

THE MINSTREL'S CURSE.

(FROM THE GERMAN.)

I.

In olden times a castle stood, high on a mountain's crest,
Gleaming far over distant lands, to the ocean in the West.
A paradise of fragrant flowers encircled it around,
When fountains dancing in the sun in summer's heat were found.

II.

A haughty king once dwelt therein, for realms, for conquests famed,
Glowing and stern his countenance, his spirit dark, untamed.
His every scheme spread terror wide, his every look showed rage,
His spoken words like scourges fell, he penned a bloody page.

III.

A noble pair of singers now to this mountain castle came,
One with the stalwart strength of youth, one with an aged frame.
The Minstrel old, with harp in hand, a goodly horse bestride,
Gaily the comrade by his side breast the mountain road.

IV.

Thus to the young man spake the old, "Be ready, O my son,
Our deepest, fullest strains to raise before the day be done.
To waken joy and yearning pain demands our utmost skill;
'Tis ours to break the stony heart, to bend the stubborn will."

V.

In the lofty, spacious, columned hall, the singers take their stand,
Fronting the throne, engirdled by the nobles of the land.
The King in dreadful splendour shows, as the blood-red Northern light;
As the moon in heaven the Queen looks down in beauty calm and bright.

VI.

The gray-haired sire with master hand draws music from the strings,
That ever triller, richer swells, lifting the soul on wings,
Streams from the youthful voice a song, harmonious, thrilling, grand,
The elder joins in fainter notes, as from a distant land.

VII.

Spring, Love, the blessed Golden Age, their fitting themes of song,
Freedom, True Worth, Fidelity, the heart that knows no wrong.
All tender softening things of Earth, the flowerets of the sod,
All high and holy things of Heaven, that raise the soul to God!

VIII.

The scoffing throng of courtiers forget their wonted part,
Each stubborn warrior secretly prays in his inmost heart.
Saddened, yet charmed, the noble Queen all grateful stands confest,
And throws the matchless minstrel pair the white rose from her breast.

IX.

Trembling in every limb with rage, his soul in furious strife,
"My people ye have duped, and now, would ye allure my wife!"
The King shrieks out; then hurls his sword right at the younger man,
And the red life blood gushes forth whence streams of music ran.

X.

Scattered as birds by winter storm, that throng of bearers go,
The Minstrel sighs his last farewell to the Master bending low.
Who folds his cloak around the dead, then lifts him on the steed,
Upright as living man, and leaves that scene of bloody deed.

XI.

Yet still, before the central door, the hoary Minstrel turns,
Grasping his harp of mighty power, his soul within him burns.
The harp he casts against the wall, its fragments strew the ground,
And then his deep prophetic voice pierces the air around.

XII.

"Never again, ye blood stained halls, shall sweet notes echo here,
Never again shall visit you minstrels from far and near!
Be sighs and groans your only sounds, let slaves crawl round in fear,
Until the avenging soul has wrought ruin complete and drear."

XIII.

"To you, ye gardens, fragrant, fair, through the fostering light of heaven,
To you, I show the countenance of my loved one, from me given.
That, withering at the sight, your springs may henceforth cease to run,
That Earth may ever know the spot accursed beneath the sun."

XIV.

"Thou tyrant foul, whose murderous hand hath struck the Minstrel low,
In vain be all thy efforts to win fame from conquered foe;
Forgotten be thy name for aye, never to see the light,
As dying groans in empty air, absorbed in endless night!"

XV.

Heaven heard the old man's righteous curse, answered his burning prayer,
The lofty halls in ruin lie, no walls are standing there,
No token tells of splendour past, save a single column tall,
A shattered witness that ere night may totter to its fall.

XVI.

Where once the fragrant gardens stood, now desolation dwells,
No tree gives shade from noonday glare, no cooling fountain swells;
No ballad and no chronicle declares that tyrant's name;
Lost and forgotten! such the doom that cursed the deed of shame.

Windor, N. S.

BENEATH THE WAVE.

A NOVEL

BY

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SON AND HEIR.

Hayward was angry with Hilda after the scene in the conservatory, and yet in his heart he acknowledged that he had deserved her rebuke. He went home almost immediately afterwards, and began to call himself to account for his folly. Yet he found himself making excuses for Isabel. Sir George was so cold and hard to her, she was so young and beautiful. It was the old story—the siren voices chanting on the shore, and the mariners drifting into danger as they listened to the too enchanting sounds.

But if Hayward was disturbed after their brief wrangle in the conservatory, Hilda was almost completely overwhelmed with emotion. The poor girl was scarcely alone when she recalled with bitter self-humiliation what she had said. How utterly ungrateful she must seem to him, she thought. Had she forgotten in her jealous anger that Hayward had saved her and little Ned absolutely from starving in London? Had she forgotten his constant friendship and generosity to her, and how, the moment that he was in a position to do so, he had asked her to be his wife? Hilda hid her face and cried bitterly as she remembered these things. What must he think of her? she thought, and Hayward no doubt at that moment felt considerable irritation on the subject.

But his anger faded away when he saw Hilda the next day. There was no mistaking the look of pain and suffering imprinted on her face. She was walking on one of the roads near Combe Lodge, when he encountered her, and with much nervousness and hesitation she asked if she could speak a few words to him.

"Certainly," answered Hayward. He was riding, but he dismounted at once, and putting his arm through his horse's bridle, prepared to walk by Hilda's side.

It chanced, however, just at that moment, that a violent shower came on, and in common courtesy Hayward could but offer Hilda the shelter of his roof.

"Come, Hilda," he said, smiling, as she hesitated, and after a moment's thought she followed him into his house, and was of course received with marks of great joy by little Ned.

But Hilda was too much agitated to respond very cordially to her little brother's signs of affection. She sat down by the library window and looked at the beating rain. Presently Hayward came and stood beside her.

"What a shower!" he said. "It's well you've found shelter, Hilda."

"Yes," she answered. She was not thinking of the rain, or the shelter, but how ungrateful she had been to the faithful friend by her side. Hayward, watching her, saw a heavy tear steal down her cheek, and fall upon her knee. This touched him.

"What is vexing you, Hilda?" he said, kindly, in a low tone.

Hilda only looked at him in answer, with her wet, sad eyes.

"Run, Master Ned," said Hayward the next moment, "to Mrs. Watkins (this was the housekeeper) and tell her to send up some tea for your sister, and stay with her until it comes up. What is it, Hilda?" again he asked when the boy left the room in obedience to his request.

"I—I am so sorry," began Hilda. "I said yesterday what I should not—I was vexed—I had better go away from Massam, I think."

"But why?" said Hayward. "Yes, Hilda," he continued, gravely, "you said yesterday what you should not," (as Hayward said this he put his hand kindly on Hilda's shoulder.) "But I am quite ready to forgive you," he added, "if you will never say the same things any more."

Hilda was silent for a moment. She sat there with her hot tears streaming down her cheeks, and with strong and varying emotions struggling in her heart. Then, after a little thought, she turned round and took Hayward's hand.

"I will never say them again after to-day, Philip," she said, "but may I speak a few words to you now?"

"What will be the good, Hilda?" he answered. "I know what you will say—'you made a fool of yourself once about Miss Trevor, take care you don't do it again about Lady Hamilton.' Isn't that it, Hilda? But do not be afraid," he added. "As I told you before you came here, Lady Hamilton is the wife of the man who honours me with his friendship."

"But an unloved and unloving wife, Philip," urged Hilda.

"That may be," said Hayward (and these words of Hilda's were not unpleasant to his ears), "but she is his wife. I can never forget under any circumstances what I owe to Sir George."

Again Hilda was silent for a few moments, and then after another little mental struggle she continued:

"I—I have no right, I know," she said. "It is only because I—care so much that I speak. I—can never repay you what I owe you, and it cuts me to the heart to see you again

being deceived. Don't be angry, Philip, I must speak! Lady Hamilton is not a good woman. She does not love you, or I could forgive her—she does not love her husband, and she will never—"

"Had we not better end this conversation, Hilda?" interrupted Hayward. "I have given you no cause to say what you are doing, and Lady Hamilton has given you no cause."

"Oh! why do I care! why do I care!" said Hilda, rising suddenly, and beginning to pace the room with uneven, restless steps. "Why did we ever meet, Philip?" she went on, wringing her hands, "for it has caused me nothing but bitter pain!"

"I—I—am grieved, Hilda," said Hayward, "but what have I done?"

"Nothing! I know you are not to blame," continued poor Hilda. "I got to care for you without any fault of yours. I saw you wasting your heart on Isabel Trevor, and I could not put out my hand to save you—and then—when you knew—"

"You tried to comfort me, Hilda," said Hayward, following the girl's restless steps, and putting his hand through her trembling arm: "and you did so, my dear. We are both very unhappy, Hilda," he went on gently. "If you could have married me, I would have tried not to cost you any pain. I would have loved you very dearly, Hilda—but as it is not to be—"

"No—!" said Hilda, but that renunciation was very bitter to her. More bitter than it had been in London; more bitter now when she had seen Hayward every day; when she felt that if she could marry him he would become a wiser and happier man.

"Let us at least remain friends, Hilda," said Hayward. "It is good for me to have such friends as you and—Jervis."

"Yes," answered Hilda, slowly, "he is a good man."

"A very good man—and—and, my dear, let me think sometimes that you—a good woman like you—once cared for me. Don't cry, Hilda. Jervis is like gold where I am dross. When I am with Jervis, I always feel somehow as I do when I look at the stars."

"O, Philip!"

"His heart is half in heaven, Hilda. That is why sometimes I grudge you to him, for no woman will ever be to him the most absorbing interest of his life."

But here Master Ned once more made his appearance, speedily followed by Mrs. Watkins and the tea-tray, and the conversation, therefore, between Hayward and Hilda ended. But it made a great impression upon Hayward. He went less to the Park after it, and kept out of the way, as much as he could, of Lady Hamilton's beautiful face.

She also, as weeks went on, became quiet and more subdued. For the first time in her life she began to feel fear. She had never been used to be ill, and she dreaded the time when her child was to be born. Hilda became of some use and comfort to her now. But Isabel was impatient and weary. She hated children, she told Hilda, and did not want to be troubled with them. She had, in fact, no motherly instincts. She could not understand the feeling that prompts the bird to build her nest; that makes the untamed brute return to die by the side of its wounded young.

But the day came at last, and an heir was born to Massam. The gloomy master of the Park heard the news without much signs of emotion.

"What a boy!" he said to the head nurse, who had hurried down to be the first to tell the glad tidings, expecting a very handsome gratuity for her trouble. "I wish it had been a girl."

"A girl, Sir George?" exclaimed the woman in utter surprise. "What, would you not rather have an heir, like the little beauty that has just been born?"

But Sir George made no answer. He took no notice of the expectant bows and smiles of the head nurse, and very little of the more courtly congratulations of the eminent doctor who had been summoned from town to attend the case.

"They are both doing well, are they not?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the great doctor. "Lady Hamilton and your infant heir are as well as I can possibly expect."

"I am glad," said Sir George, briefly; but he placed a sufficient sum in the doctor's hand to more than make up for his scant words.

Later in the day Hayward entered the library. "Well, Sir George," he said, holding but his hand, "let me congratulate you. I hear an heir has been born to Massam."

"A son has, at least," answered Sir George, coldly, and Hayward could not help wondering at his manner and his words.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FIXING THE DAY.

Hilda Marston had been about nine weeks at Massam, when one morning Hayward received a letter from his friend, Horace Jervis. It was as follows:

"My Dear Philip,—I hear from Hilda that the little heir, whose appearance has been so anxiously looked for, has arrived, and that her friend, Lady Hamilton, is doing well. Under these circumstances I am going to ask you to give me a bed for a day or two, as I would like to run down to see Hilda, and I see no reason now (as little Ned is so well) why our marriage should be any longer delayed. Could Hilda not be married from Massam? This seems to me to be the most desirable course we could adopt. It would not

be any trouble to Sir George and Lady Hamilton, as I am sure it will be Hilda's wish as well as mine, to be married as quietly as possible. If little Ned could remain with you until our return from a short wedding tour, all Hilda's anxiety about him would be at rest. Write and tell me what you think, and if it will be convenient for you to put me up next Tuesday and for the three following days.—I remain, dear Philip, yours affectionately,

"HORACE JERVIS."

Hayward felt very much disturbed after reading this letter. It gave him a kind of shock, and yet it contained no news. He knew this marriage was to be, but it had seemed far off somehow until now.

He had not seen much of Hilda lately. She had been indeed constantly with Lady Hamilton, and Lady Hamilton was very exacting. But he had thought of Hilda a good deal. The girl's trembling and agitated confession of how much she had loved him had recurred to him again and again. Isabel had seemed further away, and Hilda nearer to him, during the weeks which had preceded the birth of Isabel's child. He had not forgotten that Hilda was engaged to Horace Jervis, but he had remembered it always with increasing aversion to the idea. Now it was brought to him face to face. Jervis was evidently coming to Massam to urge Hilda to fix the wedding day.

Yet he could not, of course, refuse to receive him. His errand was a legitimate one, and Hayward was bound to treat him with all courtesy and kindness.

Strange to say, he expected another guest also, just about the time Horace Jervis had proposed to come. This was no other than his old friend, the Rev. Matthew Irvine. Many letters had passed between Combe Lodge and the parsonage of Sanda since Hayward had been in Yorkshire. The parson's welcome loan of ten pounds had long since been returned out of Hayward's salary in London. But when he got to Combe Lodge he did not forget the Irvines. Mrs. Irvine's heart had been uplifted by a present of a very handsome dinner service, and to Miss Amelia Shadwell, Hayward had forwarded one of the best pianos he could procure in town. To the parson himself he had sent a gold watch with a suitable inscription, and with no small pride the Rev. Matthew had donned his "boy's gift," as he called Hayward's watch, and had laid the old silver tub, that he had worn all his life before, away for ever.

And now he was going to visit Hayward. Mrs. Irvine had been invited also, but her stern sense of duty prevailed over her love of pleasure.

"No, Matthew," she had said to her spouse, "you go and enjoy yourself, and I will stay and look after the school. But mind you, write and tell me exactly how Hayward looks. Don't be led away by him having a colour, for that's often a sign of something wrong. I'd rather hear that he looked sallow, as that's natural to him, and I'm always doubtful of your fine complexions."

"Very well, my dear," said the parson. "Anything else?"

"Sound him," said Mrs. Irvine, in her hollow tones. "I don't encourage the girl. I tell Amelia Shadwell that the dinner service, and the piano, and the gold watch all meant nothing. That is, nothing particular; but still they may. If Hayward has any fancy for Amelia Shadwell, it is our duty to encourage it."

"But, my dear, I don't think he has," answered the parson, meekly.

"You mayn't think so, Matthew, but she may," answered Mrs. Irvine, oracularly. "But at all events there's no harm done by sounding him." And the Rev. Matthew having promised to sound Hayward, was permitted to prepare for his journey.

The idea of this visit gave great pleasure to the genial parson. Not many had come in his way, poor man, all his life, but this really was one. To go and stay with his "dear boy," when that dear boy had come in for some of the good things of this world, and to have a few days' rest and change, seemed a wonderful piece of good fortune to the Rev. Matthew.

He could not resist bragging a little to the Squire of Sanda, of Hayward's invitation.

"You see prosperity has not turned his head, Mr. Trevor," he said. "He has not forgotten his old friends."

"I was pleased to hear that my son-in-law, Sir George, had offered the late Mr. Hannaway's appointment to Mr. Hayward," said the Squire, in his old pompous fashion. "Sir George, of course, owed this young man a good deal."

"Yes," said the Rev. Matthew, with his humorous smile.

"But he has now amply repaid this," continued the Squire. "My father-in-law, Mr. Featherstone, informs me that the appointment is worth something like £1,000 a year. An excellent appointment!"

The Squire's family and the parson's were now on more intimate terms than formerly. Lucinda Featherstone had never been proud in her unmarried days, and she was not proud now. She was kind to Mrs. Irvine, and kind to Amelia. Indeed, Lucinda was doing her best to win the good-will of those around her, and show her gratitude to her elderly husband. She was grateful to him for his kindness to her father and sister. Graceless Antony Featherstone now spent a good deal of his time at Sanda Hall. His debts and his duns couldn't very conveniently follow him there. He had, moreover, to eat and drink of the best at another man's cost, and a good horse to ride on, and plenty of game to shoot, so what did Antony want more? No.