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The Story.

Scenes from my School Life.

BY HENRY FRITH.

LILLIE CAMERON.

"Only her love I ask'd for,
Only her Love—and yet—"

It is very true, if a very trite, observation, that little causes produce great events. Thus, if at the age of fifteen I had not been possessed of a piece of chalk, I should never have been sent to Dr. Cameron's as a private pupil. You may, perhaps, say that as I in no manner chalked out my own destiny I need not complain. I do not complain, although I think I was rather to be pitied; and Lillie—but wait.

My grandmother prophesied that, as an unlucky wight, I (not the chalk) had made my mark in the world, and should come to no good. As it happened, I went through a good deal, but it didn't adhere, and my fortune is not yet made.

But I had best relate the cause of my sudden departure from home to Dr. Cameron's Private Establishment for Young Gentlemen, which combined every educational advantage, with the unlimited motherly care of the doctor's wife. See advertisement.

At this time my family lived in a terrace, at No. 1. In the same terrace, at No. 14, lived an elderly lady named Smith. Mrs. Smith had become decidedly obnoxious to us—that is, to me and my school friends—because she objected to our leaping over the railings which divided her front garden from the next wherein we played at "prisoner's base." She alleged that in jumping over we spoiled her flowerbeds. We admitted the jumping—who could deny it?—but demurred when the injury was attributed to us. She sent for a policeman to watch our movements; we mocked the constable from our own side, whereat he laughed, and Mrs. Smith was wroth. This was the state of things when the lady issued invitations to a dinner party. My family were not personally acquainted with Mrs. Smith, but our cook's sister was "keeping company" with Mrs. Smith's parlourmaid's brother, so the party was known to us so soon as the notes of invitation were issued.

Of course, I mentioned the news to my "chums" during our weekly study of the "Use of the Globes"; but what use the globes were to us I never ascertained. I question if the earth ever revolved with half the rapidity it did when our master's back was turned, yet the (mis)use of the globes went on. It was that afternoon decided that we should play Mrs. Smith a trick, and we did it in this wise. After the carriage had set down the guests, and the road became quiet, we brought out my largest lump of white chalk, and, unperceived, drew a broad band across the dry, hard road. The night was dark but clear, and the white band could be distinguished at some little distance. Ten o'clock approached, and we strolled along the terrace as usual. At last one of the expected carriages came dashing along. Suddenly the coachman perceived the white line just ahead and checked his horses. He might have saved himself the trouble; the horses would not pass the chalk line. There they stood and pawed the ground, but cross the white streak they would not. To make it more unpleasant, there was no other way by which No. 14 could be approached, and so in half an hour we had the happiness to perceive all Mrs. Smith's guests walk to their carriages. We heard afterwards that they were very angry with their hostess, and she was simply "mad," as the cook said; but somehow suspicion attached itself to me, and I was questioned as to supplying the chalk, and also as being a spectator of the result of the chalking. This was, of course, enough. I was told that my conduct was ungentlemanly (so it was), and that arrangement had been made for my removal to Dr. Cameron's "private" school. At Midsummer I left home for the first time, amid the well-remembered advice of my father, the tears of my mother, and the Cassandra-like prophecies of my dear old Granny.

"Never forget you are a gentleman," said my father; "always have money in your pocket, and never owe, borrow, or lend it to any one."
"Take care of your clothes," was my mother's parting suggestion, "and write when you get there."
"Good-bye, Frank," said my grandmother, "and here's a sovereign for you. Mind you behave yourself, and don't fall in love with the young ladies."
So I left home, these good counsels ringing in my ears, and after a somewhat tedious railway journey, I found myself at Ruxborough station.

"Be you the new pupil, sir?" said an elderly man, half butler, half groom, as I stood gazing about in dire uncertainty as to my future movements.

"Are you from Dr. Cameron's?" I replied, in Irish fashion, by another question.

"Yes, sir; you be Master Hardy, I suppose, eh?" I confessed to the fact. "Then please, sir, jump up yonder while I fetch your box."

This feat he accomplished in a few minutes, and then mounting the trap beside me, he took the reins from my unwilling hands, and we started.

"What's your name?" I asked, as a commencement.

"Job," he replied, "and I ought to have his patience as well as his name among you young gent's."

"Job," I said, "you're a Briton, I can see; we shall be friends in no time."

My companion shook his head, muttering something about Britons never being slaves; while I involuntarily hummed "Rule Britannia."

In about twenty minutes we entered a narrow lane at the end of which was a gate.

"There's the house," said Job, "and here's the pupils." In a moment we met them.

"Hullo, Job, whom have you there? Mr. Chalker, your most obedient."

I now learnt that the reason of my being sent to the doctor's had leaked out; but I took no notice of the remark, merely "telling Job to proceed, which he did amid some sarcastic 'to limekilns' and 'mortar.'"

I received by the doctor, and introduced to his Lillian. She was a pretty dark-haired damsel, about sixteen, with soft grey eyes and a very sweet smile. I had no sisters, and perhaps for that reason more than boys of my age usually do.

Respecting the journey, I was shown

my dormitory, in which I perceived two other beds, and was left to find my companions, if I chose, after I had unpacked and put away my clothes.

I was wandering rather disconsolately about the extensive garden, when I perceived Lillie Cameron approaching.

"Tea is waiting," she said, "will you not come in?" Of course I accompanied her, and as I entered the room I was the "observed of all observers."

"This is Frank Hardy," said Dr. Cameron; "I hope you will do your utmost to make his sojourn with us agreeable."

Mrs. Cameron bowed to me; two of the pupils did likewise; two others looked at the biggest boy, who, without looking at me, replied—

"Certainly, sir, we'll treat him as you wish in all respects," and then he plunged into his tea.

I did not enjoy the meal, and was glad to escape with the rest into the open air. The evening was lovely, and I already felt the influence of the sweet country air and scene.

"Well, Chalker, what do you think of this, eh?" said the big boy I have mentioned, whose name was Fleming; "better than Dubstone, isn't it?"

"Yes," I replied, "but my name isn't Chalker."

"Still if I choose to call you 'Chalker,' you must be called so; you've no choice."

"I shall not answer to such a name," I said; "so I tell you once for all."

"Then," said Fleming, calmly, "we must put you in the river. I'm sorry to do it so soon, Chalker; but we must duck you." So saying, he called the others, and by his directions I was carried to the river close by.

It was neither a very deep nor a very rapid stream, still it was sufficiently formidable to me. I could swim, however, and somehow didn't feel afraid, but I had to learn that swimming with and without clothing are two very different things.

"Now, Coster, catch his heels; tightly, you muff."

I here made such a violent demonstration that the "Barrow-Knight," as Mr. Coster was usually termed, was nearly precipitated into the water.

"Now Chalker are you ready?" inquired Fleming.

I made no reply.

"Well, then, here goes. One, two, three, and go," he shouted, and I found myself flying through the air, and, in another second, plash I fell into the river. Quickly rising to the surface I struck out for the opposite bank; now I began to feel the weight of my clothes tell. True, I had denuded myself of my coat and waistcoat in my struggles, but the current was pretty strong, and, worse than all, the mill sluice was open.

"Look out for the mill," shouted the frightened Fleming, who had run along the bank, and now for the first time perceived my danger. "Get across, Hardy, slant over."

These cries fell upon my ears but indistinctly, as the roar of the "lasher" began to assert itself cruelly above other sounds. Still I swam on and battled with all my strength against the increasing swiftness of the current. My heart gave one big jump as I looked and perceived that the mill-wheel was revolving, and that the sluice was gradually dragging me beneath its influence. I dared not cry out. The horrible sluice kept sucking me down, but I made one mighty effort, and in my despair plunged headlong over the "lasher" in front. I was conscious of being beating on stones, and then I remembered nothing until I found myself lying on grass by the side of the river. A gentleman was supporting me, and to my faint inquiry as to where I was, told me I was safe, and that I was to keep quite quiet until his carriage should arrive to convey me home. As it did not immediately appear, and as I felt sufficiently recovered to walk, I was assisted to the mill, where I was packed between blankets until my clothes were dried. My companions evinced by their sympathy and ready assistance, the remorse which had taken possession of them. It scarcely needed the stern prophecy of the miller as to their being one and all shortly executed for murder, to make them penitently beg my pardon and forgiveness, added to the expressed hope that I would say nothing of the "accident," as they cheerfully termed the affair.

My preserver was Mr. Cunningham, the medical practitioner of this district. He had been fishing below the weir, and as I came headlong down, he loosed his punt-pole and picked me up. To his fortunate love of sport I owe my life, and I expressed my gratitude in a befitting manner as we drove back to Dr. Cameron's house. My appearance in company with the surgeon caused some astonishment, and the subsequent arrival of the other boys gave rise to inquiries, when we parted effectually for that evening, and I retired with the others at the usual hour.

Next morning, however, I was obliged to see Mr. Cunningham professionally, as I felt quite unable to rise. Mrs. Cameron was most kind, but my gentle little nurse Lillie quite won my boyish heart. All through the long weeks during which I was constantly visited by my parents, no presence gave me half the pleasure that Lillie's imparted. Carefully, and unselfishly as a sister, she tended me, unwearied by my petulance and restlessness. One evening when I was very ill indeed, I asked her if she should be sorry were I to die? Bursting into tears she replied, "Dear Frank, you make me unhappy when you speak so, pray don't." This decided the matter, and I resolved that should I ever get well I would marry Lillie Cameron. Well, perhaps it was "nonsense," but I meant it then and afterwards, as you shall hear.

Long before I had fully recovered I loved Lillie with all the first fervour of boyish affection. Her sweet kind eyes seemed to beam upon me even during the weary waking nights, and morning was indeed worth living for, for it brought her to my side. The convalescent period was the happiest time of my life. The friendship of my school-mates and the kindness I received from the Doctor and his family deserve a word of special remembrance. Mr. Cunningham took me out in his brougham daily, and at length, after an absence of five weeks, I re-entered the classroom.

All were unfeignedly glad at my appearance, and the "Barrow-Knight," to my surprise, began to "feel my muscle," as he termed it. "He'll do, Fleming," said he.

"Do," I exclaimed, releasing my attenuated limb; "do for what?"

"Why," replied Fleming, "you see we have been just challenged by Dormer's 'Four' to pull from Howden to Brambling up stream, and we want you to be No. 2."

"I fear that's impossible," I said; "I've no strength for rowing."

"But it's not for two months yet; Miss Cameron is working us a flag, and wants you to row."

"That's different," I said; "if Lillie wishes it, of course I'll pull."

My glib manner of speaking of "Lillie" excited some surprise, but the Doctor entering, to put me through "my fagging" in classics, postponed the discussion. He was apparently satisfied, for in half an hour he dismissed me upstairs, saying he had letters to write, and bade me go to the drawing-room. I hurried up hoping to find Lillie; nor was I disappointed.

"Here's a letter for you," she said as I entered; "you had better read it at once," and she turned away to search for something in the next room. The letter was from my mother, bidding me return as soon as possible to accompany her and my father to Wales, whither they intended to proceed for a few months' change. I communicated the contents to Lillie. "I suppose I had better go," I said.

"Of course," she replied, "are you not bidden? Besides, this is school; with your parents you will be at home."

"Ah! Lillie," I said, "I had much rather remain where you are, you know I love you better than anyone else." I confess I was sentimental, but had I not an excuse?

"Frank, now you are talking nonsense; the idea of your speaking to me in that way! Of course, you cannot care for me as you do for your home; besides—"

"Well, Lillie, besides what?"

"It's absurd, Frank. There, I didn't mean to say it; but it is, of course, absurd to talk of loving me now you are well. While you were ill, you know I didn't mind; but now you have recovered your senses, it is absurd—isn't it?"

The sweet earnest eyes came so close to mine as she put the question that I forgot my manners, and drawing her close to me, gently kissed her cheek.

"No dear, it is not absurd," I replied, "I shall always love you. Why, I am now past sixteen," I added, proudly.

"But I am now seventeen," she said demurely, "and, Frank, you mustn't kiss me again. You won't try, will you?"

Her innocent pleading face was close to mine, and I muttered, "Never, dear, if you will forgive me."

"I will forgive you," said Lillie; "there!" and, pressing her lips upon my forehead and ran out of the room.

When she appeared at luncheon, I fancied I could detect tears; but she was gentle and winning as ever, and took great interest in the forthcoming race. I took the opportunity of mentioning the letter I had received; but it appeared that the Doctor had already written to my father on the subject, and I was to leave at the end of the week.

The Saturday came all too quickly for me, and at 3 o'clock the trap was ordered to convey me to the station; but Mr. Cunningham, who had called to see the Doctor, offered to drive me over, and, as the delay would give me the opportunity of bidding good-bye to Lillie, I gladly accepted the offer, and ran out to find her in the garden. I soon descried her dark dress near the hedge bordering the croquet-ground, and hastened in that direction. She was listlessly swinging a piece of honeysuckle as I met her. She blushed slightly as I addressed her.

"I've come to say good-bye, Miss Cameron," I began in a constrained tone; "I'm going home."

"Oh, Frank, are you angry with me for what I said the other day? You know I was right."

"Yes," I replied; "but I mustn't call you Lillie any more, of course?"

"Yes, you may," she cried. "We are friends, great friends, are we not? and my best friends always call me by my Christian name. You may then, Frank, you see."

"Dear, dear Lillie," I burst out, "you know how much I like you. Can you like me when I am away—say?"

"Hush! Frank, indeed you mustn't talk like that; there's papa and Mr. Cunningham waiting for you. Good-bye. Here, take this, I plucked it for you."

I half drew back, but as I looked up I met her dear, honest eyes, and hesitated no longer.

"Dearest Lillie, good-bye," I cried, and ran off.

She was down at the gate by a short cut as we drove out, and waved me a farewell. I saw that tears stood in her eyes; I turned, kissed her hand to her, and we parted—I feeling as though I had left home instead of being on my way thither, and that Lillie Cameron was the world to me then.

Yes, my boy readers, long ago as it is since I saw Lillie, I still gladly recall her image as she stood at the gate while the dog-cart drove rapidly away. Remember, I had no sister, and had scarcely ever associated with young ladies. Lillie's tenderness and kindness stirred up all my hitherto latent feelings, and, boy as I was, I loved her dearly and truly, as I do still.

I pass rapidly over the six weeks which intervened between my departure from and my return to Dr. Cameron's. I employed this interval in practising rowing, and, if the old fishermen were to be credited, got on capitally. Of course I was aware that my style must be somewhat modified when I came out on the Ruxborough river, but this daily practice put me in capital trim. I gained strength and flesh daily; I grew rapidly, and, before I returned to school, I began to pay some attention to my personal appearance. Indeed, I got rather particular in the matter of gloves and boots, greatly to the amusement of my father and to the intense gratification of my mother, who said I was now "quite a man." At any rate I was a very different boy when the station fly deposited me at the well-known entrance, and my friends recognized the change.

"How you have grown, and I may, perhaps, be permitted to say, improved," said Lillie demurely.

"Not really changed, Lillie," I whispered as I went upstairs to dress for dinner.

The forthcoming boat-race was the all absorbing topic that evening. Strange reports were rife concerning Dormer's crew. They were pulling splendidly, and steered to a marvel. Stroke was powerful as an elephant and as enduring as the camel, and a feeling of despair pervaded us, I am afraid, when we retired for the night.

During the following week I had little leisure to think of Lillie, yet she was really never absent from my mind. She seemed to be so wrapped up in my daily work and practice, that it required no effort of thought on my part to recall her every tone and feature. I accepted her as part of creation, as the sun on the river, without stopping to analyze the feeling or thinking it strange. I was quite happy and worked hard in and out of school; and the improvement in our rowing became every day more marked.

TO BE CONTINUED.