

All day on the 24th the work was going on of carrying wreaths and strings of decorations, of fir, yew, holly, and ivy, into the church, where they were twisted and twined about pillars and galleries, and much emulation, and pricking of fingers, went on during the business. There was a temporary lull in the proceedings during luncheon time, and then a party of the young ladies latest in returning to the church met Cyril Egerton on horseback.

He reined in his horse, as he was reminded by a chorus to "be sure and not forget to come and assist in the final preparations that evening; and, above all not to be late."

Cyril returned a gay smiling answer; and then the next question which followed was, if he knew where his brother was, and whether there was any danger or probability of his forgetting the appointment or arriving late for it.

"I know nothing of Claude," he said, abruptly, and, with a change from his gay manner to a gloomy one, "he does not favour me with too many confidences; we each have our own affairs to attend to. I have not seen him since breakfast-time. By-the-bye, I remember now, he was unusually communicative this morning—he was talking about some money, he was going to the bank this afternoon to get it, and some lucky person was going to receive it, but what the money was for, and who was to get it, upon my word I have not the faintest recollection of at this moment; but I do remember he said he was going to ride somewhere with it this afternoon, and that he remarked he should be home to dinner. "Hallo, Sawyers!" he suddenly added, perceiving that the under-game-keeper and another man were standing by, "what do you want? Did you hear where Mr. Egerton went to-day?"

Jem Sawyers and another man had stopped, apparently as if anxious not to obtrude themselves by pushing past the group of the horse, rider, and young ladies, who blocked up the lane. Jem Sawyers touched his cap, and, with some surprise at the sudden way in which he was addressed, muttered, "Me, sir? I don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"What do you want with me?"

"Nothing, sir; we was just waiting till we could get by without inconveniencing you."

"Pass now, and go!" and Cyril moved his horse slightly, so as to admit of the two men passing between himself and the hedge. "Stay," he cried, when they had just passed, "where are you going?"

"Mr. Merton, sir, he sent me after some cartridges."

"Merton is out for the day."

"Yes, sir; but before he went he left particular word with me that I was to fetch them some time during the day."

"Had Mr. Egerton left home when you were there?"

"No, sir."

"All right, you can go."

"There, now you know all I have to tell you," he continued, when the men were on their way towards the town, "but you know more about Claude's affairs than I do. He never told me he was going to help decorate the church; but I should not be a bit surprised if he were to forget all about it. He will come home with all his thoughts occupied with a smoky chimney, or something of the kind, that he has discovered in one of the cottages, and then he will sit all the evening drawing sketches of model chimneys of his own invention which will cure the ill, and about two hours after bed-time he will recollect that he ought to have been helping you with the decorations."

"But we may rely on you?"

"I will be there; and my help, such as it is, you shall have. I have every desire to be the first in this world who has succeeded in pleasing everybody." And with a bright smile, which travelled so successfully round the little circle that each young lady took it exclusively to herself, he lifted his hat, and rode away.

Cyril was unquestionably very handsome, and he rode well, after the fashion in which those alone can ride who have ridden constantly since infancy; he looked especially well on horseback; and the memory of his parting look and smile stayed with them.

His mare was a splendid spirited animal, requiring careful attention, good riding, and a trained hand; and as Cyril Egerton passed on his way,

more than one pedestrain, driver, and rider, bestowed admiring glances both at the thoroughbred and at the hand which managed her.

The young ladies, as they continued their progress to the church, conversed about the brothers, and the fact of the quarrel between them was not unmentioned; and it was the general opinion that if any disagreement had arisen between them it was at all events not Mr. Cyril's fault, he was so good-tempered and sunny that any one must be determined indeed to quarrel to dispute with him. Probably Mr. Egerton was envious of his younger brother's popularity, and jealous of his good looks. Mr. Egerton's face was pleasant enough, but he was nowhere if you began to compare him with his brother. The young ladies, therefore, went to their occupation, believing Cyril to be the injured party, and thinking, with mingled pleasure, of his farewell smile which had been directed to them in particular, and of his coming amongst them during the evening.

That part of the road where they had all met was once more quiet and deserted, for the girls had gone on, to disappear into the silent church, and the rider had gone on, to disappear into an unseen shadow.

Soon after, thin white feathery snow-flakes came fluttering down, just as they had fallen on the morning of Claude's birthday and the tenants' dinner, but then they had turned to nothing, and had been no more seen till this afternoon. At first they seemed to be more a suggestion of coming snow than of anything serious enough to hurry and avoid as yet. Cyril pushed on, intent on carrying out the object of his ride, but there was plenty of time, and, in spite of the feathery snow-flakes, he kept ahead at his gentle even trot. His business accomplished, and once more in the homeward road, he urged his mare to a sharper pace, for the snow-flakes were falling thicker and in a more business-like manner. Already there was a thin white sheet laid over all around and everywhere—very slight, but sufficient to cover everything, and to change the colour of the landscape. All at once, at a turn in the lane, just as the dusk was creeping in, and making objects uncertain, in spite of the white coating, he came face to face with his brother.

Claude was also on horseback, but his face was turned away from home, for his errand was yet to be done. It was just at the cross-roads, and they pulled up and accosted one another with a certain ungraciousness, mixed with pleasure, at seeing any one on that deserted cheerless road.

Something was said about the probability of the snow storm increasing, and then something was said about the engagement at the church that evening, but it was not pleasantly spoken on either side, and almost before they understood how it had arisen, the subject of Gwendoline was brought up between them.

In another moment the black looks, now, alas, so common, had been exchanged to hot angry words, and the long pent-up storm between them broke loose with a terrible strength, with added bitterness for the time which it had been stayed.

Three farm-labourers just then passed by them, along the road which crossed their roads; the brothers were too occupied to notice them as they went by, but with nudges and winks they remarked to one another, that "the young squire and his brother were a-going it, and no mistake!" They looked back once or twice at them, but each time that they looked there was apparently no change in their positions or intentions, and they passed out of sight whilst the quarrel was yet at its height.

For a time each was too hot, angry, and blinded, to heed the exact drift of the other's words; but such plain speaking could not of course long continue without the real state of things coming to light, and the truth being reached. But so firmly convinced and perfectly certain had each been that Gwendoline Majendie was privately engaged to the other, and that for reasons of their own they had continued to hold it a secret, that for a time neither could believe or understand that their mistake had been identical.

And a silence, broken by abrupt words and unfinished sentences, followed the revelation. How it had come about was now the most mysterious thing.

"Do you mean to tell me, positively, you have all this while thought that Gwendoline was engaged to me?" said Cyril, at length.

"Of course I did, everything seemed to point to that end. Everything that you and she have done and said since my birthday seemed to convince me but the more surely. I cannot understand it now. At one time I always thought there would be something between you and Bessie Vernon, but then she was very young, and you—you were such a changeable sort of a chap, you did not know your own mind—it was just as likely as not that you had changed your mind, and had fallen in love with Gwendoline—for she is worth twenty Bessies—and then I did not know; you know I thought she might prefer you to me, most people do—your face to begin with, you know."

"Rubbish! But I am glad to think I had hold of the wrong story. I might have known you would not do an underhand thing like that. Then Gwendoline is not engaged to anybody!"

They looked at one another silently for a moment, when with sudden impulse Claude said, "At all events, I know one thing, my case is hopeless."

"She does not care twopence for me," answered Cyril, immediately.

"I do not know; I am not sure of—of course, there was that fellow Crawford; but we will talk of this another time; it is getting dark, and snowing, and unpleasant; hurry on, old fellow, hurry on, and get back."

"All right, old boy; but in case I am detained do not wait dinner for me, or you might be late in the church."

"But I shall wait, so go on."

Once more there was the old bright cheery look between them as they separated, and each rode on, on his way, Cyril saying to himself as he went, "Strange! strange! Jolly old fellow, Claude!"

Claude, still going in the opposite direction to home, said to himself, "I am thankful for this; with all his faults I did not think Cyril would deceive me."

It was getting dark; and carelessly, and somewhat absently, Cyril smartly touched his mare with the whip. This indignity she resented with a sudden start and plunge, which would have unseated a less experienced rider; a wheel-barrow drawn up under the hedge finished the matter; with another start and plunge, she was off, with the bit between her teeth, at an unmanageable wild furious gallop.

Through the night air, the snow, and the darkness, the mare dashed onward and still onward, not the faintest change or check in her mad pace, and each moment Cyril expected to come into some violent collision, which might prove death to him or his mare, perhaps both.

He kept his seat well for a mile or so, when, at a turn in the dark road, the mare swerved violently, coming to a most unexpected standstill, with her fore-legs firmly planted in a ditch, thereby sending Cyril flying over her head over the hedge, into the next field.

He fell upon the soft muddy clay, moss, and grass, and was unhurt beyond a shaking and a blow on his nose, which sent the blood over his fair moustache and his coat; but careless of this, though feeling slightly giddy and queer, he picked himself up, pushed his way through the hedge, intent on seizing the bridle, finding his whip, and punishing the mare for her vicious frolic.

She was quietly standing where she had stopped, with her slender legs deep in the hard clay by the roadside, well knowing, before any punishment could be inflicted, of the mischief she had done. In the meekest, quietest, most subdued manner she afterwards carried him home to the Hall.

Doors opened, and men and lanterns appeared in the stable-yard on Cyril's arrival there; and when he came into the full light of the open doors and fires, one and all the grooms and stable-boys stared in amazement at the sight of him. His face was white and colourless, and his coat stained with blood.

"The mare threw me!" he explained, hastily and impatiently. It was a confession Cyril had never before had to make, and he did not relish doing it now. Under all circumstances a thrown rider is certain to meet with some contempt, and Cyril felt deeply humiliated as he said it "Thank you; no, I am not in the least hurt. No, she is sound enough, she never came down on her knees; she is thoroughly vicious to-day. Has she been aggravated by anything?"

No one knew of anything which could have upset her temper, and, uncomfortable under their

ness. I have little that does not affect stating that, unless given me by the old. I go into the at I think of such rt-sighted policy. I suppose that I come but for \$200, for I rd, not hired by the it into the hands of your refusal, what told that the bonds sion Board and the atever. Here is an ke-way of doing busi- nt out by the Mission ltry price of \$800 a rd enters into an id bonds are drawn arter the clergyman the Mission Board; admits responsibility is it refuses to pay lect the rest; (e) the not be made to pay, y not binding; (f) ildren want the com- n the end perhaps he f a few people who ho would be spiritu- n could only hold on "potent" influences redness are not to be Divine influence of ur business in a cer- that way. One can see who are in love see the imperfect way his sort of treatment donable. It is cruel success, for paralyze priesthood, and you ess of the Church. length of this letter. erent nature to dis- ethren and I myself so; so you may hear

that God may some arge-hearted and vigo- to may have wisdom the Church's work way, who has the cas- us country's present; afraid to make ne- shipery, to do away n nothing but mis- o the work that is em names, if neces- ces.

V. HOYES CLARKE.

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happened to bring said Naomi. "But, hat we can do with quarrel of theirs- we h together, but now come, and they are probably each think- e afternoon—and we friends before they

ndoline, absently. igs!" said the Doctor, Making an absolute brother. Just fancy st have alone together ; and rather a dinner

ng very serious," re- r it be, we have been take it up to-morrow." lo," said the Doctor, his voice, adding, "if ive them such a good the better for it."