

GLOUCESTER'S GRIEF.

A BALLAD OF CAPE ANN.

BY KRIS.

In Gloucester's queer old seacoast town,
Chief city of Cape Ann,
There lived a band of fishermen,
A good, united clan.

A very simple people they,
But little vice they knew;
Tho' rough and ready were their ways,
Their hearts were brave and true.

One day in sad November month,
Ten vessels sailed away,
Well manned by ten fine, jolly crews
As ever left the bay.

All bound were they for fishing grounds
At Grand Banks and La Have;
All hearts aboard beat high with hope—
Each man was strong and brave.

And when they steered their boats from home,
Loud rang a lusty cheer,
While many fond ones left behind,
In silence dropped a tear.

Days sped on, and drear December's
Rough gales began to blow;
Then all ashore yearned anxiously
News of the fleet to know.

Storms had been unusual fierce,
Terrible wrecks were rife,
Many a prayer went up for men
Struggling at sea for life.

Wearied and heart-sick from waiting,
The faintest hope had fled;
The feeling of anxious longing
Changed to terrible dread.

Vague rumours were confirmed at last,
The sad truth went around,
That more than ninety fishermen
Their watery graves had found.

The wails of widows and children
Sound 'bove the ocean's roar,
In grief for the loss of dear ones
They'll welcome never more.

Montreal.

MY STEP-SON.

BY MARGARET SCOTT MAC RITCHIE.

I had been married just a year when my life experienced its first great trouble—a trouble self-increased by the wilful pride and rebellion with which my headstrong girlhood met it.

Hitherto my path had been particularly sunny. The only child of wealthy and indulgent parents, I became engaged at eighteen years old to Kendal Darcy, a rising barrister, some years my senior, whom I loved with a warmth only equalled by my satisfaction when I found the affection was mutual. My father warned him that such a spoilt child would prove troublesome; but Kendal had no fears on that point, and as yet our wedded life had cast little enough of shadow upon us.

Now and then I did indeed notice upon my husband's face a grave, pre-occupied expression that I failed to understand, but I knew he was entrusted with important issues, and loving his profession as he did, it was no wonder that his mind should entertain its concerns even when he rested from its duties in his beautiful home at South Kensington. I guessed not that scenes in his past life were the phantoms so frequently arising before him, haunting him even in his present happiness, unsuspected by his joyous girl-wife.

I was now about twenty years old, and happier than ever, for a beautiful infant boy had crept into our life and love. Ah, what marvellous hopes clustered round the rose-pink *berceuse* wherein reposed what the papers announced as our "son and heir!" Kendal used to pinch my cheeks, calling us a couple of babies, when he watched us together; but I knew he was as proud of our little Frank as myself, though his smile was so quiet and his looks were so subdued as he held the wee dimpled hand in his.

Never shall I forget the morning we became aware that baby was not the "son and heir"—that Kendal had a living son, and that I was a step-mother. We were breakfasting in our favourite room, and the flowers were nodding in at us through the open windows, whilst the canaries were singing their sweetest, when my husband received a black-bordered letter that turned his face ghastly white as he perused it. I hurried to get him brandy, fearing he was going to faint. I guessed that something was amiss in his banking or professional affairs, but I could not annoy him with questions, and silently I knelt beside him, putting my arms around him.

The story was told by-and-by, quickly and abruptly; but it was very long ere I realized the truth—that I was a second wife. In the early days of our acquaintance Kendal had heard me speak approvingly of a friend's marriage, vowing that nothing should induce me to marry a widower; it was then he had most unfortunately resolved to keep the fact of his previous marriage private; and I could well understand how much suffering the deception had caused him.

As a youth of twenty-one he had met his first wife, the pretty daughter of a yeoman farmer, and the belle of the village where his guardian Colonel Grant resided. Home from college for his vacation, he delighted for so pleasant an acquaintance to beguile the tedium of his stay at the Hall, and their dance at the harvest home was the prelude to a very warm friendship.

Their constant meetings in the sunny meadows and shady lanes were a most agreeable change from the hard studies in which Kendal had been engaged. No word save of sympathetic friendship had been exchanged between them when he returned to college; but while his labours there soon drove his pretty companion from his mind, her weaker nature was completely changed by the past few weeks. By-and-by he was recalled to the village by a note from his guardian, who informed him on his arrival that Alice Graham was in a hopeless consumption, and that she had despairingly betrayed the secret of her love to her mother, who had, unknown to herself, appealed to Colonel Grant for advice. Kendal was shocked indeed when he saw the change in the girl he had left so rosy and blooming; and, though he knew he did not deserve all the blame his guardian and her friends evidently considered his due, he could not hold himself entirely innocent in the matter.

It was a sad affair. My husband spoke of it with a trembling voice, and in deep agitation. It seemed as though the very tendrils of Alice Graham's life were twined round one who realised now that pity was the utmost feeling of his heart towards her. Her father insisted on marriage; his strictly honourable guardian advised the same course, seeing that the "difference of station had prevented the courting." Her mother "didn't speak, but she looked in his face till his heart was like to break," whilst the village doctor believed it was the one chance for her cure, and Alice herself, on hearing whispers of such a scheme, appeared quite a new creature.

Kendal was married then in obedience to Colonel Grant's wishes and the promptings of his own good feeling, and, on his guardian's death from a fall in the hunting-field, he came into possession of a substantial provision. His legal studies had kept him much away from home, but he always treated his wife with the kindest consideration, and it was a real grief to him when, in consequence of the sudden tidings of Colonel Grant's death, a premature birth cost the young wife her life. The baby boy became Kendal's one solace in his double loss. I knew too well what he felt when he held his first-born in his arms, and my heart grew hard and dry at the thought that such emotions had been excited by another than by little Frank.

As Kendal's duties called him away from the village, Alice's mother proposed to take care of the baby; and seeing that she had lately adopted an orphan baby of a late neighbor's and that it was thriving most admirably, he readily agreed to allow her a certain sum for the child's support. In a year or two however he intended to take a London house for himself, and he made it distinctly understood that the child was then to leave its grandparents' and be brought up under its father's roof.

About nine months had elapsed, when he heard from Mrs. Graham that the child had succumbed to an attack of croup. Wifeless and childless, he hurried down to look upon the tiny new-made grave, close to that of its mother—for little Willie was already buried. The farmer was ill with rheumatic fever, and Mrs. Graham was so worried and upset that Kendal did not speak with her long. He put away the past from him as a dream, and from that day to this he had never brought himself to visit the neighborhood again.

What, then, were his feelings on reading the letter received this morning? It was from the Vicar of Springmead, announcing the death of the aged woman Graham, who had been long a widow, and enclosing a letter addressed to "Willie's Father." During her last illness she had fully confessed to the clergyman the imposture of which she had been guilty, begging, however, that it might not be revealed to her son-in-law till she had passed beyond his wrath. Kendal's boy was still alive and nearly seven years old; it was her neighbor's child that had died in infancy, but her great love for her grandson and dread of losing him had tempted her to take advantage of the circumstance to retain her darling with her. The Vicar had soon traced Mr. Darcy, the barrister, to his abode, and he wrote that Mrs. Graham, even at the last, did not seem to realize the extent of her wrong-doing; it seemed to her partly excused by the indulgent care lavished on the child she had taught to call her "grannie," and by the fact that she had never accepted the help of a farthing from her son-in-law since she had imposed upon him. Since her husband's death the small farm had suffered great misfortunes; it appeared that it was to be sold, and the proceeds were to pay the debts the widow's slender means had forced her to contract.

"My blue-eyed baby alive," cried Kendal, as if speaking to himself—"given back to me as it were from the grave! I can even forgive the cruel wrong in the joy that is swallowing up every other feeling—the joy to know that my son is not dead!"

At that moment I almost hated my husband; his heart seemed so far from me and my baby that a passion of jealous anger seemed rending my soul. With bitter, cutting words did I reproach him for his deceit, and his only answer was a silent look of pain; but when, incensed by his quiet manner, I began to hint that the child's training had not been such as to fit him for our house, I saw my husband angry with me for the first time in his life.

"A child of six or seven," said he, "can scarcely be considered as trained to perfection—even Frank at that age will sometimes need our fond correction; but I suppose he will be no less our much-loved son."

"Frank has nothing to do with the present matter," was my haughty reply; "my son will always be a gentleman."

I was ashamed of my words as soon as spoken, but Kendal made no reply. He walked up and down the room for several minutes ere he said—

"I am going down to Springmead to-day, and shall probably bring Willie home on Wednesday evening. Come, mamma," he added tenderly, "I know I can trust your woman's heart towards him."

"You are mistaken," rejoined I quickly, "if you suppose I shall trouble myself in the least concerning him. I never arranged for the trying life of a step-mother. Frank's nurse had quite enough to attend to himself now. If you take my advice you will send him to a thoroughly select school for some time before you bring him home."

"You will allow me to decide that matter," said Kendal coldly. "My house is my son's home. I will take care that no trouble concerning him shall fall upon yourself or nurse. Millicent"—and he tried to take my hand—"do not let us prolong our first disagreement. You must know how deep is my love for my wife and our baby, but you would despise me in your heart if I felt no yearning towards my first-born."

"I have no wish to make matters unpleasant," returned I, withdrawing my hand. "I only wish to know where the child is to sleep, for the nurse will object to have another one in the nursery, and the rooms are all disposed of."

"He can have the small red-room for a bedroom," answered Kendal coolly.

I had always meant to have this room for a day-nursery by-and-by, and I was not at all pleased to find my plans frustrated. Without another word or look toward my husband, I hurried up stairs to my baby to pour into his unconscious ears all my indignant and tumultuous feelings.

My husband tried to reconcile me to the fact of the child's residence with us. I saw that he was as displeased with my conduct as I was with his own. But surely I had cause to be angry. Not only was I a second wife—a position to which I had a strong objection—but a vulgar farm-bred boy was to come amongst us, stealing from my baby the father's love and rights of the first-born that should have been his.

Bitter tears did I shed that day beside the cradle when Kendal had left for Springmead with a "Good-bye, Millicent," called from the bottom of the stairs. I imagined that I had already become less dear to him, and laid the whole blame of the unpleasantness upon the boy who had come between us.

"Never mind, my baby!" I cried, pressing my lips against little Frank's velvet cheek. "We will love and comfort one another through it all."

On Wednesday I received a long fond letter from my husband, full of tender words for myself and baby, blaming himself for his secrecy, and pleading very hard for a mother's love for his son, however troublesome he might prove at first. He said that he had already seen my parents, having stepped for that purpose when half way to Springmead, and that they had treated him with a forbearing kindness he could never forget. Instead of adding this letter to the precious packet in my dressing-case, I tore it up after the first perusal; I was far too angry with my fate to be just toward my husband.

I asked my cousin Mrs. Tudor to spend the day with me, and she came to lunch, accompanied by her two children, and her sister Miss Clemence—their presence would take away some of the awkward nervousness with which I looked forward to Kendal's return. I did not enlarge on the facts of the case, but told them that Mr. Darcy had been deceived as to the death of his first wife's child, taking it for granted that they were aware of a previous marriage. My cousin showed neither surprise nor curiosity, whatever their feelings may have been. Miss Clemence hoped that Willie would be a good boy and give me no trouble; and Mrs. Tudor, turning to her boy and girl, expensively dressed in the height of fashion, hoped they would be good friends with the new cousin that they would see that evening.

It was nearly six o'clock when a cab drew up to the door, and I heard my husband's voice through the open window. A tastefully-spread tea waited upon the table—for we had made a luncheon of our dinner, as Archie and Beatrice Tudor could not be kept out late. We were laughing and chatting pleasantly when Kendal came in; little Frank in his very best lace robe, lay fast asleep in my lap, and I had no intention of waking him by disturbing my position in any way.

My husband greeted my relations very cordially, though I fancy he was disagreeably surprised at their presence; at any rate, he went back into the hall, saying—

"Run up stairs with Martha, Willie, and get yourself tidy, for tea is quite ready."

"I have engaged a nurse for Willie at a registry office," said Kendal to me in an undertone; "he is far from strong, and Martha will see to him entirely. Sturdy fellow this!" he added, turning to Miss Clemence as he bent to kiss the baby.

I knew that he wanted me to look at him, that he might read my feelings in my eyes; but I kept my face resolutely bent down, in deep displeasure that a servant had been added to our household independently of my own will and choice.

Kendal was thoroughly nervous when he brought his son into the room and bade him shake hands all round. My careless glance

as I touched his hand revealed a thin, pale child, very awkward and frightened, in a black sailor suit of country make, presenting a marked contrast to the self-possessed little Tudors who stared at him with the curiosity incident to their age. It was a relief that he was not vulgar looking; however, I chose to mistake his shyness for ill-breeding, and determined to punish Kendal thoroughly through the child. Little Willie sat beside his father at tea, and finding his child so little noticed, Kendal lavished upon him a fondness that inflamed my jealousy every moment. His first choice at table being a slice of very rich cake, of which the smallest morsel was sufficient for children, my husband, with the thoughtlessness of a man, heaped his plate with it. I knew that such a meal after a long journey would certainly harm the boy, but I had not the grace to clothe my remonstrance pleasantly. I turned to Kendal with the cold remark—

"That slice should be divided between the three children; no child could eat so much rich cake."

"It won't hurt Willie," said Kendal obstinately; and without noticing me further, he turned to converse with Mrs. Tudor.

I noticed, however, that after the first taste, little Willie only crumbled his food, gazing round the table with crimsoning cheeks and gulping down his tea as though forcing back something in his throat. I was becoming as nervous as the child, for I had a horror of scenes and I knew very well what was coming.

"Eat your cake, Willie, like a man," said my husband, as a lull in the conversation took place.

"I am afraid he has a very poor appetite," remarked Miss Clemence; "he has eaten nothing as yet."

Dismayed to find himself the general attention, Willie hastily swallowed a piece of cake, and then what I had foreseen took place. He buried his face in his small thin hands, and, pushing away his plate, burst out crying. If my husband had been absent, I must have taken the motherless boy in my arms and hushed him as I did my own Frank; as it was, I looked at the sleeping child on the couch, and remarked that he would be ill at night if suddenly awakened. Miss Clemence told Willie nobody would love him if he was not well-behaved; Mr. Tudor said something about spoiled children; Archie abruptly produced a stick of chocolate from his pocket and forced it between Willie's fingers, and little Beatrice twisted her arms around his neck, whispering, "Please don't cry, cousin."

"The child is tired out," said I; "he cries only from fatigue. He had better go to bed and have something to eat there."

Kendal was very much annoyed at this public manifestation. He gave me a look of almost disgust at the indifference of my tones, and then, raising Willie in his arms, he carried him away. The last sound I heard was, "Grannie! I do want my grannie!" and the wailing cry haunted me throughout the evening.

From that time a great coldness arose between my husband and myself; while outwardly the same united couple, both were conscious that a barrier, in the shape of little Willie, really separated us. It so happened that this was term time, when Kendal was constantly occupied from home; but, when we were together, I easily recognized the absence of his former little tenderness, and my heart grew harder and harder against the little child who, I chose to believe, had usurped my place.

Willie was left entirely to the management of his nurse, a person whose cringing manners towards myself at once prejudiced me against her. She was constantly complaining to me of the wilfulness of her charge, and I told her at last that he had been under her sole control for several weeks, and I had hoped for a report of a slight improvement at least. My great wish was to get the child away to school; evil passions once encouraged pervert the better nature, and despite the occasional whispers of conscience, I threw off all responsibility concerning him, disliking even the sound of his voice or the mention of his name. If Kendal was displeased with his home-training, why did he not send him away?

"That boy is always crying," said my husband, irritably, one morning, as he pulled on his gloves in the hall. "I wonder what is the matter now."

"It is perfectly dreadful at his age," returned I. "Mamma will be here next week, and I am sure the noise will quite upset her."

"Willie must go to school next quarter," said he; "it will be altogether better for him than this house."

He turned towards the door, for our fond adieux were things of the past; but I saw before us a return of the old happy days, when Willie should no longer be an ever-present source of disagreement, and my heart went out yearningly towards my husband.

"You might spare me a kiss," said I, coloring, and put my hand on his arm.

There was a sort of affection in his look, as he answered sternly—

"When I have once seen you kiss my child, I shall know you care for such tokens from me. Till then, let neither of us pretend regard, Millicent."

"Be it so," said I, with angry pride. "You will never see me kiss that boy. I hate the sight of him!"

"Take care of what you are saying," remarked Kendal, quietly; "those are dangerous words to utter."