration area represent an annual rate mortality of 18.4 per 1,000 of the population.

In a return just issued under the Land Law Act, 1887, it is shown that in the quarter ended 30th June last 11 ecclesiastics, 7 tenants and 1 sub-tenant were evicted in Ireland, as compared with 6 ex-tenants and 2 tenants in the previous quarter.

At Tipperary sessions a resolution was passed asking the Lord Lieutenant to revoke the order closing the licensed houses in the town, as it was stated in the opinion of the magistrates there was no longer any necessity for its enforcement.

According to a roll of honor prepared by the Archdeacon of Drogheda, 165 men from the parish of Donaghadee are serving in the army. Two officers and seven men from the parish have already been killed in action.

SELL TRENCH SOUVENIRS.

Soldiers Make Trinkets From Exploded German Shells.

Many metal artisans and engravers, serving in the French artillery, devote their leisure moments to carving ornaments from aluminum and copper taken from exploded German shells. These souvenirs, made beneath the bomb-proof shelters at the front, have been highly prized by the recipients at home, and until a short time ago it was impossible to buy them.

Recently a society was organized, whose aim is to dispose of these trinkets; the proceeds of their sale being forwarded directly to the men themselves. Each article is accompanied by a card bearing the name and military address of the maker, and if desired the purchaser may receive a card of acknowledgement from him.

Aluminum rings are the most popular, but lockets, brooches, bracelets, paper knives, ash receivers, paper weights, inkstands, and various other articles of every-day use are made. The Cross of Lorraine, emblem of Joan of Arc, is a favorite design for rings; four-leaf clovers, horse shoes and occasionally some special mark of the regiment are also employed.

Exploded shells and fragments are used in many Parisian houses as flower-pots, vases for cut flowers, umbrella stands, and similar uses.

On the ocean of life many people sail under false colors.

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