Mayhew, the Millspinner,

OR,

THE STOLEN WILL.

"I dare not hope it. If I, his own father, gave him up—to ruin, how can I expect that a stranger should deal kindly towards him? Oh, I shudder and tremble to think what may have been his fate. But we shall go to Dundee at once. You have a work to do there as well as I. You have this man Willox to hunt up."

"Eh! what that reminds me," roared Luke, his fierce excitement rushing back upon him, "why you—you, Mr. Cambeerk—have more need to pursue Willox than he has. The paper he has robbed me of is the last will of your wife's uncle, old Huntly, and in it he leaves all his property to her and Lawrence Mayhew. There's valuable information for you—a not off, ain't it, to what I did with the boy!"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked his astonished listener.

"I mean what I say. Jonathan Huntly made a last will that nobody knew anything of, and the one that made Mayhew, the millspinner, master of all wasn't worth a rap. Only he didn't know that till six months ago; but then, somehow or other, Sam Willox came to know where the real will was buried, and I chanced to see him dig it up from the place where it was concealed. Of course I twigged that he was playing a game, and resolved to have a share in the plant. I waited till I knew he had gone to Mayhew and made a bargain with him to keep the will back. Then I pounced on Sam Willox, and put the screw on him next; not only that, but I got my hands on the will itself, and insisted on keeping it as security for the tin I was to get every quarter. So what does Master Willox do but follow me in the disguise of a pedlar to rob me of it. He came here to-night, but I got to know him and was on my guard. He meant to give us both the drugged brandy he had prepared, but I was too cunning to drink it. Beckey did, though. And you see the state it has put her in. I pretended to drink it too, but threw it away, and shammed sleep. But watched him all the time, and when he was about to cut the will out of my waistcoat, I gripe him fast and lets him know that was not to be done. Curse him, he was too many for me after all, for he has stabbed me. I went off into a faint, and when I came to he was gone, and the will too. So he has it, and if you don't catch him on the gate to Dundee, Mayhew's game and his will be as good as ever."

This recital rooted Arnold to the spot with amazement. It brought to his knowledge the existence of a fraud as gigantic as it was unsuspected, and the revelation brought a rush of thoughts into his mind, which rendered him absolutely motionless. Luke's story might have been vague and unintelligible to one ignorant of the family matters, but to Arnold every sentence of the tale came clear as a sunbeam, and the moment Luke was done he comprehended the case perfectly.

One man then stood out before him, hideous and vile beyond all expression, and that man was Varley Mayhew. But, indeed, he already knew him to be the most detestable of villains, and this new proof of his rascality could hardly add to the blackness of his character in Arnold's eyes.

But the fact revealed—viz.,—the existence of the will—was of importance, for it gave to his wife the half of her uncle's property, and for her sake, if she were still alive—for his boy's sake, if he was to be found—it behoved him to make every exertion to become possessed of a document so important. To pursue and overtake Willox, therefore, was the consuming desire that seized him.

As William Ogilvy had a reason no less strong to effect the same object, the two friends were equally eager to set off in pursuit of the disguised pedlar. But how could they leave Luke Briar in such a critical state, and with no help near him? He might bleed to death if no succour came to him, and as yet Becky showed no signs of passing from under the effect of the drug that had been administered to her. When Luke understood the cause of their hesitation he emphatically ignored it.

"Go," he said. "Lose not a moment, and don't mind me. The cash is a bad one, and will keep me on my back for some time to come, but I don't feel as if it was to put me under the turf, and that's almost a pity, for I could have wished Master Willox to have been hanged for my murder. Beckey won't be long now in coming out of her sleep, and if you'll leave me the flask, I'll be all right till she does; after that, she'll get help from the encampment. Oh, there ain't no fear; so off you go, or the game may be lost."

The prospect of the game being lost was so greatly opposed to the feelings of both that they were disposed to act according to Luke's wish, so they made him as comfortable as they could, put the flask of brandy into his hand, and promising to seek him out at a future time, and inform him of what should transpire, they took leave of him, and, hounding from the hut, sped away over the moor in the eager hope of overtaking the *soi-disant* pedlar, who they knew had the start of them by an hour or two, but who could scarcely, they supposed, keep ahead of them all the way to Dundee.

CHAPTER XXX.

THRILLING REVELATIONS.

The death scene which had been witnessed in the moorland cottage made a deep impression on all the beholders, as the spectacle of human dissolution never fails to do. But the strength and character of each set impression are varied according to circumstances and associations. Generally it is accompanied with the grief and sorrow of bereavement, and then it lays hold of a heart and mind with terrible power. But in this instance such grief could not possibly be felt, and the impression produced arose from the special circumstances of the case.

The cause of Sam Willox's death, the character of the man, above all, the revelations it had been the means of bringing forth, stirred up great excitement and strong emotion in the breasts of those who had been so strangely brought together in the shepherd's house, and who had all such a special interest in the same.

First of all, how important were these to Arnold Carsbrook! What a fearful fraud had been brought to his knowledge! what additional insight into the character and conduct of Varley Mayhew! And if they could not increase those motives of love and parental longing which impelled him to discover his wife and child, yet they materially changed the circumstances in which the lost ones would be found. For the final will of Jonathan Huntly, so unexpectedly brought to light and put into his possession, gave them a right to wealth, and placed them in a position of independence. To have his dear ones restored to him would be joy unspeakable; and to be able at the same time to secure for him a large portion of this world's goods was something which would certainly not make the restoration less rapturous or happy, but which would mingle as a sweetening element in the cup of blessing.

Then how important in another direction were the revelations to William Ogilvy. They had brought him tidings—mixed with joy and sorrow—of his lost sister. There was sorrow in them, inasmuch as they informed him of her death, under circumstances of the saddest and most mournful character; but the sting of his anguish was taken away by the discovery that she had not fallen from virtue, as he had been led to believe—that though she had bestowed her love on a vile and unworthy object, and by the man to whom she had given her heart, had been basely betrayed and cruelly forsaken, yet that she was pure and stainless to the last. Oh, this was a sweet solacing thought for him to cherish. He must still grieve over her bitter sufferings, but not with the agony that had clung to his former thoughts, for now he could think of her among the saints and angels, as one of the bright and shining spirits who have come out of great tribulation, and walk in robes of white amid celestial glories.

Still further to mitigate his grief for his untoward fate, he had discovered the existence of her child, the beautiful Ella, a minature resemblance of her sainted mother, and bright and attractive in her ways as heart could wish. She had come to him as a precious legacy, and he would devote himself and that substance he had acquired in a foreign land, to rear and educate her to a sphere worthy of her mother's virtue and her own beauty, and thus renew, with even more tender and sacred joy, the love and happiness of the dear, departed time when the sister's comfort was all his care and her society his chief delight.

The only one to whom the revelations brought sadness and pain was Willie, the wandering musician. On Ella the impression had been more that of wonder than of any positive feeling either of sorrow or of satisfaction. In her childish artlessness, she had not perceived the effects likely to follow, but Willie saw them clearly, and the sight of them brought a pang to his heart, in view of the desolation that was to come upon himself. So heavy was the sadness of the feeling which weighed upon him that when they left the chamber of death he took Ella by the hand and led her outside the cottage and down to the side of the burn that rushed through the hollow. There, under a bank of broom, which hid them from sight, he sat down and drew her close to him with even more than his wonted tenderness of caress.

She silently nestled close to his side and leant her golden head upon his bosom, manifesting none of her sweet and sprightly prattle, for her young spirit had been awed by the sight of death, and her thoughts were busy with its dark and shrouded mystery.

"An' sae my wee Ella is gaun to leave auld Wullie," said the latter, in a voice faltering with emotion.

She raised her head with a quick, sudden jerk, and gazed at him with startled astonishment.

"Ye'll no forget me—at least no a' at ance?" he added, laying his hand gently on her shining hair, and regarding her with a sad, regretful smile.

"Forget you, Willie?" she slowly repeated. "How should I forget you? and what do you mean by me leaving you? I am am not going to leave you—I wouldn't do so for the world."

"Ay, but ye are tae be pairted for a' that, my pet. Dae ye no ken this Mair ter Ogilvy is yer uncle, yer puir mither's brither?"

"Yes, I heard that, and he seems a nice gentleman. But," and there a look of wild, intense alarm came into her little face, "he doesn't want me, does he?"

"I hae nae doot he does, dear. He's yer uncle, ye ken, and it's natar'l and richt that——"

"But I won't go to him," burst in Ella, "and I'll run and tell him so at once. Leave you! leave my dear, good old Willie that I loved so, and that loves me so! Not likely, indeed."

And with an amused, incredulous smile she was about to run off to tell "the gentleman" that she would never, never leave Willie, when the latter caught her and kept her beside him.

"Stop, my darlin'—stop, stop; ye dina understand this. Laith aa I am tae lose ye, and wae as I'll be wanderin' my lane, after the lichtsome years we have spent thegither. I wud wrang ye sair if I socht to keep ye. It's for yer guid, my darlin', that ye sud leave me, for no' only is he yer uncle, and has a richt tae ye, but he is rich, and can dae till ye far better than I could. Sae lang as ye had nae freends tae own ye, it didna matter sae muckle for ye to be wanderin' the kintry thrugh wi' an auld fiddler; and God kens I wad have dune my best tae bring ye up respectable, tho' mony a sair heart and secret greet I hae had thinkin' what wad come owre ye if I was ta'en awa'. And then I comforted myse' wi' thinkin' that God loved ye a thousand times better than I did, Ella, and he wudna tak' me unless ye was tae be better provided for. But it's clean different noo, my pet. Here is ane turned up that belongs to ye, and can put ye in yer true position; and it's best for ye, my bairn, that ye gang tae him."

"No, no. I cannot, cannot leave you, Willie." Oh, don't say so; I'll break my heart if I leave you," cried Ella, flinging her arms round his neck, and clinging to him with passionate intensity.

Willie bent over her till his white locks mingled with her golden curls, and tried to stifle the rising sobs. Her grief was greatest now, but it would subside, and scenes of interest would open for her which would soon make up for the pain of separation. But for the old man there was no such anodyne in store. He must go his lonely way, and feel every day and every hour the loss of her bright company which had cast sunshine on his life for the last few years.

Willie was fully conscious of this. To lose Ella was to lose the brightness, the joy of his existence, and to feel a sense of loneliness which he had never experienced before, and never would have experienced but for having had her in his care. The pain of parting was therefore to him most poignant, but not for a moment was he selfish enough to wish to retain her. Her future would be immensely better under her uncle's guardianship than under his, and Willie was not the man to sacrifice her life prospects for his own gratification. But it was hard to lose her nevertheless, and now, during what were perhaps the last moments he should have her to himself, he enfolded her to his bosom with an intense and passionate sorrow.

"Ella and you shall not be parted," said a voice near them, and looking up they beheld William Ogilvy and Arnold Carsbrook gazing at them with great interest. It was Ogilvy who had spoken, and his eyes glistened through the tears which filled them.

"Oh, Willie, uncle says he will not take me from you!" exclaimed Ella, clapping her hands in rapture.

The old man was perplexed and bewildered at the intimation, for he could not deem it possible that Ogilvy would allow her to remain under the disadvantages of the wandering life which was her portion with him, and in the modesty and simplicity of his nature he dreamed not that the words implied important intentions towards himself. It never struck him that the Samaritan part he had played towards his hapless sister had inspired the heart of Ogilvy with an admiration and a gratitude which would desire to show itself by making the rest of his life comfortable. He thought the words usual ones, been spoken in displeasure at sight of the grief of the child and himself in prospect of separation.

"Forgie me, gentlemen," he faltered, "We love ilk ither, Ella and me, and it's no in nature' for us tae be sundered without feelin' it sair. But this maun a stand in the way o' her guid; and ye maun o'en look owre her grief, puir thing, and my weakness. Only ye'll maybe let us see ane anither noo and then."

"You'll see each other every day," said Ogilvy, "for henceforth we three shall live together; and I hope to have the joy of sharing with you this dear child's love."

"Live thegether!" echoed Willie, in amazement.

"Oh; how nice!" exclaimed Ella, clapping her hands with renewed rapture. "You shall get a fiddle too, uncle, and you and Willie will play together in the towns and villages, and I will gather in the money. But can you play with the fiddle as well as Willie; for you know Willie is a beautiful player?"

"I know he is, little darling, for you remember this gentleman and I heard him yesterday at the inn."

"O yes; and you both gave me so much money. I did not know then that you were my uncle."

"No, my love; but even then your appearance affected me very strangely. I now know why that was—it was the resemblance you had to your mother. Little did I then think that you were a child."

"How strange that we should have found it out in this way," responded Ella, and the look of clouded seriousness which she cast towards the corpse showed that her thoughts had reverted to the deadform of her father which lay there.

"It is the wonderful doing of a wise and a good Providence, my child. As to your proposal that I should get a fiddle and travel with you and Willie, I fear I should be of little service. But I think I have a better plan than that. I mean to get a nice house in a pleasant part of the country, and we shall have a large garden, in which you can play whenever you wish; and we shall have hens and ducks, and everything that is nice; and you shall go to school, or perhaps have a governess to teach you at home; and Willie and I shall be always with you, and you will give me some of your love, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, that I will. Won't that be nice dear Willie?"

"But, sir—Maister Ogilvy," gasped Willie; "sic kindness tae me. It's beyond a' bounds. I—I canna accept it sir. What for should I be a burden on you?"

"Hear to him," ejaculated Ogilvy, turning to Arnold, with both his hands upraised. "He a burden to me! he who did what he has done to my poor sister and her helpless babe!"

"Goodness and benevolence such as his are always unconscious of merit or desert," returned Arnold.

"True, true," murmured Ogilvy. "And a more sublime instance of this unconsciousness I never witnessed. Willie," he added, "has it not struck you that I owe you a debt, which let me do my utmost, it is impossible I can ever pay?"

"You awin' me a debt!" returned Willie, in genuine astonishment. "It canna' be, sir, seein' we never met or kenned ilk ither till this very mornin'."

"But you know me as the brother of the forsaken and suffering girl to whom in her last moments you proved a ministering angel, and as the uncle of the child whom you received from her arms, and have tended and protected for all these years."

"Weel, sir, dae ken that, but what then? Had I done less I wad hae been a hard-hearted sinner, sir—no worthy o' the name o' a man, far less o' a Christian. And for what I did, sir, Ella here has paid me a thousand times over wi' her love. Dinna speak o' debt, sir; it's me that's the debtor, as ye wad ken if ye could understand the happiness and joy she brocht tae me day after day in a our wanderin's."

"Well, well," said the other with a smile, "I see it is in vain to argue the matter with one who is so noble and unselfish. But I must have the privilege of showing in some way my unbounded admiration and unspeakable gratitude. And even in this I will be the gainer, for in your friendship and companionship life for me will be made profitable and precious. I have returned from Australia comparatively rich, and the home I am going to make for Ella and myself you must share with us. Do not refuse this, Willie, I pray—if not for my sake, then for Ella'."

"Oh yes, do live with us Willie; it will be so nice." cried Ella.

This was enough. The old man's opposition, which had no strong ground to stand on except the utter unconsciousness of desert, was not proof against the solicitation of the child; he therefore, with many thanks, promised to give up his wandering life—a harder task than they imagined—and take up his abode with William Ogilvy, wherever the latter may desire to fix his residence.

This satisfactory arrangement being made, they had now to consider the sadder question of burying Sam Willox, and resolved that he should be interred on the following day in an almost forsaken churchyard among the hills, at a secluded spot where was once a hamlet with a church before the modern village had sprung into being, but which since had gone into decay, and was now distinguishable only by grassy mounds of rubbish and the graystone of the little churchyard, where occasionally, though very seldom, a funeral took place. In this desolate and lonely place of graves it was determined to bury all that was mortal of the misguided being who had come to his end when in the very prosecution of his nefarious schemes. By his evil life he had separated himself from his family and his kindred, and now he would fittingly receive a grave apart from the same. He had turned into dark and crooked ways, had given himself up many forms of evil, had separated himself from the respectable society of his own class, and now in dust would repose in solitary isolation, where his name and memory would be unknown.

Till the funeral was over on the morrow they could not leave the place, but the shepherd and his wife, with true hearted kindness, made them welcome to remain, and set themselves to provide as far as they could for their comfort. These arrangements had been conducted by William Ogilvy, who had the greatest connection with the deceased. Arnold had taken no part in them, but when they were completed he intimated to Ogilvy his intention to depart at once, for he had a longing desire to reach Dundee.

"You know why it is so," he added, with a look of troubled sadness.

"Yes," said Ogilvy. "Forgive me, Mr. Carsbrook. The absorbing character of those other matters made me forget for a moment your peculiar sorrows and anxiety."

"Of which our old friend is ignorant; and, therefore, he looks surprised," added Arnold. "You are free to tell him all when I am gone, for I know the story will be safe and sacred in his keeping. And now, my friends, farewell! We have met together in a strange and wonderful manner—especially you and I Ogilvy."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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