

servants. Why should they rob me? They have everything they want."

"Bless you, Colonel! as if that made any difference. Of course they have everything they want; and it's generally those who are closest to us who play us the dirtiest tricks. A man would get through life easy enough if it weren't for his friends. That's a handsome watch his Lordship gave to that brat of Cray's (I hope your lady isn't within earshot), isn't now?"

"It must have cost fifty pounds if it cost five. I can't imagine any one being so simple as to part with his property in that lavish manner, Quekett!"

"Nor I — if he don't know to whom he's parting with it. But Lord Muiraven knows, as sure as my name's Rebecca. He's not such a fool as he looks."

"You are so mysterious, Quekett, with your hints and innuendoes," replies her master peevishly. "Why can't you speak out, if you have anything to say?"

"Would you be any the better pleased if I were to speak out?"

"Muiraven's private affairs cannot affect me much, either one way or the other."

"I don't know that, Colonel. You wouldn't care to keep the child hanging about if you thought it was his, I reckon."

"Of course not; but what proofs have you that it belongs to him?"

"Well, he's stamped his signature pretty plainly on the boy's face. All the world can see that; and whether the child is his own or not, he's safe."

"A very uncertain proof, Quekett. I should have thought you had had too much experience to accept it. Now look at the matter sensibly. Is it likely Lord Muiraven could have been to Priestley and courted Myra Cray without our hearing of it?"

"Myra Cray has not always lived at Priestley, Colonel. But putting that aside, how can we be sure the child did belong to Cray?"

"But — I have always understood so," exclaims Colonel Mordaunt as he pushes his chair away from the table and confronts the house-keeper.

"Ay, perhaps you have; but that's no proof either. Mrs. Cray always said the boy was a nurse-child of hers; and it was not until Myra's death that Mrs. Mordaunt told you she was his mother."

"Mrs. Mordaunt repeated what the dying woman confided to her."

"Perhaps so," remarks Mrs. Quekett drily, "but the fact remains, Colonel. And your lady took so kindly to the child from the very first, that I always suspected she knew more of his history than we did."

"Do you mean to insinuate that my wife took this boy under her protection, knowing him to be a son of Lord Muiraven?"

"I don't wish to insinuate—I mean to say I believe it; and if you'll take the trouble to put two and two together, Colonel, you'll believe it too."

"Good God! it is impossible. I tell you Mrs. Mordaunt never saw Lord Muiraven till she met him at the Glottonbury ball."

"I think there must be a mistake somewhere, Colonel; for they've been seen together at Lady Baldwin's parties more than once; I had it from her own lips."

"I can't understand it. I am sure Irene told me she did not know him."

"Some things are best kept to ourselves, Colonel. Perhaps your lady did it to save you. But if they'd never met before, they got very intimate with one another whilst he was here."

"How do you mean?"

"In arranging plans for the child's future, and so forth. I heard Mrs. Mordaunt tell his Lordship this very morning, just as he was going away, that she should write to him concerning it. And his giving the child that watch looks so very much, to my mind, as though he took a special interest in him."

Colonel Mordaunt frowns and turns away from her.

"I cannot believe it; and if it's true I wish to God you had never told me, Quekett. Go on with the accounts!—Where's the baker's memorandum for flour? Didn't I order it to be sent in every week?"

"There it is, Colonel, right on the top of the others. One would think you had lost your head."

"Lost my head: and isn't it enough to make a man lose his head to hear all the scandal you retail to me? Do you want to make me believe that there is a secret understanding between my wife and Muiraven concerning that child?"

"I don't want you to believe any further than you can see for yourself. If you like to be blind, be blind! It's no matter of mine."

"Is it likely," continues the Colonel, shooting beyond the mark in his anxiety to ascertain the truth, "that had she been pre-acquainted with that man, and preferred his company to mine, she would have been so distant in her manner towards him and so low-spirited during his visit here?"

"I am sure I can't say, Colonel; women are riddles to me, as to most. Perhaps your lady didn't care to have his Lordship located here for fear of something coming out. Any way, she seems light-hearted enough now he's gone," as the sound of Irene's voice comes gaily through the open casement.

"I don't believe a word of it, Quekett," says the Colonel loyally, though he wipes the perspiration off his brow as he speaks; "you are hatching up lies for some infernal purpose of your own. This is no business of yours, and I'll

listen to no more of it. Go back to your own room, and leave me to settle my accounts by myself."

"Thank you, Colonel! Those are rather hard words to use to an old friend who has served you and yours faithfully for the last thirty years; and you can hardly suppose I shall stand them quietly. I may have means of revenging myself, and I may not, but no one offended met yet without repenting of it, and you should know that as well as most. I wish you a very good night, Colonel."

"Stop, Quekett. If I have been hasty, you must forgive me. Think how wretched the doubt you have instilled in my breast will make me. I love my wife better than myself. I would lay down my life to preserve her integrity. And the idea that she may have deceived me is utter misery. I shall brood over it until it eats my heart way. I would rather know the worst at once."

While he is speaking, the house-keeper has drawn a torn sheet of paper from the leather bag she carries on her arm, and is smoothing it carefully between her palms.

"Well, Colonel, you had better know the worst," she replies as she lays the paper on the desk before him: "you will believe your own eyes, perhaps, if you won't believe me; and you may live to be sorry for the words you've spoken. But you shall be deceived no longer, if I can help it."

"Quekett! what is this?"

"Read it, and judge for yourself! It came downstairs in your lady's waste-paper basket, which she ain't half so careful of as she needs to be. And when you have read it, you'll understand, perhaps, why I've taken upon myself to speak as I have done."

He glances at the first few characters and turns as white as a sheet.

"Leave me, Quekett," he utters in a faint voice.

"Keep up, Colonel," she says encouragingly as she retreats. "There's as good fish in the sea, remember, as ever came out of it."

But his only answer is to thrust her quietly from the door and turn the key upon her exit.

The air is full of all the sweet scents and sounds of early summer. A humble bee, attracted by the honeysuckle that clusters round the window-frame, is singing a drowsy song amongst its blossoms: the cows in the meadow beyond the lawn, restored to their calves after the evening milking, are lowing with maternal satisfaction: the nestlings, making, beneath their mother's guidance, the first trial of their half-grown wings, are chirping plaintively amongst the lilac bushes; and above all is heard Irene's cheerful voice as she chases Tommy round and round the garden flower-beds.

Everything seems happy and at peace, as he sits down to scan the words which are destined to blot all peace and happiness from his life for evermore. He glances rapidly at the familiar writing, reads it once—twice—three times, and then falls forward on the study table with a groan.

(To be continued.)

### OH! THINK OF ME.

Oh, think of me! when fair Aurora gleams  
Her lovely heralding of coming day;  
When you, perchance, awake from pleasant  
dreams,  
And longing, watch for Phœbus' joyous ray.

Oh, think of me! at noon of summer's day,  
As you recline, in contemplative mood,  
On fragrant bank, bedecked with flowers gay,  
Or steeped in solitude of quiet wood.

Oh, think of me! when evening's shadows fall,  
And silvery stars gleam from their azure  
home;  
When loving birds have ceased their wooing  
call,  
As dies the day, you by the brooklet roam.

Oh, think of me! at witching hour of night,  
When others sleep, beloved, think of me;  
When the scene's hallowed by the moon's  
chaste light,  
And you indulged in blissful reverie.

### THE WHITE CAT.

(Conclusion.)

V.

The courtyard opened upon the high road, the high road led to the village, where everybody was up, and awake and excited. For hours past the church bells had been jangling, and a gun had been going off at intervals. It woke up Hugh, Gourlay at the same minute as M. le Maire, and old Mademoiselle de Latouche in her warm bed. In the Presbytery the children were jumping about in great excitement. It was pretty to see the little cluster in the courtyard—the babies in front, the little elder girls, in their broad hats, peeping at M. le Curé and his assistant, as they passed and re-passed through the gateway. H., who never can resist the children's voices, was also there, with a lace veil over her head. Madame Valentin was discoursing to the tobacconist out of her bedroom window as usual. He had stepped into the court in wooden shoes to borrow an um-

rella. "Ah! you will all want umbrellas," says Madame Valentin sagely. "My son started an hour ago. He is not in the procession; he goes to receive the Archbishop with the other gentlemen."

All this time a procession had been forming, rain and mud notwithstanding—talkative, excited. French people certainly have a special art for holding umbrellas, tidily defying the elements; their starch keeps stiff, their garments are dry, their spirits undamped, at times when an English temper would be drenched. Perhaps in the long run the English temper might best withstand the onslaught of adverse circumstances; but certainly for brief adversities we have little patience. The procession started at last, to the peal of bells, to the barking of dogs—windows opened, the church porch was crowded, people joining in from every doorway, late recruits following as fast as they could go. The women wore clean white shirts and starched white caps with satin ribbons; the men were dressed in their usual Sunday best—flagbearers had the additional glory of a green rosette. Monsieur le Curé and Monsieur le Vicaire were both there, encouraging and marshalling their troops. They had their breviaries under their arms, they wore their beautiful muslin stoles, their octagonal caps. The choristers were also in full dress, and the church beadle, in his long flapping gown, came away from the bell which he had been ringing uninterruptedly since four o'clock in the morning.

A few cap-strings joined still hot from the ironing-board where Madame Wachtel had been standing uninterruptedly labouring for twenty-four hours. Poor woman, she now sank down exhausted. She had counted upon going herself; there was her own jupe all ready, but she was too tired to move—tired! she was broken, there was no other word. Ah! there goes Mademoiselle de Latouche; is it possible that she walks on foot when she might drive in her aunt's carriage?

Hugh, who had dressed and come out to see what was going on, now appeared in the marketplace. He had seen Blanche pass his window, which was just about four feet from the ground, and on a level with people's heads. Mathilde, of the night before, was following with a waterproof, and expostulating as she went. "You will catch cold," he heard her say; "your aunt—the carriage——" and then Blanche's sweet shrill "Do you suppose that in the convent?" . . . and so they passed on.

The whole thing seemed to Hugh like some sort of fantastic continuation of his dreams. Still more so when he found himself, an hour later, steadily plodding in the wake of the retreating procession that was rapidly disappearing beyond the horizon of the sloping field. He had remained a little behind, talking to H., with whom he had stiffly claimed acquaintance as she stood in the gateway, on the strength of the night before; and, as usually happened in such cases, in return for his stiff excuse, she had charmed him by her kind manner and sweetness of greeting. That pale and tremulous H. has a gentle genius quite her own. It is not only sympathy, not only kind-heartedness, it is a peculiar instinct (springing in truth from a kind heart and a quick and delicate intellect), which teaches her to understand the silent language of the people she meets, as well as their spoken words. Some persons can play the piano; others, with a look, can tune a far nobler instrument. I often envy H. her gift, dearly as she pays for it. We can most of us sympathise, but to understand is a subtler quality. Unselfish sympathy, that forgets itself and does not obtrude, is the sweetest and rarest of all. Sometimes as she comes in, in her black dress and mourning garb, I look into H.'s pale face, with its sweet pensive lines; old and worn as it is, it seems to me fairer than many a young and brilliant beauty; its sudden smile is more tender and radiant. Some bright tempers are a little oblivious, carried away by their own excitement; H. is not so; she is hopeful and quietly pleased, because her heart is humble and full of love, and by her example she teaches us to practice this happiness of gentleness and faith, and to believe in it, even though it may not always be for us.

Hugh promised to come and see us again, and then walked off across the field in pursuit of the procession, that was now rapidly disappearing beyond the horizon. In order to save time he had tried another of his short cuts, and wandered into the boggy centre of a turnip-field, and was glad to scramble out of it into the pathway again. The land was monotonous enough, plains on every side, here and there a village crowding, white against the sky overhead mountains and valleys were tossing, and a storm was still impending, although the sun had come out bright for the present, and as it gleamed from the mountainous clouds above to the flat plains below, Hugh could see the little village, and the spire of the castle a couple of miles away.

Sometimes some tune comes haunting one, one knows not why, and to-day a wild heard by chance, seemed to him to be ringing in his mind, and echoing from across the plains, and from the distant line of breakers. Then carry it into the drifting clouds, and then a light would seem to break out suddenly and repeat the tune in another key. People have odd waking dreams at times. All this gray under foot, over which the slippery lights were flickering; the sea-birds flying upon the wind; the excitement and strangeness of the scene,

seemed best expressed by this tune that was haunting him, and which he associated ever after with that morning's chase. He caught the procession up at last, and as he did so the tune died away. One or two stragglers had already fallen out of the ranks. There was Madeleine Mathieu, the baker's daughter, carefully holding her white petticoats out of the mud, and naturally too much engrossed by this occupation to think of much else. Hugh soon discovered Mademoiselle de Latouche struggling with the flapping tongue of the village flag, to which a piece of ribbon had been tied, and which it was her duty to hold. She was dressed in white, as were the others; she wore a little white bonnet, tied under her chin.

"I fear you are tired, my child," said M. le Curé, coming up. He was walking along the ranks and encouraging his starved flock. "Madeleine, if you come here, Mademoiselle will be able to rest."

They had come out from the fields by this time into the high way, which was growing more and more crowded every minute. Mademoiselle de Latouche recognised Hugh as she passed him, and nodded kindly; but she seemed tired, and there was no spirit in her greeting. The sight itself was amusing enough—a quaint scene of genuine country life. Here was a group of peasant-women, proudly striding along side of the soutane, the glory of the family. The brother, the Priest, walked with his thick shoes and flapping skirts, the proud old mother by his side in her old-fashioned Normandy cap and kerchief; the modernised sisters in cheap white satin quilings. Then some little children and some nuns went hurrying by to one of the convents in the town; a little farther some recruits, who had been very tipsy the day before, were still parading in their ribbons; and with it all came an eager cheerful hum and chatter of voices, to which every moment brought additional notes; through every gate of the little town to which the procession was bound, the people were pouring.

The choir of Joyeux rang shrill and loud, the rain had ceased, the hedgerows and willow-trees were fresh in the narrow field ways, the feet of the many pilgrims had worn a streaming track as they passed, plodding peacefully through the nineteenth century to worship at the shrine of three hundred years before. There goes Femme Roulet, the farmer's wife, in her great-grandmother's earrings; there goes a priest from the seminary, who was born twenty years ago, perhaps, but who is living with St. Benedict and others, the life of their day. The way is long, the path is wet and slippery. Poor little Blanche had stumbled many a time before she finished her long three miles; she was unused to such fatigue, and could scarcely drag her tired feet along; the crowd bewildered her; she clung to her ribbon, and tried to think of the hymn that the country girls were singing as they marched along. This was what she had hoped, to find herself one of a goodly company pressing onward to the true burning shrine of religion; but she was tired; her spirits flagged; her attention wandered from the words of the psalm; she found herself mechanically counting the jerks of the flagstaff as it crossed and recrossed the priest's little black velvet cap. Suddenly, as she clung in her dismay to the green ribbon of the flag, the great prop and mainmast itself seemed to give away—there was a shriek. Something had struck her shoulder. . . .

Barriers had been put up round about the chapel, but just outside the barriers Hugh thought things looked a little uncomfortable. It was all good-nature! enough, and the people were only pushing in fun; but with so many girls and children in the crowd, it was certainly dangerous fun. There was a sudden cry that the bishop's carriage was at hand, a sudden heave, and somehow, before any one knew why, a wave passed through the crowd, some women screamed, a little pale and fainting figure almost fell into Hugh's arms. Madeleine, the banner-bearer, slipped and fell: Louise the washerwoman sprawled over her. There might have been a serious accident if M. le Curé, who was a strong man, and Hugh, who was active and ready, had not sprung forward together and made a sort of rampart against the surging crowd. Hugh would not have been greatly concerned for Madeleine, who was well able to bear any amount of pushing, or for Louise, who was loudly bewailing herself—but he still held up the almost senseless little lady of the castle; it had been his fate to rescue her; and he was relieved when the pressure subsided, and he found himself in a quiet corner of the great place outside the barrier.

Blanche revived in a minute, smoothed her hair out of her eyes, and sat on a step trembling a little and silent, and biting her lips. She did not even say "Thank you;" that wild see of heads and struggling arms was still about her.

Then she heard Hugh asking if she felt better, and found that she was safe and once more able to breathe; and in one moment she was herself again, shaking out her crumpled lace and smoothing her dress.

"You will have to go home now," said Hugh, in a tone of some satisfaction. "What induced you to come to such a place, mademoiselle? It is all very well for those peasant women, but for you——" The innocent eyes looked up.

"For me? Why should I not do as they do?" said Blanche, turning pale again at the very thought. "Oh, how wet I am! Is it not disagreeable to be wetted? Is that a carriage? Perhaps—Ah! here is Monsieur le Curé."

Monsieur le Curé emerged with Madeleine, who was all over mud, and anxious to return.