

MY LEGACIES.

I am the constant recipient of legacies. Judging from my experience men are born, they marry, they die, for no other purpose than to leave me a legacy. They do not endow me with fortune or fame. No gentleman dies bequeathing me bank stock, a house on the Hudson, a lot on Fifth Avenue, or an interest in a Western railroad. No author leaves me his deathless manuscript, that I may publish it with "Notes and Biography of the Author, by John Hensley, Esq.;" from no one of my innumerable benefactors have I received those legacies which cause the ears to tingle with pleasure, the heart insensibly to enlarge, the pocket-book to grow plerthoric and shiny like a "fat and greasy citizen." No; my friends have left me their wives, their children, their aunts, their pet mocking-birds, their hydrophobic lap-dogs, with the unanswerable request that I would take care of them?

Now what can a man do with legacies like these? Is there any patent way of declining? I am a slow fellow, and have not found it out.

So I, John Hensley, merchant and bachelor, who began life with the determination to bring no responsibilities upon myself; I, who have remained unmarried from, I trust an innocent desire for and love of freedom, I have met, and had foreed upon me at every turn, the evil deeds of other men. Even my mother, who should have been my best friend, was no exception in this particular, for she left me Jane Cribbs, her humble companion for many years, and now my housekeeper. Poor Jane, my mother wrote, has not those qualities which make friends, but I know her worth and fidelity, and you, John, will see that she never wants a home.

My mother was right; Jane had not those qualities which make friends. Any person left to his own free choice in the matter, would have thought twice before he placed Jane Cribbs in any propinquity to himself. She had a tall, angular figure, and a severe face; with that description of mouth known as the "miser's purse." She had the great virtue of taciturnity; but she contrived to make that disagreeable, by not answering when spoken to, if offended (which she generally was). She was always in a state of indignation at the servants, and of wounded sensibility toward me. I always neglected something which her dignity demanded, and my boots were forever tracking the carpets, and soiling the fire-irons. But I meekly claimed the right to soil my own carpets if I pleased, and Jane retired within herself and scowled on humanity.

Such was my situation: a good income, a comfortable house, not a responsibility in the world, no annoyance except Jane, and I had begun to get accustomed to her, when my friend Tom Macready died and left me—his daughter! a girl of fifteen.

Poor Tom! I loved him when we were young, and the world had gone hard with him. He struggled on with ill health, poverty, and misfortune, until his wife, worn out with the hardness of life, died, and his heart broke. He had a daughter, and the poor father struggled to live for this forlorn creature, but death was inexorable.

He sent for me, poor Tom! What a handsome fellow he used to be! He died in comparative comfort, for I am afraid I said something imprudent about taking care of the girl.

At any rate, coming up to dinner about three weeks after, I saw a pretty young creature on the sofa crying bitterly, and wiping her eyes on the corner of her shawl, while Jane sat grim as the sphinx, looking needles at her.

Who are you, my dear? I asked, moved by her distress.

I am Genevieve Macready, Sir, and papa—papa is dead!

To take the poor thing home—to pay the last duties to my friend—to settle his few worldly affairs, absorbed me for several days, and I forgot Jane.

Tramp, tramp, overhead, as if every step was a poker descending on the floor. (I never understood how so light a weight as Jane—she couldn't have been over one hundred—could manage to put so much noise into a foot-fall; but she expressed her indignation by her step, and her indignation was mighty). Hearing, as I say, Jane's foot-step overhead, I immediately knew there was something wrong.

Tramp, tramp, like the marble man in Don Giovanni, came Jane down stairs. I am not a cowardly man, but I am not ashamed to say I trembled slightly.

Mr. Hensley, is that girl coming here to stay?

That girl. Let me see, what girl? Oh! poor Genevieve.

Now how like poor Tom Macready to give his daughter such an absurd name as Genevieve!

Yes Jane, Miss Macready, is my ward, and is coming here to live. You will oblige me by treating her with every kindness and attention.

Then, Sir, I should like to leave, for as for staying in the house with such a girl as that—

As soon as you please, Jane, but no disrespectful remarks of my ward.

Jane always proposed leaving, I always assented; she never went.

Poor girl! I thought I should tell her about Jane, and give her the alternative of living somewhere else; but before I had an opportunity she had taken the case into her own hands, and Jane met a force superior to herself.

In the first place, Genevieve cried three months. She would scarcely eat, and Jane's objections began to be washed away by this flood of grief. I once even found her cooking a pudding wherewith to tempt Genevieve's appetite.

Genevieve was proof against the pudding, and Jane tried something else. At the end of the three months Genevieve began to revive. The redness gradually died out of her eyes and nose. She showed the recuperative powers of her age and sex. She became very pretty. We also discovered her to be very self-willed. Several engagements took place between herself and Jane, in which the latter was left "hors du combat." Genevieve would irreverently call Jane "Old Cribby," but afterwards threw her arms about her neck and kissed her. It was singular taste in Genevieve, but Jane's footsteps became lighter overhead.

To find out what my ward knew, and what she did not know, was a somewhat difficult task. She was now fifteen, and had been left to run wild. In the changeable and sorrowful days of her parent's life, they had lived in lodgings, among others poor like themselves, and poverty knows few distinctions. She had long stories of Mrs. Minee, the milliner, who occupied "the second story front," and whose rooms were always bright and cheerful, and of poor Mr. Hardy, the painter, who lived "in the third pair back," and painted dreary pictures, and was always deserted and sorrowful. If Genevieve had been a philosopher she would have perceived a profound truth lying in the contrast of Mrs. Minee and Mr. Hardy, but she as yet had only noted facts.

Shining through all her faults was the ingenuous and refined nature of her father. If she had touched pitch she had remained undefiled.

Her dear, foolish, accomplished father had taught her to read Shakspear (which she did of evenings to me), but had not attended to her geography and arithmetic, so I suggested to her that she must have masters and study. She demurred, pouted, cried, and finally acquiesced.

I enjoyed my ward; but it was a highly spiced entertainment, for I never came home to a quiet evening. Either the French master left a badly-spelled note to the effect that Miss Macready did not know her lesson; or the English master, who was reported to be choleric, had thrown the geography across the room in despair; or Jane had a grievous story of the prolonged absence which Miss Genevieve had chosen to take that day. Genevieve received my remonstrances with a kind of cage-startling expression of face; I can't get out, her face would say, and that was all.

At length I read my French-English note, heard Jane's statement, sighed deeply, threw my bandana over my face to shade it from the fire, and began to meditate in silence.

A neck-breaking embrace from Genevieve roused me. She cried, and promised to do better. She kept her promise, I was serene for three weeks.

After all, youth was the thing I had needed in my house. How pleasantly my old parlor looked when I came up to dinner! A tall, fair-haired girl, in a neat mourning dress, walking gracefully about, or sitting reading, and testifying pleasure when I entered, was not a disagreeable addition.

But the thorns had but sprouted as yet. One day Jane asked me if I knew Mrs. Cabbage?

I answered that I had not the pleasure of Mrs. Cabbage's acquaintance.

Well, she comes here very often, and Genevieve goes away with her, and she smells of whisky, and I don't like it.

I did not, either.

Genevieve, said I one morning, here is your allowance; you need some new dresses, and I put some bank-bills in her hand. Now, my dear, who and what is Mrs. Cabbage.

Take back thy gold, perfidious monster! shouted Genevieve, throwing the money on the hearth-rug, and standing, like Lady Macbeth, looking at her hand.

I picked up the money, and looked in her eyes to see if she was gone crazy; she laughed and became sane.

You must not expect to buy my confidence 'Guardy' (her affectionate for guardian), I never will tell you in the world!

I reasoned, expostulated, threatened, in vain; at length, finding her perfectly immoveable, I ventured to do what I had never done before, for fear of wounding her; mentioned her father.

My dear Genevieve, your father gave you to me, and asked me to be all to you that he would have been. Can I answer to my conscience and my promise, if I allow you, so young, so utterly ignorant of the world, to have an acquaintance whom I do not know, to take you where I do not know? My child, if you persist I must follow you; you can not escape my vigilance and love. Remember and respect your father's wishes.

The tears flowed down her face—I had touched the right chord.

Well, dear Guardy, she said with much hesitation, after a struggle of several minutes, I am studying for the stage, and Mrs. Cabbage is my theatrical instructor.

To describe all that followed would fill a quarto volume. She was as determined a spirit as old General Jackson. I got angry, I threatened to shut her up on bread and water.

Do! Guardy, I beg of you to do so! It would sound so splendidly on the bills! Miss Genevieve Macready, just escaped from the tyranny of a cruel guardian, and the petty insults of a female jailer, (that's Cribby), will make her first appearance to-night in "Love's Sacrifice!" How it would draw! Do it! Give me some play-books that I may study my part, and shut me up. I shall be pale! thin! interesting!

Now I appeal to parents and guardians, and to that large army of female martyrs—the boarding-school keepers—to all others who have been selected by Providence to take care of youth, in its various manifestations and developments, if this was not a pleasing situation for an elderly bachelor, who, as I said before, had remained unmarried that he might avoid disagreeable responsibility.

After long and anxious meditation I resolved to throw myself on the generosity of my ward. I saw if I thwarted her she would defy me, and I should lose all influence for her good. So I held a consultation with her, and we entered into a solemn pact. She was to give me her entire confidence, and I was to refrain from coercing her in her desire to study for the stage. She promised me to take Jane with her when she went to Mrs. Cabbage's, and take as many lessons at home as possible. Miss Jane Cribbs was perhaps the greatest sufferer of the party; she had a holy horror of theatricals, and to be called on at her time of life to associate with a Mrs. Cabbage!

But Jane had got to love this strange, wild thing whom Fate had thrown into our arms, and I added the last element needed to persuade her, by saying that the presence of so respectable a person as herself would be a most effectual protection to Genevieve.

I think I told the truth, for sharper than the sting of remorse would have been the look of Jane had any of the broad-clothed sex approached Genevieve.

I now attempted to change Genevieve's mind. I left around the room the lives of the various men and women who have confessed the theatrical profession to be full of hardship and disappointment. Genevieve read them all, and still went on ranting and raving at the top of her voice.

One day my young friend, Frank Carew, came into my office. He always brought a great quantity of fresh air with him, and diffused a general cheerfulness wherever he went. A bright idea struck me; I would invite Frank Carew to dinner.

A nice, fresh, handsome fellow was Frank. He looked rather gravely on my invitation, for he had once dined with me when Jane was partially crabb'd, and as he knew nothing of Genevieve, I saw he anticipated no very pleasant dinner; however, he was indebted to me for some kindness, and I knew he would come.

I pleased myself by imagining Frank's surprise when he entered my grave old parlor, and found it illuminated with a beautiful girl.

He came punctually. I saw his countenance brighten as Genevieve appeared, and I thought she did not look displeas'd at this addition to our dinner. She had been to see some pictures that morning, and talked prettily and well of the pleasure they gave her. As for the theatre, that subject, we had agreed, should remain a secret.

She had her poor father's felicity of expression, and indeed almost anything would have sounded well from such lovely lips.

When Frank and I were alone with our cigars, he inquired very much about her; and I never found him unwilling to come to dinner from this time.

Still the postures and eloquence went on, and Jane Cribbs walked overhead with iron step.

One day Genevieve brought me a letter directed to herself, and in her other hand a sheet of paper freshly written.

She began, rather confusedly, to tell me that this was a letter from one of her admirers. He has been in love with me quite a long time—since before papa died, but I never have seen him since. He is a literary gentleman, Mr. Storm. I have sometimes answered his letters, because Mrs. Cabbage says I must experience the passion of love before I can portray it on the stage, and he is the only lover I ever had. This is the first letter I have received from him, since I promised to tell you every thing, and he has taken a room in the next street, where I can see his light burning, and he can see mine. Isn't that romantic?

Genevieve, where did you first know Mr. Storm.

Oh! at Mrs. Cabbage's. She used to have suppers, and Mr. Storm used to go there, and he wrote plays, and was very poetical, and he thought I was born for an actress, and said he would write plays and I should act them.

Another charming piece of business was opening before me. However, I thought Genevieve seemed rather annoyed by her lover, so I attempted to decipher Mr. Storm's letter, distinguished as it was by the illegibility of genius.

Sweet flower of my life! dearest Genevieve! I have found you at last! Since you disappeared from my horizon, I have lived alone with my paper and ink. Sometimes I have looked at the fair sheet and seen in glowing characters, 'Consecrate to Genevieve' written on the page. Then I have written well. No feeble words could fall from my pen when these golden letters illuminated the paper; afterward would come depression and despair. She is in a happy home; she has forgotten him who knew her in poverty, in sorrow, in loneliness. When these words appeared in characters black as midnight, then my genius plumed her wings and fled. Then was I a clod of the earth.

When you were four years younger then now, I saw you standing in the sunlight. Your golden hair fell on your slender neck, the sun rested lovingly on its wavy masses. Scarcely a woman, yet more than a child; you reminded me of those angels whom the German artist has painted hovering over the infant Saviour. I knew you were my better angel—the being sent to cheer me and save me.

[CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]

A YOUNG man in Poughkeepsie made a call at the house of his affianced, and after he got there he found that the house was quarantined on account of small-pox, and he had to stay there for a fortnight.

A YOUNG flirt who keeps a collection of locks of hair of his lady friends, calls them his hair-breadth escapes.

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