

REBECCA'S REMORSE.

By JAMES PAYN.

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(Concluded.)

Rebecca was wonderfully calm and resigned, and after a few words of sympathy which perhaps had better not have been said, for I could see they tried her firmness, I spoke of what was necessary. Of course I took upon myself all the arrangements of the funeral, but I had to ask her a question about the death certificate.

"I do not know your sister's married name," I said.

"She was never married," was the unexpected reply.

My eye wandered interrogatively to the wedding ring upon that delicate finger, on which the needle had left no trace. It had, indeed, done little work of any kind. But Rebecca only shook her head.

"Then I will give your sister's maiden name, Bent."

"She was not my sister, sir. She was no relative at all. Put down Lester."

"No relative? Then, indeed, Rebecca, you may say you have done your duty to your neighbor."



She feebly stretched her arms toward her.

"My duty!" she answered with bitter scorn and throwing up her great, gaunt hands. "It was I who murdered her."

It was not till some days afterward, when Lucy had been laid to rest in the cemetery, that I heard from Rebecca what she believed to be the story of her crime. It was exaggerated, emotional, and I am very sure represented the case only as it appeared to a mind full of remorse and self reproach.

I prefer, for truth's sake as well as hers, to give the facts as they would have struck an unprejudiced observer.

Lucy Lester was the daughter of a tradesman well to do and who made his money honestly enough, but he was a Puritan and of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. His wife had died when Lucy was still a child, and she was brought up in an atmosphere of gloom and dullness very unsuited to her character, which was at once frivolous and egotistic. Her beauty, of which she was only too conscious, was pronounced by the formal society with whom she mixed to be a snare (as, indeed, it proved to be), and every amusement to which she naturally inclined was sternly forbidden her. Rebecca, who had been her nurse and when she grew up became her maid, sympathized with her young mistress, to whom she was also genuinely attached, and made common cause with her against her persecutors, as she called them though they included her parent himself. She was very thrifty and kept

Lucy "short" as to pin money, and Rebecca who, as she told me (for she spared herself in nothing), was "very greedy of gain," on a very low scale of wages. It was a sad and rather sordid story of severity and repression met by duplicity and intrigue. What redeemed it was the disinterested though exaggerated fealty of Rebecca, which would have borne comparison with that of feudal times. Except for her singular beauty, there was nothing admirable in Lucy, who indeed was proud, selfish and exacting, but in Rebecca's eyes she was perfection and a martyr, fit for a prince, but with no choice of suitors save of a commonplace and unworthy kind, and who, never having seen a stage play, had no notion of the desirability of making a friend of the maid of their mistresses.

Presently, however, a lover appeared of quite another stamp, but unhappily a clandestine lover. Mr. Power was one of her father's customers, a gentleman, as was understood, of good position and who at all events gave large orders, which were punctually paid for. While calling on Mr. Lester on business he chanced to catch sight of Lucy and became at once enamored of her beauty. Without the simplicity which is the safeguard of her sex, she was absolutely ignorant of that world with which she panted to mingle. The man's air of fashion made as much way with her as his protestations, and unfortunately the lavishness which a man of his stamp displays when bent on such a design was taken by Rebecca as the sign of a generous nature. Without knowing them (as I think) to be exactly bribes, she took his bribes.

With one word to her master she could probably have saved his daughter, but she did not feel she was in danger. Even a word of warning to Lucy herself might not have been thrown away, but she did not give it. On the contrary, urged by many considerations—dislike of her master and his surroundings, willingness to please her darling and confidence in Power's professions—she assisted him to elope with her. I am afraid there was even a time when Lucy shrunk from the audacity of that design and but for Rebecca would have abandoned it, but it was because she was herself deceived. Indeed at the last, when Lucy had lost her head as well as her heart and would have risked all for love, Rebecca stepped in and insisted upon being present at the marriage ceremony. It was a barren precaution, though poor Lucy might afterward have used it as a weapon of revenge if she had had the heart for revenge, for in a few weeks she discovered that he whom she had believed to be her husband was a married man. In that brief space she had lost all, fortune, friends and home, for her father closed his doors against her, and the unhappy girl found herself thrown on her own resources, which consisted only of a scanty wardrobe and a few jewels. Then, like a wounded tigress, she turned upon Rebecca with, "It is you who have been my ruin!"

The fury that might reasonably have been poured on her deceiver seemed quenched in the very catastrophe he had caused, as flame deserts the blackened ruin. So far as he was concerned, the crime of which she had been the victim was so overwhelming that in place of indignation she felt only wretchedness and despair. Too weak to seek relief in self destruction she yet desired to hide herself from her fellow creatures and especially to be seen no more of men.

What remained to her of vitality took the form of passionate reproach of her late ally and assistant, and not a word

did Rebecca say in her own defense.

Instead of leaving her young mistress to a fate only too easy to be foreseen, she devoted herself with penitence and remorse to smooth the rough road she must needs travel for the future.

Effort of her own Lucy never made and accepted the other's services not only as her due, but as but a small installment of the obligation she had incurred in having given her such bad advice. That she had not forgiven her she made very plain even, as has been shown, up to the last moment of her life, but Rebecca never thought herself hardly used.

"There was nothing I could do, as you may believe," she said, "that deserved thanks. It was owing to me that my poor dear mistress, so young, so beautiful, so tender, had fallen into the hands of a villain, and, unit as she was to bear hardships, was compelled to live upon a crust. Was it to my credit that these hands, which had taken his bribes, provided the crust?"

If Miss Lucy had complained, she said she could have better borne the consciousness of her crime, but after that first outbreak she kept silence—a cold, reproachful silence that for years had chilled the other's very heart. All she stipulated for was to be alone, not to be spoken to, not to be seen, and even when her illness had become severe it was only on Rebecca's promise to obtain professional advice without the doctor's presence that the sick girl had permitted her to apply to me.

This was the story of Rebecca's remorse.

I did what I could to reason with the poor woman by pointing out how penance atones for wrong, but if I had not been so fortunate as to obtain for her Lucy's deathbed forgiveness she would certainly never have forgiven herself. As it was, she was in some degree comforted. I got her a situation in the country with some friends of mine, where she was greatly esteemed and remained for years. She always took a day or two's holiday in the summer. No one knew where she spent it, for she had no friends, but at that same time whoever visited an east end cemetery would have found on Lucy Lester's grave fresh flowers.

THE END.

Too Generous.

Landlady—Mr. Granger did not drink his tea.

Synnex—No; Granger is not the man to impose upon weakness.—Boston Transcript.

Master of the Situation.

In the days of slavery Abram was a great favorite with his master, whom he had served as a valet from his youth. At his master's death his mistress wanted him many privileges, and at one period of emancipation he resisted every temptation to leave the old plantation. In the exercise of his privileges he became obnoxious to the other negroes, and their frequent complaints excited remonstrance on the part of his mistress. But Abram pursued his own way in spite of expeustulation. Finally his interference with her own plans exhausted the patience of his mistress, who determined to dismiss him.

"Abram," said she one day to him in a very kindly tone, "I see that you and I cannot live in peace on the same place, and I have decided that we must part." But before she concluded her remarks Abram exclaimed:

"Law, mistis, whar you gwine? You ain't gwine git no better p'intashun Jan dis. Take ole Abe's advise, mistis an stay right whar you is."—Exchange.

HARRY'S CORDIAL.

By HENRY HERMAN.

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(Concluded.)

"I sent yow an the others to fetch food, an yew bring me stones. My poor goll is dyin in thar. Thar's bin no food in this house nigh on a week now. I've b'iled the bark of the cottonwoods an eaten it, as if I was a hoss. Day an day an night an night I've waited an said to myself: 'Painter Harry will live through it all. Painter Harry will bring me meat for my goll, acos he loves her. Painter Harry will save my Nellie, if he'll reach my doorstep to die on it.' An yew've come back alone, an yew've left even yow'r rifle on the road, an yew bring me this filthy gold. Can yew eat gold? Can yew eat it? Speak, if yew're not dumb. Take it out of my sight. Away with it!"

He grasped a feeble handful of the shining fragments and flung them into the fire, where they rang against the hard baked clay of the chimney. Then he sat down and buried his face in his hands, and his low moans filled the room as with calls of gaunt death.

The young man stood there, with his dark, pain stretched face clouded by the old man's accusation. With slow and diffident step he stole toward him and laid one of his blood stained hands gently on his shoulder.

"Don't speak so hard, Daddy Hays," he said, with a heartbreaking quiet.

"We found nuthin that we could bring on oursel es, but we found this. There's bushels whar this comes from, an when the wind slows down it'll pay fetchin. I didn't think I'd live through it, an I'm nigh dead myself, but the instant minnit I can use my limbs I'll take that rifle an start out ag'in. I cayn't go out with these things on. I'd die on the road, an thar'll be pieces of my skin comin away with 'em as it is. But cheer up, Daddy. Nellie won't die, if Painter Harry kin save her, an I will save her still."

The old man remained dumb in his grief and doubt, while Harry, with agonized efforts, stripped off his ice covered clothing. In the corner by the fireside hung a striped Navajo blanket and a couple of mountaineer's buckskin shirts and trousers. Harry strapped the blanket around his waist and tied strips of fresh rag around his wounded and bleeding limbs. Then he sat down by the fire, facing Hays.

"An Nellie?" he asked at last. "Whar is she?"

Daddy Hays looked up. "In thar," he replied—"dead, maybe. I ain't had the courage to look this hour past."

"She ain't had nuthin to eat—for how long now?" inquired the young man, a feverish determination gleaming in his eye.

"She ain't touched food for more than eight an forty hours now."

"May I go an look at her?"

"Go!"

The young man strapped the blanket a little more tightly and wiped the dripping moisture from his dark hair and beard. In the fitful Rembrandtesque light thrown by the hearth fire his wiry form, all brawny muscle and sinew, flashed now and then like polished bronze. He might have been a model for Tubal Cain as he stood there, naked to the waist and barefooted, with his blanket reaching the ground like a workman's gown of mythological days and with his long, dark beard streaming around his manly face.