

How Did It End.

'Tis a packet of letters, time-faded and worn,
Which have lain in a dusty corner neglected;
Undated, for lovers laugh time to scorn,
But signs of their age are soon detected
For their spelling is bad, and their grammar is weak,
And quaint are the phrases in which they speak;
They were written before you or I was born
And we see an old love through their words reflected.

There's a mellow savour about each line,
Like the odour of rose-leaves dried and time-rusted;
Like the rich bouquet of some choice old wine,
Which ripens and glows all mould-en-crust-ed.

The time of patches and powdered tresses
Of brodered coats and brocaded dresses,
Speak to us of these letters of thine,
And tell how of old they loved and trusted.

"Sweetheart," he calls her—the fine old word
Rings tender and true in its Savon simplicity,
He tells the old tale; how his heart is stirred,
Yet wavers and faints at his own felicity
How he feared to speak, and was nearly undone,
How he had spoke at last, and the fear was gone;
And now he is tender, and now absurd,
As lovers will be who write not for publicity.

And how did it end? There is nothing to show,
The beginning only is here presented.
Did the love grow cold, and the lovers go
On their separate ways? Or was bliss prevented,
As it sometimes is, by a cruel father?
Or, one proving false, did their love end rather
In wailing and passionate weeping? Ah, no!
—Let us hope that they married and never repented.

SELECT STORY.

Bought With a Price.

[CONTINUED.]

Chapter XVII.

HERE had been one listener to this colloquy between the master and his accomplice. When the two passed away, he gave an exultant laugh.

"La belle!" Estelle must have had enough of these two fiends, I suspect, he murmured; I shall find her ready enough to come to me for succour. I did well to leave her so long in their power. What a demand that woman is! How she will storm and rave, even if she succeeds in removing Estelle, and marries her old lover, when she finds him bankrupt—for such he will be before I loosen my hold of him. I would have carried off my beautiful Estelle long ago, but for the caution I have had to observe in ruining her husband. How exhaustless must be his wealth, to stand the losses he has already had! I will leave him penniless before I have done with him, to revenge the tortures he has inflicted on his wife. True, it answers my purpose, and I have done my best to develop his brutal nature, but the man is none the less a fiend for all that. To think of such a peerless being as 'la belle' Estelle being in the power of him and his light-o'-love! It is time I interfered, or murder will ensue. That woman thirsts for her victim's blood!

The squire had changed his treatment of his wife since the coming of guests to the Manor House, is so far that she was not strictly confined to her own suite of rooms.

He had now and then desired her presence at the head of the table.

Estelle could not but feel this as a relief. For the time being she was free from the most cruel of her two jailors.

The filthy rags which Betsy Cornish delighted to force upon her victim were obliged to give place to more decent clothing. To one reared to all the refinements of life, as Estelle had been, this alone went far to mitigate her sufferings.

Then, though the guests were far from agreeable to her—being no other than the Honourable Herbert and his late captain and parasite, Captain Albany—yet they were men of her own world, and to one who had been shut up with such a one as the drunken, brutal Betsy Cornish, their presence was wonderfully refreshing.

The squire did not appear at all afraid of his friend, the Hon. Herbert, being thrown into the society of his still beautiful wife. He even invited him to follow into the drawing-room whilst he and Captain Albany indulged in another cigar.

On the contrary, no sooner had his friend taken his advice, that he turned to the hanger-on of his noble guest with the remark—

You have some influence, and are in the confidence of the Honourable Herbert, and have no doubt seen that he admires my wife. It is no secret to you I dare say, that her beauty has become loathsome to me, and that I hate her. I

only wish to add that, can any one persuade the Honourable Herbert to carry her off, that party shall receive a cheque on my banker for £2,000.

The greedy eyes of the parasite dilated with joy.

He would take care that this money should be his.

He must use his influence to overcome the scruples of his friend on the score of an abduction, in the event of Estelle still refusing his protection.

In the meantime, the Hon. Herbert was pleading his love with the ill-used wife of the millionaire with all the energy in his power.

You surely cannot know to what danger you expose yourself by remaining with your villainous husband and his mistress, he added, when Estelle had refused to listen to his plan of flight with him.

I know that, probably, they will murder me. Not by open violence—they are too wary for that, but by the most refined cruelty they can devise.

And yet you persist in remaining? Nay, I would willingly escape.

Then why not do as I beg and implore you? See, on my knees I entreat you to listen to me. I will take you where no one will know us, I will devote my life to your happiness; I am rich, and can surround you with all the splendour which is so dear to you. I have already told you how ardently I love you—passionately and devotedly—at times with a frenzy I cannot control.

While giving utterance to these sentiments, the Hon. Herbert's voice swelled into impassioned excitement, his countenance grew flushed, and his eyes seemed to flash forth fire.

It was impossible for Estelle to doubt how much in earnest he was.

She took a flower from a vase, and gazed upon it intently to hide her agitated feelings, while she paused to think over his proposal.

For a moment she thought, would it not be well to escape from her present wretchedness by such means?

Dare I hope? he whispered, mistaking her hesitation for suspicion of him. Tell me, dearest Estelle, that you do not abhor me, and I shall be happy.

Should she barter her fair fame as she had once before bartered love and liberty?

Her tempter saw that she wavered, and renewed his supplications.

Estelle, my beautiful Estelle, he cried, do not doom yourself to the continuance of your present wretchedness. You know not how long you may have to endure. Your persecutors fear to kill you outright and death is ever chary of visiting those whose life is a burden. Besides, you are two young and beautiful to die. Believe me that many years of happiness are stored for you, if you will but permit me to watch over you. When I think of you—when your image rises up to my mind—and it is almost ever there—I grow excited, bewildered, maddened! Oh! as I behold you now, pale and trembling as you are—yet beautiful—oh! so beautiful!—and with something about you which I cannot find words to express, but what in infinitely more ravishing than even your loveliness, I feel that I could sell my soul to Satan, in order to make you mine. Estelle, you cannot refuse me. Say you will fly from your vile husband, and that I shall be your preserver!

Estelle was shuddering to the very confines of her being.

The temptation to accept this means of escape had passed as she listened to the impassioned pleadings of her tempter.

She had recalled her cousin Nevill's outpouring of love for her.

How pure—how unselfish and self-sacrificing had that been!

Having once tasted of love from a pure fountain, Estelle could discern the spuriousness of this love—the licentiousness of its character.

It was pollution to the nobler flame to call it "love."

No, she would withstand this test, and refuse liberty at such a price.

There arose before her the thoughts of Nevill—how he had trusted in her, and warned her against this very man.

True, he had forgotten her ere this, and had married one more worthy of his love.

But she would be true to herself for his sake.

She would not be guilty of this crime, and again tarnish the honour of her family.

Had not the first sin brought enough wretchedness and misery upon her! Could she expect happiness if she again sinned to obtain it?

Then, too, how would her position be bettered?

She had no love for this man.

She would make herself vile—a thing for the finger of scorn to point at, for what? Merely to save herself from the brutality of the man to whom she had voluntarily sold herself.

Had it been Nevill who pleaded to her, Estelle knew well she should have yielded only too gladly.

But that love of his she had lost—hopelessly.

Oh, most adored—oh, most regretted Love!

Oh, joys that never must again be mine! And thou, lost Hope, farewell! vainly I rove,

For never shall I reach that land divine,
Nor ever shall thy beams celestial shine
Again upon my lone unheeded way;
Oh, let me here, with life, my woes resign,
Or in this gloomy den for ever stay,
And shun the scornful world, nor see de-
tected day.

This was the inward wail of the woman, whose mercenary marriage had proved such a failure.

By bartering herself for gold alone, she had polluted the sanctity of her marriage vow, and had exposed herself to the present outrageous test to her honour.

But Estelle even now did not know the utter villainess of the man who so professed to love her.

She had suddenly formed the wild idea of appealing to his pity for her, to make her position known to her cousin, Sir Neville Campbell.

Her tempter laughed gleefully to himself.

Nothing could be better—he would pretend to be her friend only—would gain his ends by winning her confidence in him.

He would profess to make Sir Neville aware of her husband's brutality to her, and work with him in obtaining her release from him; meanwhile he would carry out his scheme with regard to the squire.

So when Estelle, with clasped hands and tears streaming from her eyes, implored him to talk no more of love to her, but if he had any regard for her, to give her his help.

Hear me, she cried, solemnly swear that nothing shall induce me to give up the only treasure that remains to me—my honour. But if you pity my sad fate and have any regard for me, be my deliverer by going to Sir Neville Campbell and telling him what you know. Do, sir—do, I beseech you, hear my prayer. Betink you how helpless I am. Depend upon it, if you grant my prayer, the day will come yes it must come—when you will rejoice at having shown me mercy. I do not love you—I cannot love you, not for worlds would I do the deed you ask me. What! go forth into the world and be compelled to blush when looking on the face of any human being! No, if you refuse me your help in the way I ask, I would sooner remain as I am—the victim of my husband's brutality.

My beautiful Estelle, why can you not love me? My daily delight should be to minister to your happiness. Consent but to fly with me, and to-morrow I will bear you away to whatever part of the globe you may prefer.

Do not tempt me. I will never consent, Estelle cried, in frenzied excitement. Have I appealed to you in vain? Am I to believe you are inaccessible to every sentiment of humanity, generosity, and goodness?

Estelle, you have conquered. I will be content to work for your liberty. No longer will I trouble you with my unfortunate, though undying, love for you. Most noble and chaste of women, I am henceforth your slave! Command me at your pleasure.

How shall I thank your for your generosity? exclaimed the poor victim of his treachery. Never will I cease to pray for your happiness, and, should brighter days be in store for me, you I shall ever look upon as my benefactor and true friend.

Say no more, Estelle; only tell me what way I can be of service to you.

Will you, then, give this letter to my cousin? You little know how difficult it has been for me to obtain materials to write it! Once before I had accomplished the task, but my jailor discovered it before I could find a messenger for it. How different will be the fate of this letter! Little did I think of the noble friend who would be raised up to help me in my dire need!

I will do your bidding, Estelle—forgive me for so addressing you. Your marriage name is so odious to me, as connected with the villain who bestowed it upon you, that it is hateful in my ears. But rest content; this letter shall reach your cousin's hands by a trusty messenger. I would go myself, but it will be necessary to practise the greatest circumspection. Your husband must not know that I am on your side. I shall still feign to be his friend for your dear sake. How little will he understand how abhorrent he is to me!

So Estelle felt her heart lighted.

She had found a friend in one whom she had first feared to be another persecutor.

She had withstood the test which he had made on her honour only to find him the noblest and most generous of men.

How had Neville been deceived in him!

Chapter XVIII.

ASHTON TOO HOT FOR THE SQUIRE.

It was a long time before Ashton began to suspect any wrongdoing at the Manor House.

It was sometimes remarked, at a social tea gathering—a species of entertainment much in vogue at Ashton—that madame, as the squire's wife had ever been named among them, appeared to hopelessly indulging in grief for her lost child.

Or someone would remark,—

It was to be trusted she would not go too far, and weary out her husband's patience—so devoted as he had shown himself!

Then they would talk of the gay entertainment given at the Manor House just before, and after the squire's marriage, till the younger members of the party would wish most earnestly that those days would come again.

So at first, public opinion in Ashton was all in favour of the squire, and against Estelle.

She was considered, as time went on and she remained in seclusion, to be selfishly indulging her sorrow at the expense of others.

As has been shown, Ashton had at first been all sympathy with the bereaved mother; but Estelle had been sunk into a perfect apathy of grief, and had denied herself to all comers.

The squire on the contrary, had shown himself, but had shocked Ashton by his outrageous violence, and the blasphemous language in which he had arraigned Providence for taking his child from him.

But still the squire, and not Estelle, had most of their sympathy.

When it was found that the squire had filled his house with profligate guests, Estelle was the one mostly blamed.

The Ashtonians exclaimed—

Just as I predicted! Madame has neglected her duty to her husband in her selfish sorrow. No wonder, she has driven him to seek consolation elsewhere.

Ashton was for a time quite absorbed with the gossip which reached them, through the servants of the riotous way of living at the Manor House.

Then, so scandalous were those rumours, that Ashton was horrified.

Never had there been such doings anywhere.

The squire and his guests were supposed to be ever gambling, or doing their best to ruin the character of any young girl who fell in their way.

And madame permits these liberties to remain under the same roof as herself cried Ashton, with looks of horror. She was never very particular: remember how determined she was to grasp the squire's wealth. In what a shameless manner she thrust herself upon his notice, from his first coming among us. It was the most mercenary marriage that was ever solemnized.

Here then, was another evil of Estelle's having sold herself.

Having once forfeited her honour, people were but too ready to heap approbrium upon her.

No one stopped to consider how far Estelle had the power of controlling husband's choice of guests.

Then had followed the news that all the servants, with the exception of the squire's valet, had given notice to leave.

It was not creditable to be known as connected with such a household.

The new servants were of a wholly different class from those who had preceded them.

They were found, too, to be particularly reticent as to the doings at the Manor House.

Very little could now be learnt.

The guests were all gone with the exception of two, who occasionally came and the squire was often known to be absent for weeks together.

Surely madame will come out of her seclusion now, cried Ashton.

But no, she still confined herself to her own house and grounds.

But what exasperated Ashton against her, was the precaution she took against anyone intruding on her.

To think of her keeping the great gates locked at the entrance of the grounds. Does she suppose we intend to force ourselves upon her?

The tradesmen told how even they were refused admission further than the lodge.

The lodge-keeper had been changed for a crabbed old man and his wife, who merely received the goods brought, and gave orders, without wasting a single word.

If any suspicion had been inclined to rest on the squire, it was utterly removed when the same precautions were used during his absence.

It never entered their heads that Estelle was a prisoner—forcibly constrained to seclude herself—watched over by a cruel, relentless jailor.

So weeks and months went by, and Estelle was cruelly judged by Ashton.

They remembered how she had scorned their advances when she had first come to the vicarage.

This behaviour of hers was only part and parcel of the same.

Well, they said let her remain. They had done their best to comfort her with their sympathy, and she had refused their comfort.

But gradually, no one knew how, whispers stole through Ashton that there was foul play at work at the Manor House.

The vicar heard it, and determined to try and see his afflicted parishioner.

He had called at the time of her bereavement but Estelle had refused to see any one.

Since then he had made many attempts, but had always seen the squire alone who declared his wife had become quite a monomaniac on the subject of seeing no one but her husband and her especial attendant.

He had appeared each time so truly grieved at his wife's sorrow having taken such an effect on her, that the vicar had formed the highest estimation of his tenderness of heart.

It was therefore, more with the idea of proving the reports to be slanders, than otherwise, which had determined the vicar to see Estelle if possible.

The squire was away he knew, but that should not prevent his trying.

The vicar was puzzled when he found he was not permitted to approach the house.

The taciturn lodge-keeper refused him admission, stating that no one entered during his master's absence.

Ashton declared this was not to be borne.

Public opinion now veered round, and Estelle was looked upon as a martyr to her husband's tyranny.

The wildest rumours were afloat.

Some went so far as to say they believed Estelle was murdered, and had been secretly buried in the grounds!

Others declared that she was alive, but that at night her screams could be heard ringing out on the night air.

The most general opinion was, that she was a maniac, and that her husband was keeping her confined to the Manor House, so that the affliction that had come upon her should not be known.

No sooner had the squire returned, than the vicar determined to see him, and tell him of these rumours.

He happened to meet the squire the day after the honourable Herbert's compact with Estelle.

The vicar told him, as gently as possible, that the time had come when he must make known the cause of his wife's seclusion. If she was insane, as he feared, it would be wiser to put her under medical care.

Very delicately he put it to him, for from his heart he pitied him, believing, as he did, the torture it would be to this devoted husband to have his wife's calamity made public.

What, then, was his surprise to hear himself called a meddling old fool!—a prying, gossiping humbug!—and desired to look after his own affairs, with the threat that, if he again attempted to force himself beyond the gates of the Manor House, the servants should have notice to duck him in the horse-pond?

The Rev. Francis Marriot let it be known in Ashton that the squire had "grievously insulted him," and henceforth all the small boys looked upon themselves as the champions of his honour.

Next time the squire appeared in public a dead cat was shod at him from behind a hedge.

No sooner had he turned to look for the offender than he was met by a perfect shower of rotten eggs.

His assailants seemed to have collected quite a variety of missiles, for besides these came dead rats, rotten turnips, and many other things.

He seemed to be suddenly surrounded by a yelling mob, who shouted to him—

Who killed his wife, and hid her body under the hearthstone?

Who starved her in a garret, and then flung her body into the lake!

Who keeps the gates locked lest her ghost should be seen walking in the grounds?

Why they inferred that the ghost should confine itself to the grounds is not known.

Amongst the lower classes—the boys especially—it was settled that madame had in some way disappeared by murder.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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