

An Unexpected Confession;

Or, The Story of Miss Percival's Early Life.

CHAPTER IV.—(Cont'd)

Evidently the independent physician's last prescription produced the desired effect, for from that hour the woman seemed like a different person.

She demanded no more attention from Esther. She arose every morning in season to breakfast with her at the table, instead of having the meal brought to her in bed. She also began to do little things about the house, and, though still abrupt and imperative in her speech, manifested an interest and oversight, regarding household matters, that were very helpful to the careworn girl.

About the middle of the fourth week after the disaster, the young man upstairs was pronounced out of danger; but he was still too weak, both mentally and physically, to pay much attention to what was going on around him, and as yet even Dr. Crawford had held no conversation with him that would require an effort of memory. One day, while Esther was busy ironing, her patient having fallen quietly asleep after having partaken of a generous supply of nourishing beef tea, Miss Percival, actuated by a feeling of long restrained curiosity regarding the hero, who, despite his own injuries, had bravely rescued her from the wreck and borne her to her present refuge in a state of unconsciousness, crept stealthily upstairs and looked upon the sleeper through the half-open door of his room.

His face was turned toward her. It was an ideal face, even though it was so wan and thin, its every feature clear-cut and perfect as if it had been chiseled from purest marble.

The bruise, had entirely disappeared from his brow, and the cut upon his head had nicely healed, although his hair, having been shaven around the spot, a red line upon the scalp could plainly be discerned.

One hand, white and delicate as a woman's, lay outside the counterpane, and upon the third finger came a peculiar ring—a fine cameo, set in a heavy band of gold. The moment her eye fell upon this Miss Percival gave a violent start, and her own face grew almost as colorless as that of the sleeper.

She stole softly into the room and bent down to examine the circlet more closely; then her glance wandered back to the face upon the pillow with an eager look of scrutiny.

An expression of agony leaped into her eyes; her left hand went up to her throat, clutching spasmodically at the collar of her dress, as if a feeling of strangulation had suddenly seized her. Her lips opened and framed a name, but no sound issued from them.

"Yes, I am here," the sick man observed, as if responding to some call; then his eyes unclosed and he looked up, wondering, into the countenance of the woman bending over him.

"Who are you? You called me," he said, weakly.

"No, I did not. I have not spoken," Miss Percival tremulously asserted; "I would not have disturbed you for anything."

"But I certainly heard some one call 'Donald,'" the invalid persisted. "Perhaps, though, I may have dreamed it. But who are you?" he asked again.

"I came up to see if you need anything—can I do something for you?" the woman evasively replied, while she nervously moistened her dry lips and gazed fixedly at the cameo upon her companion's hand.

"Yes, I should like a drink of water. I am very thirsty," the young man answered.

Miss Percival stepped to the table and looked into the pitcher standing there.

"I am afraid this is not good. I will get you some fresh," she said in a voice that was still unsteady. And, taking the receptacle, she hastily left the room.

Going below, she told Esther that the young man upstairs wanted a drink of water; then she went to her own room, shut and locked the door, and fell headlong upon her bed, moaning brokenly:

"Donald! Donald! No, no! but Donald's son, with Donald's eyes and voice, and—that ring!"

All day long the woman lay there, refusing to leave the room for either dinner or supper; telling Esther, when she came to call her, that she wanted to have quiet and rest.

But the next morning she made her appearance as usual, and bestowed herself energetically to help Esther, manifesting a gentleness toward and a consideration for her that amazed the girl.

smiled and nodded a welcome to her.

"Come in and talk to me. I am lonely," he said, and she was glad to sink into a chair that stood near, for she was trembling from a rush of old-time memories.

"I hear that you were a companion in the recent disaster which nearly cost me my life," the invalid continued.

"Yes, and I'm not sure but I owe mine to you," said Miss Percival, with visible emotion.

"How so?" queried the young man, in surprise.

"They tell me that you brought me here, unconscious, in your arms," the spinster explained, flushing slightly.

"Ah! I believe I do begin to remember something about it now," was the musing response. "I have a dim recollection of seeing a woman pitched from her seat upon the floor of the sleeper as it went over—of getting her up, stumbling out into the darkness, up a muddy bank toward a light that streamed from an open door; from that point all is blank," he concluded, with a sigh.

"Well, that is correct as far as it goes; but you've neglected to mention the thump and cut that cost you so dear," said Miss Percival.

"I didn't even know how I was hurt, until the doctor told me about it this morning. He said I was so much better I might begin to talk if I wished. Were you done up very badly?"

"A couple of ribs broken; but they've mended nicely. What's your name, young man?" and the woman bent an eager, searching look upon the white face opposite her as she put the question.

"Why! don't you know?" was the surprised inquiry.

"No; we've all been in a tantalizing state of suspense and mystery throughout your sickness."

"Well, that is a queer state of things!" said the young man, with an amused gleam in his eyes. "It is strange that Dr. Crawford has not asked me before! But, then, until yesterday and to-day, he has not allowed me to talk or even try to think of anything. Madam, my name is Donald Lancaster—I beg pardon; did you speak?"

"No—no; a—slight pain caught me in the side," faltered Miss Percival, as she stooped to recover her handkerchief from the floor and to hide the anguish, which, for the moment, convulsed her face.

"You've been ill a long time—your people must be anxious about you," she added, more naturally.

"Fortunately, my father and mother are both in Europe, and cannot know anything about my accident. They will have missed a few letters; but they are so on the move, they will doubtless attribute their non-appearance to that fact. I must try to write to father, though, as soon as I am able to guide a pencil," young Lancaster concluded, a slight shade of annoyance sweeping over his face.

Miss Percival eyed him sharply as he spoke of writing to his father, rather than to his mother, and a faint sneer curled her thin lips.

"By the way," he went on, after a moment of silence, "we've been here an age, haven't we?—and that poor little girl downstairs must have had a hard time of it. Pete, the darky, has told me how she slaved to take care of her sick mother, then her father, and now this extra installment of invalids added to everything else, must have been rather tough."

"Yes, Esther has had a great deal to do; but, of course, she expects to be well paid for what she has done, and the money will doubtless be very acceptable to her, for she is poor as a church mouse," the spinster observed, with her keen eyes reading her companion's face, to see how he would take this reference to his obligations.

"H—m! she does not act at all like a mercenary person," the young man thoughtfully rejoined; "she is the most devoted little attendant I ever saw. She never seems to consider herself, but will almost run her feet off, and watch her eyes out, if she thinks I need anything, or am a trifle feverish at night. Dr. Crawford says that, next to my wonderful constitution, to her I owe the winning of the battle of life."

"Humph! I reckon the doctor himself comes in for a share of the credit," curiously observed Miss Percival, who, ever since her tiff with the physician, had appeared to respect him a hundredfold more.

"Yes, I believe he is very skillful," the invalid admitted. "I wonder," he continued, moving restlessly, "how much longer I shall have to lie here? I begin to feel impatient to be up, and to-day

I have been ravenously hungry for the first time."

"Those are good symptoms," Miss Percival remarked, "and no doubt you will gain rapidly from this time on."

"Where is your home, Miss Percival?" Donald Lancaster inquired, after a brief pause.

A spasm of pain contracted the woman's brow at the question. But after an instant of hesitation she replied:

"Wherever I happen to be. I've been a migratory sort of person for a good many years. I was bound for New York when I started on that luckless journey five weeks ago."

"And so was I. I have lived there all my life," said the young man. "I have been visiting an uncle in Portland, Oregon, and doing some sightseeing on this side of the continent during the past year. Now I am going back to New York, from where I expect to sail for Europe, about the first of April, to join my parents."

"Esther Wellington is also going to New York to live," Miss Percival here volunteered. "She would doubtless have been there before this, but for the fact of having had us upon her hands. Dr. Crawford wanted her to go, in spite of all, immediately after her father died, saying he would find some one to look after us; but she utterly refused to leave until we were able to resume our interrupted journey."

"Well, I must say that Esther Wellington is a brave and conscientious little heroine," observed young Lancaster, admiringly.

"How old is the girl?"

"She says she is sixteen; but if length of limb was any indication of age, I should say she must be twenty at least," the spinster replied, with a grim smile.

"Poor child! what a tall, gaunt, ungainly creature she is! and I think I never saw anyone so thin!"

"That is no wonder, when you consider how she has had to work," said Miss Percival; "and," she added, with a little sniff, "she will never be hung for her beauty."

"No," replied her companion, with a pitying smile, "her sorrowful complexion, her hollow cheeks and those dreadful crooked teeth, to say nothing of her form, do not tend to make her attractive. Her only redeeming features are her well-shaped head and her magnificent eyes; but even those great, black, velvety orbs give her a weird and uncanny look. Yes, truly, poor Esther is a perfect fright to look at, but she has the kindest, tenderest and most faithful heart in all the world. Good heavens! what was that?"

Donald Lancaster gave a violent start as some crockery ware went crashing to the floor, just outside the door of his room, which was ajar.

Miss Percival sprang to her feet and hastened out to the hall, where she found Esther—herself leaning against a banister, white as a sheet, a splash of something upon her apron and another upon the floor, where a bowl and plate lay in fragments at her feet.

"What has happened?" questioned the woman, with a guilty feeling in her heart.

"I spilled some of Mr. Lancaster's best tea on my hand, and it was so hot I dropped the bowl!" "And you are burned," interposed Miss Percival, in a startled tone, as her glance fell upon the scalded hand which Esther was trying to wrap in a napkin.

"A—little; but—never mind—the girl began faintly, then swayed dizzily, the next moment slipping to the floor, insensible.

WOMAN'S TRAVELS IN PERSIA.

Ten Days Ride at Hard Gallop on a Gun Carriage.

In times of peril in Persia the medical missions have proved to be the safest places not only for Europeans but also for the Persians themselves. Dr. Emmeline Stuart, niece of the veteran Bishop Stuart, had a remarkable story to tell of her own experience when preparing to leave the country, says the Pall Mall Gazette.

The only escort available through the disturbed country from Ispahan to Teheran was offered to her by the military authorities, and she accepted it, to find that it entailed travelling on a gun carriage harnessed six in hand and that for ten days double stages were effected at a hard gallop, while the shelter of the carriage formed her canopy at night.

Dr. Stuart testified to the unflinching courtesy and kindness of the officers to the traveller placed in their charge and reassured the committee as to the absolute safety of the missionaries during this period of unrest by saying that the mission compound at Ispahan was one of the safest places in the city. In fact members of the families of officers of the Shah have in the last few months resorted to it as an asylum.

MARRYING WELL.

"Did your daughter marry well?" "I should say she did. She's got so much money and is putting on such style that her father and I are uncomfortable all the time we're visiting her."

The Farm

POISONS IN SOILS.

A repetition of the same crops on ordinary land is not considered to be good practice though the reasons against it are not very well understood. It is a matter of common knowledge that an orchard tree planted in the place of one which died after making a few seasons' growth rarely succeeds. The replanted tree usually makes an unsatisfactory growth and often dies even when fertilizers are added. In greenhouse practice it is found better to transplant seedlings several times than to attempt to grow them continuously.

There is not only a deleterious effect of a given plant upon its own kind, but, in certain cases, upon different plants. Such successions are to be avoided in crop rotations as much as the continuous growth of a single crop. It is known that certain crops do not thrive when planted on newly cleared land which was originally covered with walnut or butternut trees. It has been observed that rye grass and tares seem to poison wheat. Thistles are said to poison oats and euphorbias to kill flax.

It has been found that young peach trees planted in large pots in which oats were also planted, shed their leaves and matured early. The foliage of these trees were never as abundant as of the others, and before falling it turned yellow. The trees grown in pots in association with potatoes and tomatoes were found to be next in order of injury, but the yellow color of the foliage was not as marked as with the grains. Trees grown with rape were also slightly checked in growth, whereas those grown with beans and crimson clover were not thus affected.

In another case it was found impossible to maintain a growth of grass or clover in the vicinity of oak, pine and other trees. Stable manure was thoroughly incorporated with the soil and later artificial fertilizers were added. The grass and clover grew well for a time, but were soon checked and died in spite of good care.

DAIRY WISDOM.

Every cow and every calf should have a full supply of water at least twice in twenty four hours, preferably before feeding.

It pays to provide water in every stall. If this is not done, the troughs in the yards should be sufficient to give ample room, to avoid crowding and fighting.

Neglect and starvation will ruin the most promising heifer in the world.

If a cold rain is falling, the cows should be left out only a few minutes and rubbed dry as soon as they return to the stable. This may seem troublesome but it is profitable.

Allow no pipe or cigar about the stable. It is not only dangerous, but the milk is liable to be tainted; besides smoking is a bad habit.

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Don't guess at anything you do in the dairy line—know. This is the only safe rule. Scales, a thermometer, paper and pencil—these are things that every dairyman ought to have close at hand all the time.

Sometimes by adding one or two new milk cows to the dairy, we may shorten the process of churning a good deal in cold weather.

If some folks could only see the butter that is carried out to their pig pens every day, there would be a new leaf turned over in many places.

Send a sample of your milk to the experiment station now and then and see just how it stands. It is a good thing sometimes to let the creamery man know that you have done this.

THE LACK IN WOMEN'S LIVES.

Few Diversions in a Small Village and Life is Dull.

A writer in the Atlantic Monthly agrees with the general opinion that the masculine half of mankind has considerably the best of it, but adds that the question, which of woman's alleged disadvantages has operated the most seriously against her? is one of individual opinion.

For myself, she writes, living as I have done in a village of small size and few diversions, the thing I have resented most, has been, and is now, that it is not possible, that it never has been possible, for me to hie me with my men-folk to the village store, or to the shoemaker's shop, or to the railing of the old creek bridge, every evening of my life and talk.

Take these men-folk of mine! In the pauses of gossip and of yarns, they have more or less thoroughly exploited, take it year round, every event of importance that has occurred on the face of the earth during their entire lives; and echoes of the past and portents of the future have not been lacking.

Here they have forged their beliefs, and here they have nerved themselves to action. No wonder I have envied them! Nothing like it ever came into the life of any woman since the world began.

It couldn't, you know; there has not been time. Things at home had to be looked after even if the men-folk did become — patriots and heroes.

The babies had to be born and reared and fed; the food had to be prepared, the dishes washed, the clothes made and mended, the

house looked after, and all the other odd jobs done that nobody wanted to do. This, you will admit, has taken time, lots of time, all the time of nineteen-twentieths of all the women who have ever lived, some one says. And although I am the last to suggest that it has turned out so badly, either for the woman or for the race she has reared, I must yet insist that, as a rule, it has been dull for the woman.

GATHERING SEA FOWLS' EGGS

Pernicious Work of Cliff Climbers on English Coast.

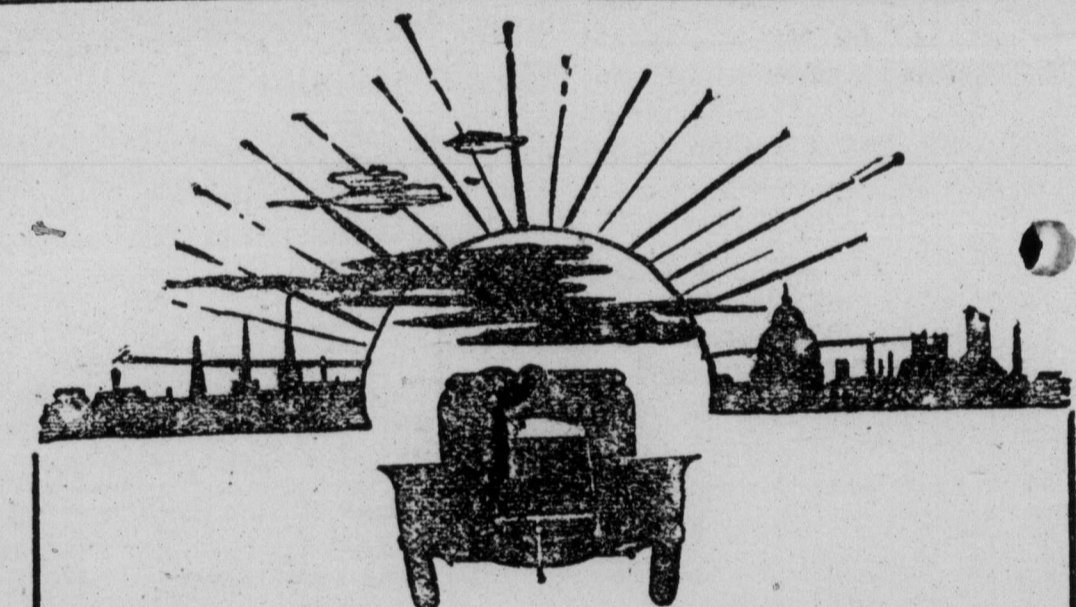
With the advent of spring the Yorkshire cliff climbers are making preparations for gathering the eggs of the myriads of sea fowl that build their nests in the dizzy precipices of the northeastern coast, says the London Daily News.

At Bempton, a few miles from Bridlington, the favorite resort of these egg hunters, the chalk cliffs tower 400 feet above the sea. They are the home of thousands of gulls, cormorants, kittiwakes and other sea birds that have just begun to build their rough nests in the chalky crevices. William Wilkinson, who has pursued this perilous calling for many years, is known locally as "the king of the egg hunters." He is a bluff, weather scarred man of the sea, with as much nerve and agility as is possessed by the most daring steepclimber.

Wilkinson wears an old helmet to protect his head from the pieces of rock dislodged by the rope by which he is suspended in midair. Around his body he buckles a kind of leather hammock, in which he is able to sit. On his arms he wears leather protectors.

"Lower away, boys," he cries as he swings himself over the brink in an almost horizontal position and presses each foot firmly against the chalk surface. Three of the men seize the rope, and foot by foot the intrepid climber is lowered till his cheery voice is lost amid the fluttering sounds of the disturbed birds. He swings in a nest to nest, putting each egg carefully in a bag slung over his shoulder. As soon as his bag is full he gives the "hoist up" signal on the guide rope and the men haul him up.

Wilkinson makes several descents and at the end of the day shares the spoil with his assistants, who sell them for eating purposes to the inhabitants of the neighboring villages.



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