

[FOR THE CRITIC.]

A POSTSCRIPT.

(By R. M.)

(Continued.)

At last he broke the silence ; saying, " come Astor, we'll cancel all to-night's play, I had no right to go on winning as I did. Look !"

And he threw some scraps of paper, which represented his winnings, into the fire. This was the man who was unpopular ; who allowed himself to be universally disliked ; who was thought mean, callous, calculating.

For a moment Astor, amazed out of all speech, said nothing ; his surprise was at the extrinsic fact that a totally new side of Smiles' character was so suddenly displayed ; but when he did find words they came quickly, almost angrily.

" No, I have lost, and will have no charity. Good-night."

So dismissed, Smiles with a sigh went slowly away, his footsteps echoing along the empty corridors, and then on the barrack square beneath. Everything was still again, but for the sound of a rasping pen, for Prescott was writing a hurried note. That finished he wrote a second, and a third. The first he then addressed to his mother, the second to Smiles, and the third to the Astorholme lawyer. This done he blew out the caudles and by the faint light of the fire made his way to a chest of drawers, from which, with a shudder, he drew out a revolver.

He crept over to the fire and standing before it, inch by inch, he commenced raising the pistol.

Oh ! Astor ! Astor ! and that note within a few feet of you ; if only you could guess what it contains !

Still he is raising the shining barrel towards his livid face, ghastly with the sickening fear that struggles with his determination for mastery. A second more and—

" Halt ! who goes there ?" rings out below the window, and the revolver drops with a crash to the floor.

" Relief returning," responds a distant voice.

" Pass relief returning, all's well !" cries the sentry.

Silence again.

Astor is trembling so he cannot stoop to pick up the revolver. He strikes a light. Watching it burn in a dazed manner, his dazzled eye rests on a piece of paper, leaning against his clock, on it he reads:

" P.S.—My dearest Prescott"—Great heavens ! he knows that writing, trembling all over he grasps it, reads it through, and turning to the other side sees the very words he read in the evening.

For a second he stands immovable, like one suddenly paralyzed.

Then with a cry he throws the revolver into its drawer, locks it, catches up the three letters he has written and flings them into the fire ; when, finding he has done all his strength will allow him to, he falls unconscious into a low chair by the table.

Sprigs coming in to waken his master next morning found him, much to his surprise, up and dressing. As he busied himself about the untidy room, Astor said,

" You put a note of mine on the mantelpiece last night ?"

" Yes, sir."

" You had read it ?"

A pause. " Yes, sir."

" Why did you ?"

" Well sir, I knew you was upset by that 'ere note, 'cause I watched you read it, and I got a bit curious and read it myself almost without thinkin', and knowin' you 'adn't seen the inside bit yourself sir, as you dropped it after lookin' at the first page, I put it where I thought you'd see it before turnin' in sir."

This was perhaps the longest speech Sprigs had ever made. He astonished himself by it, but Astor's reply astounded him still more.

" You were wrong to read a letter of mine, but you saved my life."

Now most of the story is told, for you can all understand how it wound up. Astor and Miss Carteret were married of course. She has not added a postscript to any letter since, and Astor never reads a note of any sort without looking for one. I never heard how Astor got out of his pecuniary difficulties, but believe that a distant relative left him a comfortable sum just before the wedding. And who do you think was godfather to their first child ? why, it was no other than the mean, callous, unpopular Smiles.

THE END.

THE DEACON'S DINNER.

When Katie Weston became Mrs. Deacon Lee everyone said what a good match she had made ; for the deacon was an honorable, upright man, pleasant, kind and generous ; in addition to this, he was the owner of the best farm for miles around, including a large piece of woodland.

Since every one thought of him as a model husband, they never dreamed of attributing the bare worn look that grew on Katie's face to any fault of his. How could they, when she, loyal little woman, always spoke of him with so much pride and respect that the village gossips could find nothing of which to complain ?

Even close-mouthed Jonas, the grocer, said he " never see so good a provider as the deacon was." Perhaps he might have thought differently if he had heard a few remarks Mary Ann Hoolihan made, when after working at Deacon Lee's a couple of weeks, she announced her intention of leaving.

" Shure it's a good missus ye are, mum, an' everything is plisant an' fine like around, but me ripitation as cook is what I'd not like to be losing ; there's many a place where the master has sinse enough, saving yer prisince, mum ! to know how it takes wood to build a fire, an' not to tell ye, 'I guess ye can be pickin' up something to last ye the day,' whenever ye speak of the want of a stick for the day's bakin'. But don't worrit yourself, I'll not be speaking of it outside, for it's many a kind word ye've given me, an' Mary Ann Hoolihan will never forgit that same."

And she was as good as her word. No one but Katie's half-sister, Jessie, suspected that there was any reason for her leaving.

After that Mrs. Lee did her own work, and never complained to the deacon, who always found his meals well cooked, never inquiring how they became so ; and as time rolled on, his confidence in her abilities to " pick up some pieces about the yard" grew so great that it seemed to have crowded all knowledge of the use of an axe out of his head ; for beyond drawing up a lot of old rails when he put in his new wire fences, he left the getting of the wood, as well as building fires, entirely to Katie.

People driving by admired the well-kept yard, and said to each other " what a neat man Deacon Lee was to keep every chip and piece of wood picked up"—never dreaming how Katie searched for every stray bit that might make kindling, running in if she saw a carriage coming for fear the occupants would see how she was employed and censure the deacon for his neglect.

" Great things from little causes flow," and so it was that the deacon owed his reformation to a call made by Jessie and a friend one cold day in spring. The fire got low, and Mrs. Lee excusing herself for a moment, left the room, leaving her little three-year-old girl in Jessie's care. The child played about the room for a few moments, then taking hold of the window sill with her chubby hands, raised herself up and looked out.

" Ma's tütün wood," she said, as Jessie looked at her ; " she's tütün wood !"

Miss Davis was talking and did not notice ; but Jessie did, and the words confirmed a suspicion she had had for some time. She found it hard to be entertaining until Mrs. Lee came back, who, after replenishing the fire, renewed her conversation with Miss Davis.

Jessie seemed very much occupied with her own thoughts next day as she went about her work. At last a gleam of mischief came into her eyes, and she seemed to have arrived at some determination, for, as she hung the last piece of her snowy ironing on the clothes-bars, she brought her small foot down very emphatically and said :

" I'll do it, if I ever have a chance."

Her chance came that haying-time. Deacon Lee had a nice lot of hay to put in, and, as it was the fashion there for the farmers to change work, he concluded to have a bee. Accordingly he asked a number of his friends to come, and made arrangements for a big day's work.

But when he returned to the house, after mowing a roadway to the north meadow, he found that Mrs. Lee had been taken suddenly ill. The doctor was hastily summoned, and said it was necessary that the patient be kept perfectly quiet ; she must not be worried about anything, or it would result in brain-fever. He left two or three bottles of medicine and went away again, leaving the deacon almost in danger of brain-fever himself.

What should he do ? In spite of his thoughtlessness he dearly loved Katie and was very anxious about her. In addition to this anxiety were his thoughts of the bee and the care of his little girl and sick wife. What wonder that his face was very grave as he leaned over his wife, asking if there was anything he could do or get for her ?

He had her welfare too much at heart to say one word that would worry her, so when she began to speak of her work, he kissed her forehead and told her that would be all right. But he was relieved when she mentioned Jessie. He went to the window at once to watch for some one passing by whom he could send word ; but as no one came, he was obliged to have little Trot go for the nearest neighbor to stay with Katie while he went after Jess.

He found that young lady willing to come and take care of her sister ; but a look the deacon did not quite understand, or like, flashed into her face when the bee was mentioned.

" I don't know, John," she said, " whether I can cook to suit you. You know I am rather particular about what I have to work with, and my way may not be a way you'd like."

Now the deacon prided himself on keeping a well-furnished store-room and good kitchen garden, so he smiled rather complacently, and replied that if she was obliged to prepare a different dinner to what she would do at home for lack of material to work with, he would be satisfied with whatever she did prepare.

It was not until afterward that he understood the mischievous look in her eyes as she said : " you make me that promise, do you ?"

He answered, " Certainly," readily enough, thinking, meanwhile, of the excellent dinners he had helped to eat that Jessie had prepared.

The dinner-bell at the farm-house rang out cheerily at a quarter to twelve next day, and the deacon, with a satisfied look at the amount of work accomplished, throw down his rake, and with his men started for the barn. There he left them to see to their teams, while he hurried to Katie's room. She was considerably better and he was feeling very glad and grateful. As he lingered with her, Jessie's voice suddenly called him to show the men to the dining room.

It was very pleasant and cool in the shaded room, suspiciously so ; but the deacon never noticed that. He led the way to the table, and when all were seated, bowed his head reverently ; but the blessing he was about to ask died away on his lips, as his downward glance fell on the dish in front of him, on which was tastefully spread the pork steak he had bought the night before, and which, the deacon was horrified to see, was still raw.