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"Flatterers"

The Shadow of the Future.

CHAPTER III.
THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

And this is the other scene which, misty of detail, will haunt Sydney to the end of time.

A pretty hamlet at a little distance from Guyswick. A gray old church looming up across a rustic road, near by the fruit-trees of a cottage garden. A warm sunny afternoon, with a great humming of bees and scent of stocks and wall-flowers in the air. The constant sound of a busy hoe at work not far off, and the crooning of some minor-keyed ditty by an old figure dressed quaintly in dark-colored stuff, with snow-white cap and kerchief pinned in front, knitting diligently under the shade of a yellow laburnum.

This is "Taffy," or "Mrs. Taverner," affectionately abbreviated, the nurse whose last piece of official work was presiding over Sydney's very earliest days, and who now, with well-earned savings, takes the rest of threescore years and ten. Her home is with a daughter, once a servant at Sturats, whose husband married from his post of second gardener there to the dignity of a cottage and "Marketing" for Sillcote-Upton on his own account. He is clerk of the church close by; a thrifty, hard-working soul, plodding contentedly on from morn till night, putting his few pounds by year after year against a rainy day, or maybe for a legacy to his good "missus," or a fortune for the laeases who are now doing for themselves in honest service.

She is in the swing by Taffy's side now, as with arms upward clinging to

They are steady, sterling people all in their way, and the elder dame is a prodigious favorite with all her children, as she calls a goodly list, beginning with men long since out of their teens, ending with Sydney Alwyn. Her duties with the brood whose first cries she hushed have not finished with the nursery, as many of her grown-up babies testify, for hopes and fears, troubles and joys, loves and hates, find their way to Taffy's sympathetic confidence often before the household they belong to half suspect them, and rarely a week goes by without bringing a visitor out of her old working circle to Nurse's cottage.

There Sydney, to her unflinching delight, is sometimes allowed a sojourn.

When her mother takes Leonora to the sea, when any epidemic is reported at Guyswick, or if any far domestic lessons the establishment, for a time, the child is sent for a few days to Nurse. There her father comes round morning or evening to see her. There she revels in the freedom of her oldest frocks, and learns the letters and syllables, so difficult to attain in the school-room at home, quite easily off the tombstones in the churchyard under Taffy's spectacled instructions.

Naturally, they make much of the little lady at the cottage, for, over and above their genuine fondness for her, the visits of the rich man's child are pleasant little wind falls to these frugal folk. So they keep a tiny cup-board-like apartment, with a diamond-paned casement that tiger-lilies peep in at, and monthly roses are always blooming round, for her very own. They mostly find some infant chicks or downy rabbits for her playmates. They fix a swing for her in the big russet apple-tree, and pluck for her any flowers her fancy fixes on.

She is in the swing by Taffy's side now, as with arms upward clinging to

the ropes she sits slowly swaying backward and forward in the checkered light under the apple-boughs, and her old guardian, stopping the clicking of her bright pins to watch her, thinks this last of her foster-flock is the fairest of them all, and wonders what makes her chattering look so very grave.

Presently Sydney calls to her: "Taffy, when did I come here?" "On Tuesday, my pretty." "And what's to-day?" "Friday." "And papa hasn't been to see me!" "May be he's not back yet, missy." "No, per-haps not," says the child, slowly, "for," brightening, "he will be sure to come when he gets home." "Sure," repeats the old woman, confidently, and then adds, "Was your mamma gone out too, Miss Sydney? Havens didn't say."

"And I—don't know," answers Sydney, her wits dropping, as it always does when she speaks of her mother, who never gives the younger-born more place in her pursuits than she does in her heart. Then, still swinging softly, she thinks profoundly a minute or two, and the outcome of her meditation is:

"I wish, Taffy, I always lived with you, if papa came every day to see me."

Which says more than she intends, for Nurse looks sorry as she answers: "Nay, my pretty, Mr. Alwyn couldn't afford that nowadays!" "Not afford it! Do I cost so much to keep?"

Nurse is glad of something to laugh at. "Why, afford to spare you, Miss Sydney, I mean. Your cost ain't much! We wouldn't mind keeping you for nothing."

"Oh, then," says the child, "if I—"

but she breaks off abruptly, disturbed by the sound of an approaching step. The little gate at the end of the garden-path is unlatched, and striding between sweet-williams and Canterbury-bells, up comes a tall, big-framed lad, with reddish brown curly hair, and eyes over which he draws his darker brown as if to keep the glare of sunshine off.

Sydney ceases swinging to watch, a trifle jealously, as Taffy gets up and joyfully greets this new-comer with:

"Why, Master Bertie, back again from school! Oh, I sak pardon, my old head can't keep up with such a lot of new names; anyhow, back and not grown too proud to come and see me, I declare!"

"Back?" repeats the youth, as he gives her welcoming hand a hearty shake. "Yes, and likely to keep back. But proud?" flinging himself on the end of the bench under the laburnum. "It's a little too late in the day for me to set up in that line, I promise you. For, oh, Taffy, do you know we are in a muddle and no mistake!"

Then he leans forward till he brings his face, with the square-cut chin resting in his large, nervous hand, close to Nurse Taverner's shoulder, and plunges into the story of whatever escapade or veritable trouble he has just hinted at.

Sydney hears nothing of it all, for when, assured that he is a stranger to her, or nearly so, she has just a glimmering notion she has seen him somewhere, in the town perhaps, and that nurse and he want to talk together, she intuitively turns her back upon the pair, and gives her undivided attention to a couple of black-caps chasing each other in and out among the apple-leaves. But presently a startled "Good shakes alive!" from the old woman attracts her attention, and she looks round while Taffy says something else, of her apparently, for most certainly it is at her the boy's deep-set eyes flash the wrathful glance she is just in time to catch, as he exclaims passionately:

"An imp of evil! I hate her!" "Oh, Master Bertie, do hush!" The child's senses, on the alert now, here her old friend plead, and then she jumps down from her swing, runs off past Mr. Lewis hoeing French beans in his shirt-sleeves, and hides herself and a babyish disposition to cry in a grove of currant-bushes at the farther-most corner of the garden.

Somebody says he hates her, and she has never hurt that some one! Why does he hate her—her, when she does so love to be loved? He has called her a dreadful sort of name which he is positive she can't deserve. Will many people treat her like this as she grows older? A fright of the future overtakes her. A great quail of aggrieved injustice sets sobs rising and falling under her fading daisy chin, and her sensitive little soul, injured by now to cold neglect, frets sorely at the notion of active unmerited dislike.

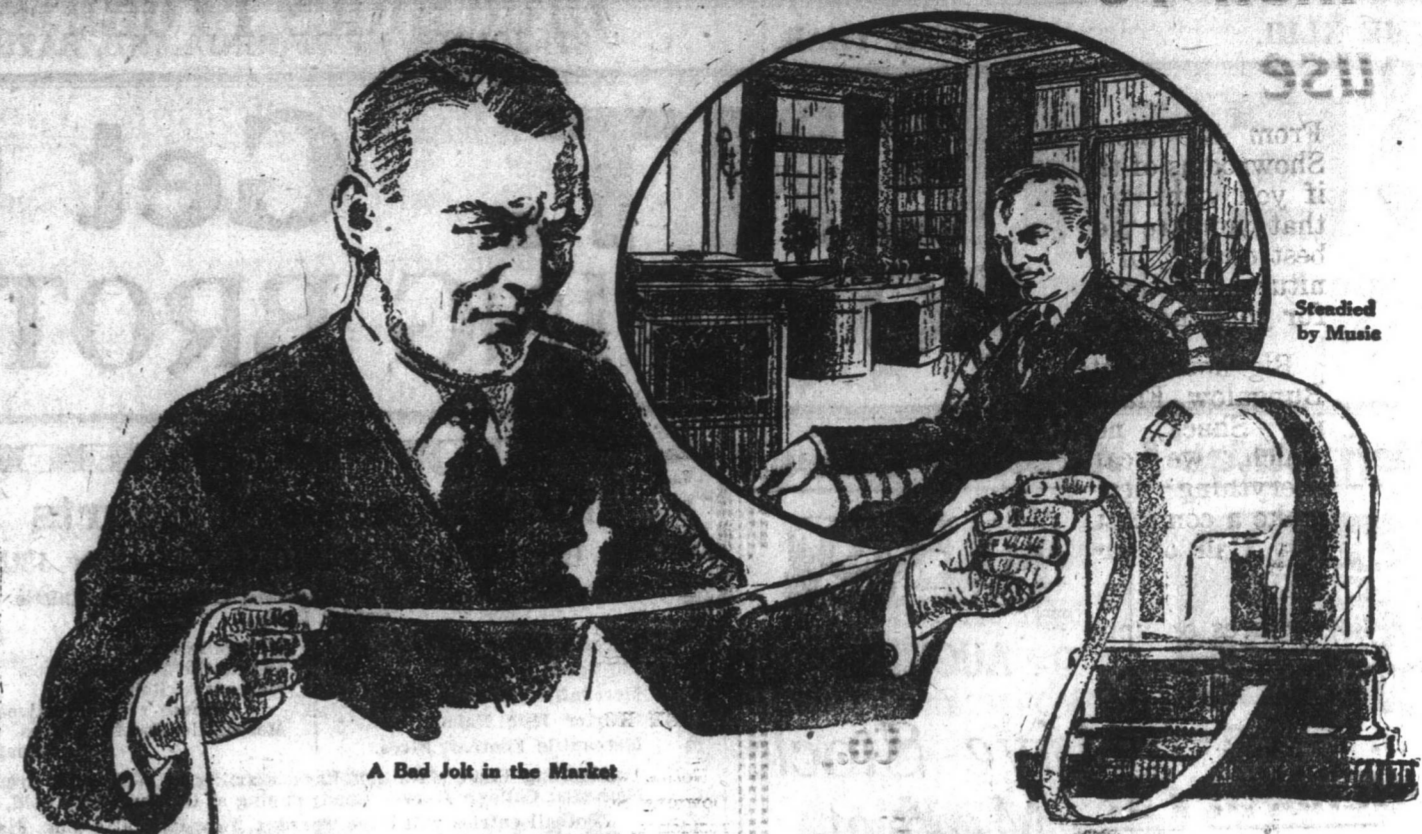
In the midst of her distress the intruding origin of it, his conference with Taffy at an end, stalks homeward-bound along the lane outside, and Sydney, no coward howsoever soft-hearted, dries up her tears, peeps at him over the hedge, and arrests his steps before he has passed the bounds of Mr. Lewis' tiny plots.

He is not by any means a grown-up man, she thinks, manhood being identical, in her mind, with gray hairs such as her father has, so she has to choose a form of address for him as she climbs over a separating stile; which point settled, she confronts him and demands, with an odd mixture of the imperious and the willful:

"Boy, why do you hate me? Stop-and tell me, please!"

(To be continued)

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sleep. And I, fatigued by honest toil, found peace and comfort in repose; I'd left my trademark on the soil, out where the pallid pumpkin grows. Oh, I had done the best, I could to show a line of sterling worth; I felt I had achieved some good to vindicate my stay on earth. And that's a feeling most sublime for any man to entertain, to know he has not wasted time, or let a day get by in vain. And so a slight calm was mine, when to my couch night saw me creep; there I indulged in fifty-nine varieties of balmey sleep.

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