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Tales and Sketches.

RACHEL NOBLE'S EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER XIX.

FANNY and I were in the habit of going frequently to New Broom. We never staid long at a time, as we preferred going together, and it did not suit very well for us to be away for a lengthened period. Had we gone separately, we might have made longer visits. It was a long while before I noticed, but at last I did notice, that some kind of change had come over John and Mary; they had grown very grave and solemn, and even melancholy, I thought. I laughingly remarked this to them, and they both said, "Indeed they were not aware."

"Well," I said, "look at Mary now, and tell me if I only imagine that she looks solemn and preoccupied?"

"So I am," said Mary, both solemn and preoccupied, I was just thinking how I could make a leg of lamb fresh for some days longer in this weather."

"Certainly," I said, "that is enough to make anyone look solemn, but you should not infect the children—they are growing quite soft and sentimental, you'd better let them go with us to L—, and we'll get over the little Mysles; their sentimental vein is not unduly cultivated, I assure you, and they will brace them up, otherwise you'll be having them too good for this world, as people say."

"And really there was often a rush of tenderness in Mary's voice and manner towards her children, the pathos of which struck me; it always seemed as if she were deprecating some calamity that might be hanging over them."

"On this occasion, we staid over the Sunday. John was to preach. When Mary came down to breakfast on Sunday morning she told us that her husband had been very unwell, that she had done all she could to persuade him not to preach, but he was determined to do it, as no substitute could at that hour be had."

"But Mary," I said, "it is no duty to preach if he is so unwell—I'll go and see how he is, and try to advise him."

"Don't go," she said in a tone almost of entreaty, "it will make no difference, and he won't care to be interrupted at present, when he is preparing."

"Of course I did not insist on visiting him, so that I did not see him till he was going up the pulpit stairs. I understood that a violent headache was what he chiefly complained of; he frequently put his hand to his forehead, during the service, and his eyes—as I have seen in persons suffering from bilious headache—looked brighter than usual, and his face was slightly flushed. I was sorry that he should have thought it necessary to preach, and Mary looked positively agitated about him. She watched him most intently, and I saw her fingers working nervously in her closed hand. He got on tolerably well, except that he seemed to forget sometimes what he was saying, and had to go back a few sentences, and he had a little difficulty in enunciating distinctly; he was near the end of his discourse, and was not speaking of anything—judging from my own feelings—to cause me any uneasiness when he suddenly appeared quite overcome, sat down, and burst into tears, no one moved, not even Mary; there was a dead hush. In a few minutes he rose again, said that he had not felt so well, that he would not have been in the pulpit, if he could have secured the services of a brother minister, and that he would make no apology for taking his manuscript and reading to the congregation. He did so, and closed the services. Mary hurried from the pew and went with him to the house."

"As Fanny and I, in coming out of the church, were passing the foot of the stair that led to the gallery above, I saw a man looking intently at us,—he was near the head of the stair—a middle-aged, disreputable-looking man; I was certain I

had seen him before—that he was the person who had escaped drowning at Lericlaw. He was looking at us, as if he was not wholly ignorant as to who we were. I thought, "Can this man have stumbled into that church by accident, or has he some such hold on John Morgan as he has on his sister, and is his presence that agitated him to such a degree?" I almost hoped it for a very painful impression would occur to me—I could not avoid the idea that the forgetfulness, the indistinct utterance, the unaccountable loss of self-control, were symptoms of incipient brain disease.

I almost forgot the man whose appearance had again roused my curiosity, and hurried to the house. I met one of the servants in the lobby, and found that John and Mary had gone to their own room. I said to the servant, "Jane, has your master any attack like this before?"

"Yes, ma'am," she said, "once or twice, since I came, but never on a sabbath day afore."

The girl, I knew had only been six months in the house; my fears were confirmed—if John and Mary took this view of the case, no wonder that they looked grave sometimes—but why had they not spoken of it, why, above all, had they not had medical advice?

Mary came down to dinner, looking pale, but quite cheerful comparatively; she said, "John was much better but meant to keep his own room for the rest of the day; she had no doubt that to-morrow he would be quite well." Fanny grew cheerful too on this intelligence.

"But Mary," I said, "I find this is not the first attack of the kind he has had?"

"How do you know?" she said.

"Oh, Jane told me; I asked her, and I think you have been wrong in not speaking of it, and getting a doctor's advice at once."

"You might have done better than ask Jane questions of the sort; servants always exaggerate anything of the kind—violent headache and occasional mental depression only take a day or two to wear off."

"I did not say more, for I did not wish to alarm her, it might be unnecessary, but I resolved to talk the matter over with John."

Next morning I saw him from my window at work in the garden, transplanting stock gilly-flowers. He had the finest flower of all kinds; it was worth the journey from L—, and the suggestion of flowers; indeed he made pots of his vegetables too, having cabbages of some peculiarly delicate kind, ready to cut before the cabbages of other people had made up their minds to grow. So I hid me into the garden fragrant with the rich breath of the summer morning, and congratulated him upon being able to be at work. He said, "Two hours work in the garden he always found to be better than any medicine."

"For all that," I said, "you should not allow a turn or illness like yesterday's to pass unnoticed—you should have medical advice—prevention is ten times easier and better than cure."

"There can't be two opinions about that," he said, and he went on busily digging a hole with his trowel.

"Well," I said, "if you are afraid of alarming Mary—although I don't think concealment of any kind good—you might consult a doctor quietly; probably relaxation, change, a few weeks on the Continent just at present might do you a world of good, and would not be very bitter medicine."

"Not at all; only I don't require it, and prefer being at home—if my disease is curable it will cure at home as well as elsewhere—I can be my own doctor," and he dibbled a gilly-flower into its hole.

"I said, 'John don't trifle; I shall be very unhappy if I think you are neglecting the means of health.'"

"I should be very sorry to make you unhappy, Rachel, but really, I have no need of advice from doctors—I am in perfect health."

"You did not look very like it yesterday—by the by," I said, "did you notice a man, a stranger, in the gallery, a man I have seen somewhere before?"

"I saw him coming down the stairs—wondered if you knew him, or what brought him there?"

"I didn't notice any one in particular, but at this season there are often strangers present."

"We gathered some flowers for the breakfast-table, and went in: it was a wonderfully pleasant retreat on a summer day, the manse of New Broom. The dining room, in which we breakfasted had a large bow-window looking into the

garden, which on this summer morning was dressed in its best; the window was open, and the black-bird and the mavis gave us music for our meat. Presently the children ran in with radiant faces and well brushed curls, to say good morning and give a kiss all round. In a little while they subsided on stools to enjoy the tops of the eggs, which they claimed as their perquisites. They were very fine children, a boy and a girl, and having a sense of property in them made them all the dearer to me, although I don't think I was less fond of Lizzy's two little girls."

Fanny and I had to return to L— that day, and we had to leave early in the forenoon, for which we were very sorry. An earnestly requested both John and Mary, if he had such another attack of illness to have a doctor, and I comforted myself by considering that I could speak of the matter to Dr. England. We had just said good-bye and driven away, when I saw the man, the stranger of yesterday, come round the garden wall towards the manse. I touched Fanny's arm, "Do you know that man?" I said, "who has just come in now?"

"How should I? I know very few people here."

"He does not belong to New Broom, he is sometimes in L—."

"I would have given something to know whether he was going to call at the manse, but before he got the length of the gate, we were whisked round a corner and out of sight."

"As we travelled, Fanny said, 'I am always very sorry to leave New Broom; I don't know a more delightful place, there seems so little about it to hurt or destroy. Do you know, Miss Noble, I haven't been able to prevent myself thinking of our poor old servant, Sarah Wilson. I much doubt she learned to drink in our house; I know she made a practice of drinking all that was left in the glasses.'"

"I know she did; I once spoke to her about it. I never had courage to do that, besides what good was speaking to do? She was not going to be convinced that it was a bad thing for her, when almost every body in the house took it, and we lived by the sale of it."

"That's quite true," I said; "but let us hope that things are not so bad with Sarah yet. We'll go and call upon her soon, and try what we can do to get her and her husband to become abstainers. I wonder every one is not that; but I needn't wonder when I see my own father. Do you know the horrors connected with drinking have been like a millstone about my neck ever since I could think. Ministers going about amongst their people must see the terrible evils of it; one would think they would rise as one man to put it down, but they don't. Mary says there's not a total abstinence in their presbytery, they all drink, and some of them not a little; she says she would most gladly abstain, and keep house on the same principle, but she does not think, in the circumstances, it would do."

"Kind to myself—where could I go for a week's play that I could be better? and he is an old friend of mine; I have known him since he was a boy."

"You relieve my mind entirely; I hope you will advise him to take care."

"I shall," he said emphatically. "That's all the advice he needs, and if he acts on it he is safe—brain disease, indeed! You must lose that trick of interpreting symptoms, Miss Noble; ladies are encroaching on our profession, I believe, but I don't approve of it altogether."

"Do you know, doctor, I think John is turning a teetotaler?"

"Eh, what! he is not making a parade of teetotalism is he? I should consider that a very bad symptom indeed, and he actually looked grave."

"There, doctor—there's prejudice for you; if a man's a total abstainer why shouldn't he let it be known? I suppose you call that making a parade?"

"Does he let it be known that he is a teetotaler?"

"No—I didn't hear him speak of it, but Fanny tells me that Mary wishes to become a total abstainer, and keep house on the principle."

"Ah!" interrupted the doctor, "that's it—is it that's a different thing?"

"But she never would have harboured such a bold notion unless John had promoted it."

"You admire that style of matrimony, Miss Noble—you think that's all as it should be?"

"I admire Mary—I am not apt to admire a degree of virtue that's out of my own reach."

The doctor laughed and went away. When he returned from New Broom he reported John in perfect health, but said that as he promised he had perfectly understood the nature of his attacks, and told him how to avoid them for the future. He has it in his own hands; care is all that is needed."

I was very grateful to have my anxiety removed.

A GUARDS DREAM.

My mate, I've been a railway guard in my time, and was reckoned, too, as a fellow as ever did a fly-shunt down three roads. And well I might be, for I ran with some rare good men in my time, and got part of my training under poor George Barnes, and everybody knows he was the best goods guard that ever ran between London and Leicester. But I was only an under-guard; at least, I left just when I had passed a head once. Ah, and I liked the job, and meant to do well at it. Then why did you leave it?"

some will say, "Why, because the company asked me to; which means, in plain language, I got the sack."

"I will tell you how it happened. It was when I was stationed at Cookeford, just after I was married. I had just been 'passed,' but had not yet taken charge of a train myself."

One night I came in from a journey, and asked the foreman what train I was booked for on the following day.

"The 12:30 p.m. pick-up to Botley," said old Bob.

"All right," replied I, "but, dash it, Bob! that's rather hard on me." For I had been with this train three days already, and it was a well-known hard one.

"Can't help it," said the imperturbable Bob; "I've got no other under-guard to go with it."

With that I went off home, and after having had my supper retired to my "downy."

I don't know whether or not my supper was extra heavy that night, but I dreamt, most furiously, and this was my dream—I thought I had just come home with the Botley pick-up, and was walking along the train, when I found to my horror the engine wet drenched with blood. I ran back to my break-yan, and everything seemed covered in blood wherever I went. I got to the van and called my mate, and found him lying all his length on the floor, and all my efforts to rouse him were futile. In fact, the attempt woke me, and I found myself trembling violently. I got up, and when the time came, went on duty, and inquired who was to be my mate. I was told Jimmy Stokes was going in charge of the train, and I was rather surprised at the name, as he was the very man I had dreamt about the night before. My surprise, however, was considerably heightened, when, a few minutes after, Jimmy himself came

up and exclaimed, "Hullo Jack! Are you going with me? what a rum thing. Why I dreamt about you like blazes last night." He then related his dream, which was that he was lying senseless in the break when I woke him, to tell him that the train was covered with blood. I must confess I looked upon this as an omen, and was very much afraid something out of the way was going to happen.

However, we started our train, and arrived at Botley in due course. As we were not due to leave until 5:30 p.m., Jimmy asked me to stay on the spot, whilst he went to get a glass of something warm. So as it was a fearfully cold winter's night, and dark as pitch, I took my coffee into the points-man's box and warmed it up, and made myself comfortable for an hour.

But the time passed on, and no Jimmy came and just as it was time to start home, and the signals were right for our departure, some men came down to the station bearing something heavy, which upon examination, proved to be Jimmy in a most helpless drunken state. The men said he had come into the public house, and some gents had stood treat, and had made the poor beggar as drunk as a fiddle.

"What on earth was I to do? After a few minutes hesitation I resolved to save him from disgrace, as I hoisted him into the break and giving driver a wave of my lamp, and right a-head Bill, I set to take charge of the train myself."

It was a hard job, but I was well up to the mark, and by sheer hard work and good luck, we ran into Cookeford yard about 9 o'clock, an hour late.

I went and got on the engine to have a chat with the driver, "Well," said he, "I reckon we did that pretty well! My eyes, what a jump my engine gave just this side of Bilton. I thought for sure we had gone off."

I then got off the engine, and for something or other, I walked round to the front of it. I happened to turn my lamp towards it, and almost staggered back with fright, for all the front part of it was splashed with blood and pieces of human flesh. My dream flashed upon me in a moment. Almost sick at the sight, I yelled to the driver and the men who were about the yard, who all came round and stared with horror.

The driver was the first to speak. "We have run over some one," said he, and then called our attention to the jump the engine gave at Bilton. So we sent Jimmy home to the quiet, and then steamed towards Bilton to search.

Wesoot, by the aid of our lamps, found the mangled remains of a poor labourer, who had evidently been returning from work. His body was nearly all in pieces, and it was with difficulty we collected the different parts of him.

The next day there was a coroner's inquest, and to save Jimmy's character we primed him up with a story as well as we could. But somehow or other the inquest was adjourned for a week, and then we were all summoned to give evidence. Jimmy was called, in the course of the inquiry, and was so frightened by what had happened, and anxiety on his own account, that he made a terrible mess of it. The coroner was a sharp little man, and ferreted about so curiously that, by some means or other, the whole business came out—Jimmy's drunkenness and all.

Though the accident was no fault of ours, yet we all got reprimanded strongly. About a week after we were both summoned before the "Gaffer" at Cookeford, and told that the directors had ordered our immediate dismissal from the service—Jimmy for getting drunk on duty, and me for culpably concealing the fact.

So I got the "sack" from the Midland; but I got so good a character from the station-master at Cookeford (who, by-the-by, in some things is the best little man that ever wore the "griffin"), that I soon got a job, and am now doing well.

Some of you won't believe about the dream, but I can assure you I have told you facts from the first to the last.—*Railway Service Gazette.*

A TEXAN tells this story of lost opportunities. "Now, you see," said he, "land was cheap enough at one time in Texas. I have seen the day when I could have bought a square league of land, covered with fine grass and timber, for a pair of boots. 'And why didn't you buy it?' asked his companion. 'Didn't I have the boots,' said the Texan.