

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

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CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

Haldane remained upon the saloon steps, where he had been left, blinking stupidly at a distant street lamp. He had a vague impression that something was wrong—that a misfortune of some kind had befallen him—but all was confused and blurred. He would soon have gone to sleep again, had not the door opened, and a man emerged, who exclaimed,

"Faix, an' who have we here, noddin' to himself as if he knew more'n other folks? Are ye waitin' for some un to ax ye within for a comfortin' dhrap?"

"Take me 'ome," mumbled Haldane.

"Where's yer home?"

"Mrs. Haldane's," answered the youth, thinking himself in his native town.

"By me sowl, if it isn't Boss Arnot's new clerk. Sure's my name is Pat McCabe, 'tis Mither Haldane. I say, are ye sick?"

"Take me 'ome."

"Faix, I see," winking at two or three of his cronies who had gathered at the open door. "It's a disease I'm taken wid myself at odd spells, though I takes moighty good care to kape out o' the way of ould man Arnot when I'm so afflicted. He has a quare way o' thinkin' that ivery man about him can go as rigaler as if made in a mashshine shop, bad luck till 'im."

Perhaps all in Mr. Arnot's employ would have echoed this sentiment, could the ill-luck have blighted him without reaching them. In working his employes as he did his machinery, Mr. Arnot forgot that the latter was often oiled, but that he entirely neglected to lubricate the wills of the former with occasional expressions of kindness and interest in their welfare. Thus it came to pass that, even down to poor Pat McCabe, man-of-all-work around the office building, all felt that their employer was a hard, driving task-master, who ever looked beyond them and their interests to what they accomplished for him. The spirit of the master infused itself among the men, and the tendency of each one to look out for himself without regard to others was increased. If Pat had served a kinder and more considerate man, he might have been inclined to show greater consideration for the intoxicated youth; but Pat's favourite phrase, "Divil take the hindmost," was but a fair expression of the spirit which animated his master, and the majority in his employ. When therefore Haldane, in his thick imperfect utterance, again said, "Take me 'ome," Pat concluded that it would be the best and safest course for himself. Helping the young man to his feet he said,

"Can ye walk? Mighty onstiddy on yer pins; but I'm athinkin' I can get ye to the g house afore mornin'. Should I lave ye on the street, and ould man Arnot find it out, I'd be in the street meself widout a job 'fore he ate his dinner. Stiddy now; lean against me, and don't wabble yer legs so."

With like exhortations the elder and more wary disciple of Bacchus disappeared with his charge in the gloom of the night.

It chanced that the light burned late, on this evening, in Mrs. Arnot's parlour. The lady's indisposition had confined her to her room and couch during the greater part of the day; but as the sun declined the distress in her head had gradually ceased, and she had found her airy drawing room a welcome change from the apartment heavy with the odour of anaesthetics. Two students from the University had aided in beguiling the early part of the evening, and then Laura had commenced reading aloud an interesting tale, which had suspended the consciousness of time. But as the marble clock on the mantel chimed out the hour of twelve, Mrs. Arnot rose hastily from the sofa, exclaiming:

"What am I thinking of, to keep you up so late! If your mother knew that you were out of your bed she would hesitate to trust you with me again."

"One more chapter, dear auntie, please?"

"Yes, dear, several more—to-morrow, but bed now, instantler. Come, kiss your remorseful aunt good-night. I'll remain here a while longer, for either your foolish story or the after effects of my wretched headache make me a trifle morbid and wakeful to-night. Oh, how that bell startles me! what can it mean so late?"

The loud ring at the door remained unanswered a few moments, for the servants had all retired. But the applicant without did not wait long before repeating the summons still more emphatically.

Then they heard the library door open, and Mr. Arnot's heavy step in the hall, as he went himself to learn the nature of the untimely call. His wife's nervous timidity vanished at once, and she stepped forward to join her husband, while Laura stood looking out from the parlour entrance with a pale and frightened face. "Can it be bad news from home?" she thought.

"Who is there?" demanded Mr. Arnot, sternly.

"Me and Mither Haldane," answered a voice without in broadest brogue.

"Mr. Haldane?" exclaimed Mr. Arnot, excitedly; "what can this mean? Who is he?" he next asked loudly.

"Me is Pat McCabe, sure; the same as tidies up the office and does yer errands. Mr. Haldane's had a bad torn, and I've brought him home."

As Mr. Arnot swung open the door, a man, who seemingly had been leaning against it, fell prone within the hall. Laura gave a slight scream, and Mrs. Arnot was much alarmed, thinking that Haldane was suffering from some sudden and alarming attack. Thoughts of at once telegraphing to his mother were entering her mind, when the object of her solicitude tried to rise, and mumbled in the thick utterance of intoxication,

"This isn't home. Take me to mother's."

Mrs. Arnot's eyes turned questioningly to her husband,

and she saw that his face was dark with anger and disgust. "He is drunk," he said, turning to Pat who stood in the door, cap in hand.

"Faix, sur, it looks moighty loike it. But it's not fur a dacent sober man loike meself to spake sartainly o' sich matters."

"Few words and to the point, sir," said Mr. Arnot, harshly; "your breath tells where you have been. But where did you find this—and how came you to find him?"

Either Mr. Arnot was at a loss for a term which would express his estimation of the young man, who had slowly and unsteadily risen, and was supporting himself by holding fast the hat rack, or he was restrained in his utterance by the presence of his wife.

"Well sur," said Pat, with as ingenuous and candid an air as if he were telling the truth, "the wife o' a neighbour o' mine was takin on the suddint, and I went for the doctor, and as I was a comin home, who shud I see sittin on the doorthstep but Mr. Haldane, and I thought it me duty to bring him home to yees."

"You have done right. Was it on the doorstep of a drinking-place you found him?"

"I'm a-thinkin it was, sur; it had that sort o' look." Mr. Arnot turned to his wife and said coldly, "You now see how it works. But this is not a fit object for you and Laura to look upon, so please retire. I will see that he gets safely to his room. I suppose he must go there, though the station-house is the more proper place for him."

"He certainly must go to his own room," said Mrs. Arnot, firmly but quietly.

"Well, then, steady him along up the stairs, Pat. I will show you where to put the—" and Mr. Arnot again seemed to hesitate for a term, but the blank was more expressive of his contempt than any epithet could be, since his tone and manner suggested the worst.

Returning to the parlour, Mrs. Arnot found Laura's face expressive of the deepest alarm and distress.

"Oh, auntie, what does all this mean? Am I in any way to blame? He said he would go to ruin if I didn't—but how could I?"

"No, my dear, you are not in the slightest degree to blame. Mr. Haldane seems both bad and foolish. I feel to-night that he is not worthy to speak to you, much less he fit to be entrusted with that which you will eventually give. I hope, only to one who is pre-eminently noble and good. Come with me to your room, my child. I am very sorry I permitted you to stay up to-night."

But Laura was sleepless and deeply troubled; she had never seen a labourer—much less one of her own acquaintances—in Haldane's condition before; and to her young, innocent mind the event had almost the character of a tragedy. Although conscious of entire blamelessness, she supposed that she was more directly the cause of Haldane's behaviour than was true, and that he was carrying out his threat to destroy himself by reckless dissipation. She did not know that he had been beguiled into his miserable condition through bad habits of long standing, and that he had fallen into the clutches of those who always infest public haunts, and live by preying upon the fast, foolish, and unwary. Haldane, from his character and associations, was liable to such an experience whenever circumstances combined to make it possible. Young men with no more principle than he possessed are never safe from disaster, and they who trust them, trust rather to the chances of their not meeting the peculiar temptations and tests to which they would prove unequal. Laura could not then know how little she had to do with the tremendous downfall of her premature lover. The same conditions given, he would probably have met with the same experience upon any occasion. After his first glass of punch, the small degree of discretion that he had learned thus far in life began to desert him; and every man as he becomes intoxicated is first a fool, and then the victim of every one who chooses to take advantage of his voluntary helplessness and degradation.

But innocent Laura saw a romantic and tragic element in the painful event, and she fell asleep with some vague womanly thought about saving a fellow-creature by the sacrifice of herself. The morning light, however, the truth concerning Haldane, and her own good sense, would banish such morbid fancies. Indeed, the worst possible way in which a young woman can set about reforming a bad man is to marry him. The usual result is greatly increased guilt on the part of the husband, and life-long hopeless wretchedness for the wife.

CHAPTER IX.—PAT AND THE PRESS.

Pat having staided and half carried Haldane to his room, Mr. Arnot demanded of his clerk what had become of the money entrusted to his care; but his only answer was a stupid, uncomprehending stare.

"Hold his hands," said Mr. Arnot, impatiently.

McCabe having obeyed, the man of business, whose solicitude in the affair had no concern with the young man's irreparable loss, but related only to his own money, immediately felt in Haldane's pockets for the envelopes which had contained the thousand dollars in currency. The envelopes were safe enough—one evidently opened with the utmost care, and the other torn recklessly—but the money was gone.

When Haldane saw the envelopes, there was a momentary expression of trouble and perplexity upon his face, and he tried to speak, but his thick utterance was unintelligible. This gleam of intelligence passed quickly, however, and the stupor of intoxication reasserted itself. His heavy eyelids drooped, and Pat with difficulty could keep him upon his feet.

"Toss him there on the lounge; take off his muddy boots. Nothing further can be done while he is in this beastly condition," said Mr. Arnot, in a voice that was as harsh as the expression of his face.

The empty envelopes and Mr. Arnot's dark looks suggested a great deal to Pat, and he saw that one of his "sprees" was an innocent matter compared with this affair.

"Now, go down to my study and wait there for me."

Pat obeyed in a very steady and decorous manner, for

the matter was assuming such gravity as to sober him completely.

Mr. Arnot satisfied himself that there was no chance of escape from the windows, and then, after another look of disgust and anger at Haldane, who was now sleeping heavily, he took the key from the door and locked it on the outside.

Descending to his study, the irate gentleman next wrote a note and gave it to his porter, saying—

"Take that to the police headquarters, and ask that it be sent to the superintendent at once. No mistake, now, as you value your place; and mind not a word of all this to anyone."

"Faix, sir, I'll be as dumb as an oyster, and do yer bidding in a jiffy," said Pat, backing out of the room, and glad to escape from one whose threatening aspect seemed to forbode evil to anyone within his reach.

"He looks black enough to murder the poor young spalpeen," muttered the Irishman, as he hastened to do his errand, remembering now in his trepidation that, though he had escaped from his master, the big, red-faced, stout-armed wife of his bosom was still to be propitiated after his late prowlings.

When he entered the main street, a light that glimmered from the top of a tall building suggested how he might obtain that kind of oil which, cast upon the domestic billows that so often raged in his fourth floor back room, was most effective in producing a little temporary smoothness. A lasting calm was not to be hoped for.

Since the weather was always fouler within his domestic haven than without, and on this occasion threatened to be at its worst, Pat at one time half decided not to run into port at all, but the glimmer of the light already mentioned suggested another course.

Although the night was far spent, Pat still longed for a "wink o' slape" before going to his work, and, in order to enjoy it, knew that he must obtain the means of allaying the storm, which was not merely brewing, but which, from the lateness of the hour, had long been brewed. In his own opinion, the greenness of his native isle had long ago faded from his mental and moral complexion, and he did not propose that any stray dollars, which by any shrewdness or artifice could be diverted into his pocket, should get by him.

Since his wife had developed into a huge female divinity, at whose shrine it seemed probable that he would eventually become a human sacrifice, and whose wrath, in the meantime, it was his daily task to appease, Pat had gradually formed the habit of making a sort of companion of himself. In accordance with his custom, therefore, he stopped under the high window from whence gleamed the light, for the sake of a little personal counsel.

"Now, Pat," he muttered, "if yees had gone home at nine o'clock, yees wouldn't be afeard to go home now; and yees go home now widout a dollar more or less, the ould woman will make yer wish yees had set on the kerbstone the rest o' the night. They sez some men has no bowels o' marries, and after what I've seen the night, and afore the night too, I kin belave that Boss Arnot's in'ards were cast at the same foundry where he gets his mashshines. He told me that I must spake nary a word about what I've seen and heard, and if I should try and turn an honest penny by givin' a knowin' wink or two where they wud pay for the same, that 'ud be the ind of Pat McCabe at the big office. And yet they sez that them as buys news is loike them that takes stolen goods—moighty willin' to kape dark about where they got it, so that they kin get more next time. That's the iditor o' the 'Currier' in yon high room, and p'raps he'll pay me as much for a wink and a hint ter night as I'll get for my day's work to-morrow. Bust me if I don't thry him, if he'll fust promise me to say if anyone axes him that he niver saw Pat McCabe in his loife;" and the suddenly improvised reporter climbed the long stairways to where the night editor sat at his desk.

Pat gave a hearty rap for manners, but as the night was waning he walked in without waiting for an answer, and addressed the startled newspaper man with a business-like directness which might often be advantageously imitated:

"Is this the shop where yer pays a dacent price for news?"

"It depends on the importance of the news and its truthfulness," answered the editor, after eyeing the intruder suspiciously for a moment.

"Thin I've got ye on both counts, though I didn't think ye'd bear down so heavy on its being thrue," said Pat advancing confidently.

As the door of the press-room, in which men were at work, stood open, the editor felt no alarm from the sudden appearance of the burly figure before him, but, supposing the man had been drinking, he said impatiently:

"Please state your business briefly, as my time is valuable."

"If yer time is worth more'n news, I'll go to another shop," said Pat stuffily, making a feint of departure.

"That's a good fellow, go along," chimed in the editor, bending down to his writing again.

Such disastrous acquiescence puzzled Pat for a moment, and he growled, "No wonder yer prints a paper that's loike a lump of lead, when stead o' looking for news yer turns it away from yer doors."

"Now, look here, my man," said the editor rising, "if you have anything to say, say it. If you have been drinking you will not be permitted to make a row in this office."

"It's not me, but another man that's been shrinkin'."

"Well," snarled the editor, "if the other man had the drink you have the 'drunk,' as 'if you don't take yourself off, I'll call some men from the press-room who may put you down stairs uncomfortably fast."

"Hould on a bit," remonstrated Pat, "before yer ruffle yer feathers clane over yer head and blinds yer eyes. Wud a man loike Boss Arnot send me, if I was drunk, wid a letter at this toime o' night? and wud he send a letter to the superintendent o' the police at this time o' the night to ax him the time o' day? Afore yer calls yer spalpeens out o' the press-room squint at that."

The moment the editor caught sight of the business stamp