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ST. JOHN'S

## Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER XXIII

He turns quickly, and sees the girl standing a few yards behind him, holding her hand to her arm, in which the hook has caught.

"Oh!" says Hal, with dismay. "Why, I had no idea you were so near."

"I ran up to see you catch a fish," she says, with a little smile. "and see! I am caught myself!"

And she laughs, as she tries to free the line.

"Stop! wait!" cries Hal, in alarm. "Don't pull at it—you'll fix it firmer. By George!"

And, with a troubled face, he drops the rod and takes hold of her arm.

"Is it fixed so tight?" she says, quietly. "Can't I pull it out?"

And she gives the line a little jerk, and utters a low exclamation of pain.

"Stop! stop!" says Hal, holding her hand. "You mustn't pull it!"

"It's gone right through the sleeve of my dress and into my arm," she says, with a naive smile. "Now I can understand. I'm a very big fish you've caught, am I not?"

And she laughs.

But Hal utterly refuses to be merry; he knows how very much easier it is to get a trout-hook small as it is, into the fleshy part of the arm, than it is to get it out; and he looks grave as a judge. Taking out his penknife, he cuts the line, then hesitates—he doesn't like to pull up the sleeve.

Guessing at what he wants, she pulls it up for him, and reveals a round, white arm, in which lies the small hook, which has already drawn a drop of red blood.

"Gosh!" Hal takes the arm—how soft and warm and smooth it feels in his brown paw—and feels the treacherous bit of steel.

"I'm afraid it hurts you," he says, himself terribly afraid to touch it.

"No, not much," she says, smiling. "What a wicked little thing it is! Why don't you pull it out?"

Hal shakes his head.

"I can't get a hook out by pulling it—at least, I never did. It would hurt you awfully. Confound the beastly thing!"

"But I can't go home with a hook in my arm—like a fish," she says, laughing. "You will have to pull it out, or put me in your basket."

Hal's face turns flame-like. Put her in his basket. Ah, if he only could.

"Is there any way of getting it out?" she asks, naively.

"Only by cutting," says Hal, reluctantly.

She gave a little shudder.

"I can't bear a knife," she says.

"Will it make much of a cut?"

"Yes," says Hal, slowly. "Only just here where the barb is. Not much," but while he says it he feels as if he would rather cut his own leg off than touch that white arm with his knife.

"Well, then, you must do it," she says, in her soft, musical English.

She gave a little shudder.

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"Yes," says Hal, slowly. "Only just here where the barb is. Not much," but while he says it he feels as if he would rather cut his own leg off than touch that white arm with his knife.

"Well, then, you must do it," she says, in her soft, musical English.

"Wait while I shut my eyes." Hal takes up his penknife, and, mentally confounding his trembling hand, makes the necessary incision. It is merely a pin's scratch, but as he performs the operation and sees the little jet of blood follow his knife, he feels as if he had run the blade into his heart and actually turns pale—that is, as pale as his sun-browned face will allow him.

"Is it done?" she inquires, plainly showing that the operation has not caused her much pain. "May I open my eyes?"

"Yes, look!" says Hal, and he holds out the fatal hook.

She slowly opens her eyes, and languidly looks first at the hook, and then at her arm.

"What a little thing to cause so much fuss; isn't that he right word?" Hal nods, and is about to viciously pitch the hook into the stream, but suddenly changing his mind, puts it into his pocket.

"Does it hurt?" he asks, anxiously.

"No, not much," she says. "It isn't poisoned, is it?"

"No," says Hal, starting up at such an un-sportsman-like idea. "Poisoned! No! If it doesn't hurt you now, it won't afterward."

"That is well," she says, pulling down her sleeve, but still rubbing her arm. "Then I needn't say anything about it. The senora would make so much fuss—fuss and compel me to go about like a cripple if I did, and she laughs. "Well, are you going to catch any more fish?"

"No," says Hal, with rather a rueful laugh. "I've caught quite enough to-day. I'm very sorry!"

"It was all my fault," she says, most affably. "I ought not to have got behind you. I shall know better another time. Besides, it might have been worse! I might have been caught in my eye, you know!"

Hal shudders palpably.

"Don't mention such a thing!" he says, starting at her large dark eyes. "I shall touch a rod for years without thinking of this beastly hook. I hope it won't be my fester."

"What—the hook?" she asks, innocently.

"No, your arm," explains Hal. "But," he adds, "that's out of the question; they never do."

"What's all right?" she says, "and now I'll go for my book; I left it on the grass."

Hal runs back, and, after a little search, finds the volume; it is Tennyson's poems in Italian.

"Here it is," he says, handing it to her; "is there anything else?"

"No, thank you," she says; "and now I will go and not disturb your fishing any longer."

"I shan't fish any more," says Hal, decidedly. "I've got quite enough."

"Yes," she says; "and the sun is shining, too. Are you going to Forbach?"

"Yes," says Hal, looking at just where she is going, but not daring to say. "Yes, I'm staying at Forbach."

"Ah, yes, you are travelling—you are a tourist?" she says, curiously.

"For goodness' sake don't call me that!" says Hal, laughing. "It makes me feel like the idiots who go about with a knapsack and dressed like mountebanks! No, I'm staying at Forbach till some friends arrive. They are coming to that castle—Schloss, they call it—on the hill there."

"The Konig's Schloss?" she says, nodding. "Yes, I know it. It belongs to a great English lord, doesn't it? What is his name?"

"The Marquis de Ferndale, said Hal.

"Yes," that is it. Your English names are so difficult to remember. Ferndale, that is pretty."

"Yes," says Hal, carelessly; "his name is Vane, though; at least, that's what we call him. He married my sister."

"Your sister?" she says, thoughtfully. "Is she like you?" naively.

"Like me—Jeanne?" says Hal, indifferently. "I'm sure I don't know. No, I should say not. Jeanne is very pretty."

The girl looks at him with a little grave smile, playing about her mobile lips.

"She is pretty—and not like you," she says. "And she's the marchioness—is that right? Yes, the Konig's Schloss is a beautiful place. Do you know the Villa Verona?"

"No," says Hal. "Is that—"

"That is where I live—where I am staying," she says, frankly. "It is a little white house—oh, not so large as the Schloss!—just by the church."

"I know," says Hal. "Perhaps I might—I mean—that is—"

"Yes?"

"I thought," says Hal, fumbling with his basket, with a very red face, "that I might, that you wouldn't mind if I called to ask if that beastly hook hadn't hurt your arm much."

"Will you?" she says, not eagerly, but with a frank smile of pleasure.

"That is very kind! I shall be very glad! It is very quiet and dull—is quiet the right word? You see I do not speak English very well."

"Why!" exclaims Hal, enthusiastically. "You speak it perfectly! Your grammar is first rate, and—and—in fact, you couldn't speak it better if you tried."

"Now you are complimentary," she says, "and that is not like your countrymen—they always speak the truth."

"Do they?" says Hal, ironically.

"Not always," says George.

"There is a minute's silence after this subtle burst of satire. She breaks it.

"Are you staying all alone?"

"No," says Hal. "I've got my coach with me."

She stares at him, opening her dark eyes to their widest.

"No, at the hotel," he adds, with a smile. "and sees I don't get into mischief and fall into the water. Though, by the way, I had to pull him out of the lake! He is at the hotel; it was too hot for him, and he stayed behind, reading the paper."

"And you are going to be a clergyman?" she asks, thoughtfully.

"Not I," said Hal decidedly. "I'm going to be a barrister, or going into the army—I don't quite know which. But it's holiday time just now."

"I see," she says, musing. "Well, I hope you will be happy."

Hal doesn't bow, as he ought to do—doesn't lift his hat; but, in blunt fashion, he says:

"Thanks—the same to you."

And it is such to his surprise that, instead of smiling in reply, as an English girl would do, she looks dreamily before her, and sighs.

Suddenly—so suddenly for Hal—she stops short at a little path.

"I go along here," she says. "We must say good-by."

"Good—good-by," says Hal, and he raises his hat.

She makes him a little bow, grave and demure, and is about to pass on, when Hal suddenly betinks him.

"Oh!" he says. "Wait—I mean, do you mind telling me your name?—so that I can inquire, you know?"

"My name?" she says. "Yes. My name is Verona—the Princess Verona," and she smiles.

Hal stands turned into stone. A true Englishman, he respects rank. This simple, frank girl, whose arm he has been cutting about with his penknife, is a princess! What right has he to be walking so far with so great a lady?

He lifts his hat.

"I—good-evening," he says. "I didn't know. Of course I won't call. Good-evening," and he is about to turn away, when he feels a soft, warm hand on his arm.

"What is the matter? Have I offended you, sir?"

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**Mr. Ayre Replies to Mr. Smith.**

Editor Evening Telegram.

Dear Sir.—When you put over Warwick Smith's letter, which appears in the Telegram to-night, the heading "The Position of the C.E.I." you, in your paper, like the Rev. Mr. Forbes, in his pulpit, stated something which is not true (!) It is just possible that his letter states Warwick's position. That, of course, depends upon Warwick's mental state when he wrote it. He is evidently pleased with himself that he is again a member of the C.E.I. and wants to let everyone know it. What is biting him anyway that he is in this way, gets after me? I never did him anything but good in my life. He used to be a great supporter of mine in the old days in the Institute, and was a great help to me in the Literary Association which I started in the Institute, but of which the past years I have heard nothing. That is a side of the Institute which should have been developed. He appears to be mad with you, for not deleting, as he calls it, the reference to the Church of England Institute, which were contained in my letter to you concerning the resolution of the Board of the Gower Street Methodist Church, which referred to His Honor, Judge Morris, the Press and myself. Here am I complaining that you have cut out too much and Warwick, on the other hand, complains that you have cut out not enough. Truly an editor's life is not a happy one. (Quite so—Ed. Tel.) He says that the Institute has a good reputation in the community which it is anxious to maintain. Who does not know of the good reputation of the Institute, and why is it necessary for Warwick to publish the fact, and why is the Institute now anxious to maintain the reputation which it has so justly deserved? Is it because Warwick is once more a member? We know that one bad apple can spoil a barrel, but as one Swallow does not make a Summer I do not think that one member, even if that member is Warwick Smith, will be able to very greatly harm the reputation of the Institute—but now that he is again a member I can easily understand his anxiety to maintain his heretofore excellent reputation. His complaint, which is a capital perversion of my epistle, lengthy or otherwise, is open to question. It is easily seen that he is not able to read them aright, for, from his communication he clearly shows that he has the impression that I referred to the present Council of the Institute as having wooden heads, when a capital perversion of my lengthy epistle, as he calls it, will show any person a little less stupid than Warwick, that I did nothing of the kind. The words "Council" and "Board" may have a somewhat similar meaning, but the effect of my reference would not have been so applicable, and so I should not have propounded my question asking if by the members of the Board are collectively called a Board because their heads are wooden. That would not be so effective in reference to the word Council and I am surprised that a mind which used to be so acute as Warwick's has so deteriorated as not to be able to read aright what I had written. Why does Warwick refer to the Institute Council as having "wooden heads"? If I were a member of that Council, I should ask it to pass a resolution censuring Warwick for making such an unwarrantable assertion. Warwick pays me a great compliment when he states that it is a matter of great astonishment to many of the members of the C.E.I. to learn that Mr. Ayre is still connected with the Institute, as he has not been in its rooms since his retirement from the presidency. What do you think of that? There are some people who accuse me of hankering after the limelight, and here Warwick tells you that although I have been Honorary President of the Institute for eleven years I have said so little about it that it is a matter of astonishment to many of the members. Had not the Board of the Gower Street Methodist Church passed a resolution censuring me just as the Council of the Church of England Institute did the time when the Coronation Choir was here, nearly twenty years ago, I should probably never have mentioned it, even now. Why, if some people occupied such a position as Honorary President of the Church of England Institute for the past eleven years, as I have done, they would be demanding a highly paid Government job or at least a seat in the Upper House. They would not be content with such a humble Government position, such as Warwick adorns. I have never said a word about it and still there are some who say I wish to advertise myself. Wait till I start in the advertising line and then I will astonish you, and as for Warwick, will be unable to open that caustic mouth of his. Here I am still plain George Ayre, not even a K.C. and even Institute members, according to Warwick, are hardly aware of the fact that I am its Honorary President. Those members who attended the dinner six or seven years ago to the Institute football team on their winning the championship of the Newfoundland Football League for 1918, were aware of the fact, because the then President of the Institute,

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Mr. Hunt, honored me with an invitation to that dinner and asked me to speak, and on the printed toast list I was referred to as Geo. W. B. Ayre, Esq., LL.B., Honorary President of the C.E.I. What do you think of that? Where was Warwick then, that he was not at that dinner and did not hear me speak? Why, I even sang a couple of songs. Sang songs! Just fancy! There is no doubt about it because at that dinner the present Premier the Hon. R. A. Squires, LL.B., K.C. and Mr. W. J. Higgins, K.C. and Mr. Hunt were also present and also spoke. Mr. Squires congratulated me on my singing, and I, of course, congratulated him on his speaking. That was only fair. It is no news to me to be told that the Institute is now numerically and financially stronger than ever before in its history. I have watched it too closely for that, and probably worked in the background for the Institute, right here in the city, when Warwick was working for himself somewhere in the United States or elsewhere when I went to bed that it was not the Church of England Institute that was occupying his scattered thoughts. No one is more pleased than I to see the Institute prosper. Mr. Withers, I and others planted, Mr. Hunt and others watered, and Mr. Long and others, Warwick included, are now reaping the harvest. I learn with mingled feelings that Warwick is again a member of the Institute. At times he is and at times he is not. He reminds me of Finnigan. Off again, on again; and now he tells us he is on again. I wonder for how long this time. He, as a member of the C. E. Institute, resents its name being dragged into discussion of matters with which it has nothing to do. Is Warwick, who is unable to read aright an extremely simple and clearly written letter, competent to judge whether the Institute has nothing to do with the matters which have recently been discussed in the papers. Like all great reformers I do not complain, but I think that before Warwick rushes into print he ought to know something about what he is writing, and ought to get some one to explain to him the little things, which in my letters now and again rise to the surface. Some would call them jokes but I am not one of that kind. My reference to what happened in the Institute, like all my references, and unlike that of the Rev. Mr. Forbes, is true and as Warwick ought to know "Truth is mighty and will prevail." If I am not greatly mistaken the incident to which I referred happened before Warwick or Mr. Hunt, my immediate successor in the Presidency, who has occupied that honorable position for the past eleven years, was even a member, so for the life of me I cannot see how it, in any way, could reflect on the present or any Council of the Institute for a great many years back, even if they were not called a Council but a Board which they were not. I do not mind defending myself, if I have some responsible person to answer. But I strongly object to a controversy with such as Warwick. If he can show me that he was chosen representative of the Church of England Institute, which I am certain he cannot and will not be able to do, unless the Institute has greatly deteriorated from the time when I was its President, then I shall only be too pleased to continue this discussion, otherwise my pen shall not

Yours sincerely,  
GEO. W. B. AYRE  
Feb. 7th, 1921.

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