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TOM LINTON, MERCHANT.

HOW HE LOVED, TRADED, AND MARRIED,

BY FRED BENOUGH.

CHAPTER I.

ELIJAH LINTON, Esq., Justice of the Peace in and for the County of Blank, resided at St. Alloway, in said County. I knew Squire Linton from my infancy. A quiet, steady-going, uncommunicative old gentleman, whom report said, had accumulated his tens of thousands, and had them stowed away under lock and bar, in great iron chests, beneath his office. None knew the report to be true, but many believed it, although the Squire, when questioned concerning it by some townsman bolder than his fellows, denied the accusation in his quiet way, much as if he were averse to speaking of the matter at all. Even his son Tom knew nothing of it, and strove to contradict the rumours in circulation about his respected parent, although he acknowledged to me privately that the report might be true for aught he knew to the contrary. Tom had clerked it in his father's store, from his sixteenth birthday, handled a vast amount of cash, which went to his father, who did something with it—what, Tom never knew. There was a vault under the office, which Tom's eyes—as long as he had been in his father's service—had never penetrated. That there were great iron bars across the vault's door, secured in their places by huge padlocks, he acknowledged, for he had seen them once, when in a spirit of adventure he had entered the back cellar—a place he had been prohibited entering under heavy penalties. Tom was motherless, with one sister much older than himself, who was married, and had a family of her own. Thus left alone, he used to drop in upon us—my better half and self—of an evening, play a rubber at whist and make us his confidants generally. A tall, burly, awkward fellow was Tom, with a plain face, an uncouth figure, a heavy stock of reddish brown hair, and a flowing red beard. But a heart he had like a child's. Innocent of wronging a fellow-creature, by word or deed; keenly alive to human suffering in every form; as sensitive as heart well could be. Did he accidentally wrong any one, he was down in the depths of humility at once. The most abject apologies, the most denunciatory language towards himself, immediately followed. Was he wronged, accidentally or otherwise, he was loud and blatant over it, telling his wrongs to friend and foe alike—not with exaggeration, but with a force that enlisted your sympathies in his behalf at once.

Hence it was that at the age of twenty-three—having fallen in love with Edith Burton, the *belle* of the town,—having been her acknowledged admirer and general *chaperon* on all occasions, his attentions encouraged and courted by Edith—he at length found himself an humble suppliant for her hand, and left her with her angry words of refusal, mingled with disdain, ringing in his ears;—hence it was, I say, that the very next evening found him up at our house, looking pale and haggard, although open-mouthed and insolent in word and gesture, quite frightening Mrs. Dora with his loud threats of hanging himself, or enlisting as a private, to fight against Prince Satzuma of Japan, or the natives of New Zealand, who were in rebellion against the government of our beloved Queen.

"She is rich, beautiful, and proud, and I love her," he thundered; but, by Jove! she is poor, low, and mean of heart, and I hate her for it; yet, Fred, there is not such another in the world; and I—well, I'm a fool, my dear fellow, and deserve your pity, for I know that you *do* pity me, though you laugh and think I'll be myself again in a few weeks, without hope, without friends—except yourself and your angel wife; God bless you both! What am I but a miserable wretch, scarce worthy the position in life I fill—a clerk in a country store!"

And he stalked out of the house, leaving Mrs. Dora in a delightful state of nervous excitement, that prevented her obtaining a wink of sleep all the night through. There was no rest for him the next morning till he had been down at Mrs.

Whitney's, and unburdened his mind, in his boisterous way, to Charley Sparks and the other boarders, quite oblivious of the fact that he was thought a fool, and furnished abundant food for merriment for a dozen thoughtless fellows there for a month after.

Every day, for a fortnight after, I met Tom on the street, expanding his lungs and vehemently gesticulating his limbs to some admiring listener, and his theme was always the same, until every chick and child in St. Alloway knew of his wrong from his own word of mouth. At length—having given Mrs. Dora's nerves a chance of assuming their usual composure—he came into our place again one evening; but it was so easy to beat him at whist now, that he soon gave up the game in disgust, and fell to talking of his great wrong, as though it were a new one committed against him but yesterday.

"I can't stay here," he said, "meeting *her* every day, when I know how she glories in the victory she has won, and despises the heart she has trifled with and thrown away—at the same time laughing at those who have a word of pity for me. I can't stand it, Fred; I won't stand it, Mrs. Fred! I shall leave town at once. What do you think I did! I went to my respected father this morning, told him the whole story, asked leave of absence and a little money—enough to take me out of *her* sight at least. His reply was that he had no money to throw away, but if I was determined upon going, and if I would search out a place in which to commence business on my own account, I might draw on him for a thousand, but if it was my intention to tramp about the country without any definite object in view, and spend my slender means foolishly, fifty dollars would be the extent of his liberality towards me. Now, what shall I do? Shall it be the thousand and life in a country store, or fifty and 'the bubble reputation at the cannon's month'?"

"Take the thousand, by all means, Mr. Tom," advised that excellent woman, Mrs. B., and of course I echoed, "take the thousand."

"Well, I can't say that your advised course is my choice," he replied, "though prudence tells me it is the right one; I'll do it. I'll advertise for a country store, take the old gentleman's thousand, purchase a general stock, and go to work,—bah! you can't think how little my heart will be in it though!"

Mrs. Dora reads the "Globe"—in fact the "Englishwoman," "London Society," "Cornhill," "Saturday Reader," and the "Globe," contains about all the matter that she does read, (inference, *entre nous*, that she is not much more perfect than her unworthy consort.) Well, having taken an afternoon *siesta* with that immaculate daily before her, she had seen an advertisement over the signature of somebody who wished to rent a country shop, storehouse and "fixings," somewhere, for a certain sum *per annum*,—she must needs jump up and go off on a search for the paper, while visions of Tom's ultimate greatness—rich, richer, richest; Reeve, Mayor, Warden, M.P.P., filled her giddy head. (Tom took the occasion of her absence to inform me, confidentially, that I had the best, dearest and most estimable, &c. &c., which I didn't hear; adding that he had fondly hoped that E. B. would have been the same to him, but the dream was over, although he never, never, never, &c. &c., which I *did* hear). Returning, she exhibited to our astonished gaze, a piece of the aforesaid immaculate, about the size of a pen-wiper. Dixie, her favourite spaniel, having, in a festive moment, torn up the remainder, in lieu of being able to get anything better in the shape of sheets or table-spreads to amuse himself with.

The address of the said party wanting to rent, was on the pen-wiper, however, and that was all sufficient.

"Address (prepaid) David Welton,
Weltonville, P.O., Canada West."

"David Welton, of Weltonville, will certainly hear from me within a day or two," said Tom; "he is evidently a man of position and influence, as the village seems to be named after him or his family. I'll try Weltonville, and I thank you, Mrs. Fred, thank you with all my heart, for your kindness to a—"