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**Grand Alliance;**  
—OR—  
**Love That Knew No Bounds.**  
CHAPTER XI.

Having come to this stage, Mr. Villiers would probably have pressed his suit rapidly to conclusion but for sundry interruptions unforeseen and unavoidable.

First came a month of snows and storms, that made country roads all but impassable even for journeys of profit, and utterly tabooed the notion of traversing them on journeys of pleasure. At least so Mrs. Alwyn wrote to her nephew, opining, perhaps, that an obstacle at this precise juncture might make him more ardent on his next visits. Then a political embroilment with a cantankerous foreign power brought clouds of war on the nation's horizon, agitated the War Department, and gave Mr. Rupert a bona fide dose of long hours and with March came graver delay.

One of what Mrs. Alwyn called Sydney's "pretty warbling choir," a worthy little twelve-year-old Suffolk dumpling of the female sex named Patty Peggs, was "look a-illin'," and after vaporing through a prelude, suspected of chicken-pox, ague, or measles, developed by the end of a week a fine case of malignant typhoid. Miss Patty being the eldest of eight (the family including two sets of twins, which, as the poor mother said, "do tell up so!") it may be inferred without much imagination that her share of daily bread was not superabundant, to say nothing of the food illness needed.

Fearless of disease, Sydney at first went to the child with such supplies as Dr. Dacie recommended, and her own narrow purse could furnish; but when the malady was duly declared Mrs. Alwyn promptly forbade these ministrations. Leonora, alarmed at all fever, was infinitely terrified by a second and third case, resolutely refused to go out-of-doors or taste a breath of the air which blew between the infected village and "their nobility," and so nearly alarmed herself into illness of some sort that her mother decided on flight as the lesser of two evils, sent the servants away on very close board wages, shut up The Dale, and carried her daughters off to the fresh breezes of a southern watering-place.

Sydney pleaded dolefully to be left at home or with the Dacies. She might help them or Mr. Vaughan if illness spread. But her mother quickly negated the petition. "People would say I had more regard for Leonora's health than yours," she said. "Nothing should induce me to leave you here."

So, as an example of well-balanced

affection, Sydney was carried off, and had to leave what the cottage neighbors called her "poor little singin' mawther" to struggle through her phases of suffering without further help from her than could be trusted in the shape of shillings to Mary Dacie.

A clean bill of health was reported in April, and Mrs. Alwyn desiring to spend a week at her brother's in Hampshire with Leonora (three would be inconvenient again) Sydney was permitted to return and stay with the Dacies before they all reunited at The Dale.

Nowhere had the girl been more missed than at the Gate House, where she shone always at her brightest, paying them in every coin she could conceive for the kindness to her earlier girlhood. Now Mary received her joyfully with,

"How well you are looking, and how glad I am to have got you back!"

And the traveller, with a hug and a kiss, answered, "Also, how glad I am to be back, but how well you are not looking! What's the matter, Mary? Has anything gone amiss while I was away?"

"No," Mary declared, "nothing so very particular;" but bit by bit, in the privacy of upstairs unpacking, it came out how her father was less equal to work than ever that spring; his lameness gained on him so, and "mother," who had never flagged, but kept such a willing shoulder to the wheel so many years, was not like herself. The strain of all her middle-age was telling on her now. And the "boys," long since men, two married, one in Canada, were getting less able, between growing families and uncertain business, to give their small aids to the old home, and so, confessed poor Mary Dacie—permitting herself the extraordinary luxury of five minutes' collapse.

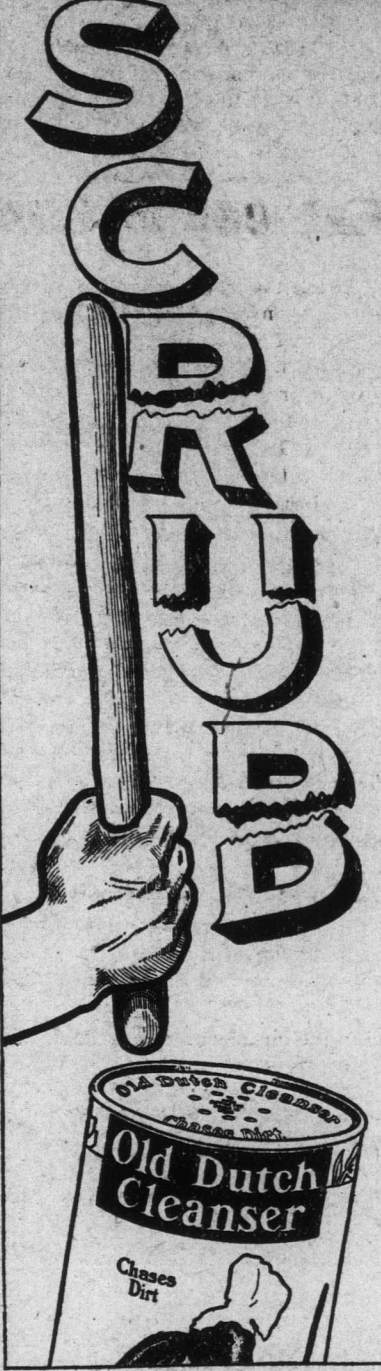
"It seems as if we are all on the downhill road together, Sydney, dear; and sometimes I'm such a goose I get miserable over it."

To which Sydney, who had long dreaded this state of things, could only return the comfort of caresses. The outlook was gloomy, she knew, so uninviting that she must have been glad to quit its contemplation, for, after some minutes' diligent unpacking, she changed the subject by asking, most irrelevantly, if Mr. Drayton had been to St. Clair's while she was away.

It was not often Sydney showed such lack of sympathy. Mary Dacie sighed as she answered, "No," and she sighed again as she smoothed her ruffled brown hair, and stroked out of sight a few obtrusive silver threads. What a foil she looked to that girl in the sweet bloom of her twenty years! But she mustn't grow curmudgeonly Admirers! Lovers! These must be pleasant pastures for young minds to stray along. She wouldn't grudge 'hem to Sydney, even—with a sensation as of a rising sob firmly subdued—even in the shape of—Mr. Drayton or Mr. Rupert Villiers.

This latter gentleman, though debarred from prosecuting his plans in person through the spring, had not allowed himself to be forgotten. Early in the year each note to his aunt Helen had contained some special message for Sydney, unfailingly delivered. About that date in February when feathered monogamists select their spouses for the coming spring, a tourist of Petersham (a stroke to please the Major that!) packed off a splendid mass of sweet-scented lilies of the valley, and the address "Miss Alwyn, The Dale, St. Clair's," was in Mr. Rupert's handwriting. Reviews to her liking, magazines many, found their way similarly to the young lady at Bournemouth, in company with so many papers for her mother and sister. And now, definite desire and in-

**The Club That Knocked Half The Rub Out Of SCRUB**



vention of success strengthened by the propitious Christmas visit, Mr. Villiers felt no hesitation in assuring his anxious father that, spite of postponement, everything was going on as right as a trivet, and the paternal purse would probably be drawn upon for wedding-garments shortly after midsummer.

Meanwhile, as the season was gay and likely to be his last free entirely from petticoat control, the young man took license to treat his good resolutions for the future pretty freely.

The singer who had once enthralled him was far away now, enchanting dollars by thousands from the rich citizens of another continent, but his pedestal was not long vacant. Small pink tickets for the Opera Comique and large long bills for suppers connected with the same; companion documents to Mr. Tuter's original one, and a run of late hours over a green table much best left alone; there, to say nothing of more legitimate indulgences, swelled a debit account of considerable proportions as weeks went by, and relied for their settlement mainly on Sydney's fortune. Since "Hang it, you know," thought Mr. Rupert, "five thousand, or four, perhaps, will be plenty to tie up. She'll like to do something toward starting the domestic mill, that'll be only fair. The rest we'll leave loose as a sort of general fund."

And over the manipulation of that general fund Mr. Rupert's fingers itched prospectively, after a fashion that boded ill for its long existence, while for his first visit to The Dale in May he began to look impatiently as for a serious crisis in his fate. But this crisis was yet to be put off by doing as we must halt to explain.

Among the elements of uneasiness underlying Sydney Alwyn's young life was one extremely common to mankind—want of money. Endowed with a quick eye for other people's needs, a ready hand to help them, it was no light bond to feel herself always scantily provided with means to this end, and in nothing was the contrast of her nature to her mother's and sister's more clearly shown than in this matter of pounds, shillings and pence.

Mrs. Alwyn would nail down the charges of a laundress to the lowest farthing, and travel miles, metaphorically, to save a mite; Leonora invariably had headaches on offertory Sundays at St. Clair's, and as Philippe would grimly say, was never known to give away so much as her cast-off-frilling, and neither lady grudging any domestic screwing which would sup-

ply means of external display; while Sydney's economies, contrariwise, began and ended with herself. All she could garner up went in channels she was not in the habit of talking about, and many a rueful hour it cost her to think that these savings were so provokingly small.

Mrs. Alwyn, however, took good care that only a very small portion of her income would be wasted through Sydney's proclivities, and so it came to pass that the girl had to tax her native ingenuity to make the most of the little she possessed.

She was making, one May morning, an after-breakfast inspection of last winter's garments, pondering over what could be spared to robe the convalescent Patty Peggs, and two or three junior sisters, lamenting secretly that she must not venture on slicing up a suggestively useful serge, for fear her mother might not see fit to replace it before the cold weather came again, when Phillips entered, and explaining, "The bag was late this morning, miss. Mistress sent this up here," laid a letter on the table.

Sydney's postal communications were few, and a glance at the old-fashioned business envelope told her from whom this came—Jacob Cheene. Glad to receive it alone, since Mrs. Alwyn never saw the clerky superscription without annoyed comment, she opened this missive of her old friend, and prepared to read it undisturbed.

But the first sight of its news almost took her breath away.

She always wrote to him simply and freely, more freely, perhaps, than she could ever speak to any one at St. Clair's, and in her last letter she had dwelt rather dolefully on the poor furnished home of her choir invalid, wishing she could have given the little pale-cheeked mortal a taste of sea-breezes; though, as she had ended, wishes were, alas, void—the surplus of her allowance would go such a little way.

Now, in Jacob's letter came this remarkable response:

"It is like your own father's child, Miss Sydney, to be looking after the poor about you. He was as free as the day as long as ever he was able, and I will make bold to say you will copy him when you take your money. Your birthday comes next month. I know, I remember when you were born as well as yesterday. I wish I were not too old a man to travel over the country and bring you some trifles you and you only, would value. But they shall get to you somehow, though I may never live to shake hands again with my dear master's daughter. And please to remember on June the 8th that nobody prays more fervently for prosperity to your six thousand pounds, and for a long life for you to do good with it than

"Your very true and dutiful friend  
"JACOB CHEENE".

Six thousand pounds! Her six thousand pounds! Whatever did the old clerk mean?

Sydney flushed up, and all her pulses started off full gallop at the thought of such wealth in her own hands. Patty Peggs was clothed in blue serge instantan. The damp, ill-drained domicile which the entire family of Peggs inhabited was deserted; they were transferred by magic, high and dry, to a six-roomed house. The rector had his blanket club endowed, so he hadn't to go begging every winter. The Dacies—oh! with a great joyful inspiration—if it were true! But not a moment could she wait without hearing if this extraordinary fortune were really so near at hand. Letter held tight, away she went through her mother's boudoir, where she heard her voice.

(To be Continued.)

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"Christ the Lor Christ hath bro Hark! angelic Singing ever m Hallelujah! P

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