

aged people, in a quiet way, to look on our union as certain. I suppose I gave him some right to do so, for I never mentioned Mrs. Dartmouth's name for months, or went near her."

"Wise, perhaps," interrupted Bream.

"Once I met her by accident, at a yeomanry ball, and I am sure that no stranger who had seen our meeting would have discovered that there was anything between us but the most commonplace acquaintance. I seemed numbed, somehow, as I felt once when I was pitched on my head out hunting, and got up and rode home. My father thought I was cured; I should have thought so, too, if I could have cared for anything, or felt any interest in life. Something like a tacit engagement was entered into with the Daynes. I was to go abroad and travel a little, and when I came back the engagement was to be made public, and we were to be married."

Sir George paused, with a gloomy frown, then proceeded:

"She—the girl—was a good, feeble, insignificant little creature, who would have married a labourer off her father's fields if she had been ordered to do it. It was arranged that I should go away for a year. I started, and got as far as Paris, and then—God knows what idea I had in my poor head—I knew it was hopeless, and whether I was at home or at the North Pole it would make no difference; but I came back, I could not bear to be away from her. My father saw that it was no further use to struggle with me, and gave in about Miss Dayne. He died a year later, and I succeeded to the title and the estates, and some months later I made a second proposal to Mrs. Dartmouth.

"And then?"

"I learnt then, what I had never known before, that she loved me. She told me so. I begged her to tell me what was the obstacle that kept us apart, but she would not. She extracted a promise from me that I would go away from England for a short time, and that, come what might, she would marry no other man. I went, and travelled all over the continent, and through America and Australia. I was away nearly two years, till I could stay away no longer. The absence did me a little good. I shall never cease to love her, but I have learned patience. I can meet her now as a friend, without making her unhappy by asking her for what she cannot give me. I am not very unhappy, except at moments, and I manage to keep my unhappiness to myself, as a general thing. I potter about the estate, and attend Quarter Sessions, and all the rest of it, and I daresay some day I shall go into the House, and be a tolerable success as a country gentleman.

"Have you no idea of her reason for refusing to marry you?"

"She gave me none. I can only guess. The likeliest guess I can make is that her husband is still alive. A nice brute he must have been to quarrel with an angel like that. By God, Bream, when you know her as I do—she's an angel. She's been the sunlight of this place since she's been here. You'll hear what the poor say about her. They worship her, and no wonder. She's the best friend they ever had."

"Do you see her often?"

"No oftener than I can help," he replied, simply. "I hadn't been there for six weeks when I called to-day."

"You could hardly have liked my monopolizing her as I did," said Bream.

"I did not mind it," answered Sir George. "I am glad to be near her, but it is as well, perhaps, that I should not be alone with her. I am not certain if I could trust myself to speak of—of things better left unspoken of."

The anodyne which soothes the heart of one who has spoken of a secret trouble to a sympathetic listener had come to him, and he was more cheerful, more like his strong and hopeful self, whom Bream had known years ago, when they had been light, talking of many things, old memories and future plans. Sir George was cheerful at breakfast, and saw his friend mount and start back to

the village with jovial invitations to him to come again soon and stay a longer time.

As Bream drew near Mrs. Dartmouth's house, he saw approaching him the figure of a tall and strongly built man, clad in what seemed a peculiar compromise between the ordinary dress of a peasant and that of a sailor. He had on a pair of dilapidated longshore boots reaching to mid-thigh, and splashed with mud of various hues, as were the corduroy trousers which surmounted them, a blue flannel shirt with a carelessly knotted flaming red tie, a ragged tweed jacket, and a broad felt sombrero. He seemed to be under the influence of liquor, for he was reeling and tacking from side to side of the road, and every now and then pausing to hold on to a tree branch. Thinking that it was an early hour for the most faithful subject of *La Dive Bouteille* to be so nearly prostrate at her shrine, and wondering if one so strangely garbed was merely a passing tramp or one of his parishioners, Bream turned in at Mrs. Dartmouth's gate.

The lady was on the lawn in front of the house, equipped with gardening gauntlets and a pair of shears, and engaged in trimming a rosebush, with Dora hovering about her. She gave him a pleasant greeting, and called to a gardener at work at a little distance, to take the mare round to the stable. They were chatting together as she continued her work among the flowers, when a sudden cry of alarm from Dora made them both turn. There, in the gateway, stood the figure which Bream had seen a few minutes before in the road. In the very moment in which Bream again caught sight of him, he set both hands to his head, and with a long groan fell forward on the path, sending the gravel flying in a little shower about his prostrate figure.

Bream ran to him. He was lying face downwards, in an attitude of complete unconsciousness and self-abandonment.

Turning him over as he raised his head, the curate saw that he had altogether misread the man's condition. He was not drunk, but clearly very ill. His face was blanched to the hue of chalk, his lips a dull violet, the half-opened lids showed the glaring and discoloured whites of his eyes. The beating of his heart was scarcely sensible to the touch of Bream's hand, and only his slow and stertorous breath betrayed that life was in him.

"The man is seriously ill," he answered to Mrs. Dartmouth's rapid questions. "He has fainted from hunger."

"Poor wretch," said Mrs. Dartmouth, pityingly. "Can you not carry him into the hall? Tom will help you."

The gardener had returned, and lent a pair of strong and willing hands. The wayfarer was carried into the house, and set upon a chair, where he sat, lax as an unstrung marionette, supported by Bream's arm.

"A bad business, I fear," said the latter. "Could you let me have a little brandy, please?"

A ring at the bell produced Barbara, who went in search of the spirit, and stood by while Bream gently insinuated a teaspoonful into the man's throat. He sighed, and a faint tinge of colour flickered into his ashen cheeks.

"That's better," said Bream. "Come, my lad, try another dose."

The second teaspoonful of liquor worked a marked change for the better in the man's aspect and condition. The colour in his face deepened, his eyes opened, and after letting them wander for a moment he fixed them on Mrs. Dartmouth. His lips stirred with a broken murmur, and he made a wandering movement with his arm, meant, perhaps for a phrase of thanks and a salute, though no word was distinguishable, and his arm fell heavily by his side again.

"Is there any workhouse or asylum that would take the poor fellow in?" asked Bream.

"None nearer than Stortford," answered Mrs. Dartmouth, "and that is twelve miles away. Is he very ill?"

"Too ill to stand such a journey," said Bream. "He is almost exhausted. What is to be done?"

"We must give him shelter here, I suppose. It would be inhuman to turn him out on the road again."

"Eh, missus," said Barbara, "but he is such a rough lookin' chap."

"It may be a long business," said Bream. "He has evidently only partially recovered from a severe illness, possibly an infectious disorder."

"There is a loft over the stable," said Mrs. Dartmouth, "where the groom used to live before his cottage was finished. He would be quite safe there."

"Lord save us, missus," again interposed Barbara, "we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Not by this fellow," said Bream, "for a time at any rate. He hasn't the strength to murder a fly. Whatever is to be done, should be done quickly."

"We cannot turn him out," said Mrs. Dartmouth again, "that would be too shameful. Will you help Tom to carry him to the loft, Mr. Bream, and please tell me what food he should have."

"Soup—not too strong. A spoonful every half hour. Now, Tom, my man, take his legs. So! You had better come with us, Miss Barbara, to see that the room is in order."

Barbara followed, a mute protest expressed in her face, and Bream and the gardener bore their patient to the loft. It was not until they got him there that Bream noticed a ragged and dirty piece of paper clenched in the man's hand. It seemed as if, even in his mental prostration and physical exhaustion, he blindly attached some value to it, for he feebly resented the curate's effort to take it from his fingers.

On it was written, in thin rusty ink, in straggling formless characters, these words:

"Barbara Leigh,
Crouchford Court, Crouchford, Essex."

He read the words aloud, and was electrified by a sudden scream from the woman at his side.

"Lord sakes, it's Jake!"

"Jake!" said Bream. "You know him?"

"Know him! He's my own very brother-in-law—Jake Owen, as married my sister ten years' ago and took her to Ameriky!"

(To be continued.)

Literary Notes.

The *Melbourne Review*, one of the leading periodicals of Australia, is to be re-established as a shilling monthly.

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The late Mr. Kinglake was a most voracious reader, his favourite subject being fiction. He was especially fond of Mrs. Oliphant's novels.

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Mr. T. Wemyss Reid's "Life, Letters and Friendships of Lord Houghton," has met with such success that two editions have already been exhausted, and a third was issued last week.

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Mr. Latey, to whom we referred recently as retiring from the editorship of the *Illustrated London News*, after 48 years' service, did not live long to enjoy his well-earned leisure, he dying of pleurisy on 6th inst.

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The sale of the Thackeray manuscripts and sketches in London recently brought some extraordinary prices. A letter to an old schoolfellow was sold for £38; a few lines of Latin verse £15, and an old lexicon that the great novelist had used at school and scibbled over with sketches brought £11.

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Mr. Charles Samuel Keene, whose sketches have adorned *Punch* for many years, extending back to 1849, died on 31st December, aged 67. His special forte lay in illustrations of the humbler classes, street incidents, etc., which he treated with marvellous skill. His signature, ("C. K.") will be much missed by readers of the great English comic journal.