

HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")

CHAPTER I.—THE RICH CHARLOTTE.

The room had three occupants, two were men, the third a woman. The men were middle-aged and gray-haired, the woman on the contrary was in the prime of youth; she was finely made, and well proportioned. Her face was perhaps rather too pale, but the eyes and brow were noble, and the sensitive mouth showed indications of heart as well as intellect.

The girl, or rather young woman, for she was past five-and-twenty, sat by the fire, a book on her knee. The two men had drawn chairs close to a table. The elder of these men bore such an unmistakable likeness to the girl, that even the most casual observer must have guessed the relationship which existed between them. He was a handsome man, handsomer even than his daughter, but the same individualities marked both faces. While, however, in the woman all was a profound serenity and calm, the man had some anxious lines round the mouth, and some expression, now coming, now going, in the fine grey eyes, which betokened a long-felt anxiety.

The other and younger man was shrewd-looking and commonplace; but a very close observer of human nature might have said, "He may be commonplace, but do not feel too certain; he simply possesses one of those faces which express nothing, from which not the cleverest detective in Scotland Yard could extract any secret."

He was a man with plenty to say, and much humor, and at the moment this story opens he was laughing merrily and in a heart-whole way, and his older and graver companion listened with evident enjoyment.

The room in which the three sat bore evidence of wealth. It was a library, and handsome books lay on the tables, and rare old folios could have been found by those who cared to look, within the carefully locked bookcases. Some manuscripts were scattered about, and by the girl's side, on a small table, lay several carefully revised proofs, even now she was bending earnestly over a book of reference.

"Well, Jasper," said the elder man, when the younger paused for an instant in his eager flow of words "we have talked long enough about that fine land you have just come from, for even Australian adventures can keep—I am interested in something nearer home. What do you say to Charlotte there? She was but a baby when you saw her last."

"She was five years old," replied Jasper. "A saucy little imp, bless you! just the kind that would be sure to grow into a fine woman. But to tell the truth I don't much care to look at her, for she makes me feel uncommonly old and shabby."

"You gave me twenty years to grow into a woman, uncle," answered the pleasant voice of Charlotte Harman. "I could not choose but make good use of the time."

"So you have, lass—so you have; I have been growing old and you have been growing beautiful; such is life: but never mind, your turn will come."

"But not for a long long time, Lottie, my pet," interrupted the father. "You need not mind your uncle Jasper. These little speeches were always his way. And I'll tell you something else, Jasper; that girl of mine has a head worth owning on her shoulders, a head she knows how to use. You will not believe me when I say that she writes in this magazine, and this, and she is getting a book ready for the press; ay, and there's another thing. Shall I tell it, Charlotte?"

"Yes father; it is no secret," replied Charlotte.

"It is this, brother Jasper; you have come home in time for a wedding. My girl is going to leave me. I shall miss her, for she is womanly in the best sense of the word, and she is my only one; but there is a comfort—the man she is to marry is worthy of her."

"And there is another comfort, father," said Charlotte; "that though I hope to be married, yet I never mean to leave you. You know that well, I have often told you so," and here this grave young girl came over and kissed her father's forehead.

He smiled back at her, all the care leaving his eyes as he did so. Uncle Jasper had sprung impatiently to his feet.

"As to the lass being married," he said, "that's nothing; all women marry, or if

they don't they ought to. But what was that you said, John, about writing, writing in a printed book? You were joking surely, man."

"No, I was not," answered the father. "Go and show your uncle Jasper that last article of yours, Charlotte."

"Oh, no!" said Uncle Jasper, lacking a pace or two. "I'm willing with all my heart to believe it, if you swear it, but not the article. Don't confront me with the article."

"There's nothing uncommon in my writing for magazines, Uncle Jasper; a great many girls do write now. I have three friends myself who—"

Uncle Jasper's red face had grown positively pathetic in its agitation. "What a place England must have become!" he interrupted with a groan. "Well, lass, I believe you, but I have one request to make. Tell me what you like about your wedding; go into all the raptures you care for over your wedding dress, and even over the lucky individual for whom you will wear it; tell me twenty times a day that he's perfection, that you and you alone have found the eighth wonder of the world, but leave out about the books! Don't mention the unlucky magazines for which you write. Don't breathe to me the thoughts with which you fill them. Oh, if there's an awful creature under the sun 'tis a blue-stocking, and to think I should have come back to England to find such a horror in the person of my own niece!"

CHAPTER II.—THE POOR CHARLOTTE.

While this light and playful scene was being enacted in a wealthy house in Prince's Gate, and Charlotte Harman and her father laughed merrily over the Australian uncle's horror of authors and their works, another Charlotte was going through a very different part, in a different place in the great world's centre.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast than between the small and very shabby house in Kentish Town and the luxurious mansion in Kensington. The parlor of this house, for the drawing-rooms were let to lodgers, was occupied by one woman. She sat by a small shabbily covered table, writing. The whole appearance of the room was shabby; the furniture, the carpet, the dingy window panes, the tiny pretence of a fire in the grate. It was not exactly a dirty room, but it lacked all brightness and freshness. The chimney did not draw well, and now and then a great gust of smoke would come down, causing the busy writer to start and rub her smarting eyes. She was a young woman, as young as Charlotte Harman, with a slight figure and very pale face. There were possibilities of beauty in the face, but the possibilities had come to nothing; the features were too pinched, too underlined, the eyes in themselves dark and heavily fringed, too often dimmed by tears. It was a very cold day, and sleet was beginning to fall, and the smoking chimney had a vindictive way of smoking more than ever, but the young woman wrote on rapidly, as though for bare life. Each page, as she finished it, was flung on one side; some few fell on the floor, but she did not stop even to pick them up.

The short winter daylight had quite faded, and she stood up to light the gas, when the room door was pushed slightly ajar, and one of those little maids-of-all-work, so commonly seen in London, put in her untidy head.

"If you please, 'em, Harold's bin and he stood up to light the gas, when the room door was pushed slightly ajar, and one of those little maids-of-all-work, so commonly seen in London, put in her untidy head.

"I will go up to them, Anne," and you may stay down and lay the cloth for tea—I expect your master in early to-night."

She put her writing materials hastily away and with a light, quick step ran up-stairs. She entered a room which in its size and general shabbiness might better have been called an attic, and found herself in the presence of three small children. The two elder ran to meet her with outstretched arms and glad cries. The baby sat up in his cot and gazed hard at his mother with flushed cheeks and round eyes.

She took the baby in her arms and sat down in a low rocking-chair close to the fire. Harold and Daisy went on their little knees in front of her. Now that mother had come their quarrel was quite over, and the poor baby ceased to fret.

Seated thus, with her little children about her, there was no doubt at all that Charlotte Harman had a pleasant face; the care van-

ished from her eyes as she looked into the innocent eyes of her babies, and as she nursed the seven-months-old infant she began quobling a sweet old song in a true, delicious voice, to which the other two listened with delight;—

"In the days when we went gipsying.
A long time ago."

"What's gipsying mother?" asked Harold, aged six.

"Something like picnicking, darling. People who live in the country, or who are rich,—here Mrs. Home sighed—often, in the bright summer weather, take their dinner or their tea, and they go out into the woods or the green fields and eat there. I have been to gipsy teas; they are great fun. We lit a fire and boiled the kettle over it, and made the tea; it was just the same tea as we had at home, but somehow it tasted much better out-of-doors."

"Was that some time ago, mother?" asked little Daisy.

"It would seem a long, long time ago to you, darling; but it was not so many years ago."

"Mother," asked Harold, "why aren't we rich, or why don't we live in the country?"

A dark cloud, caused by some deeper emotion than the mere fact of being poor, passed over the mother's face.

"We cannot live in the country," she said, because your father has a curacy in this part of London. Your father is a brave man, and he must not desert his post."

"Then why aren't we rich?" persisted the boy.

"Because—because—I cannot answer you that, Harold; and now I must run down-stairs again. Father is coming in earlier than usual to-night, and you and Daisy may come down for a little bit after tea—that is, if you promise to be very good children now, and not to quarrel. See, baby has dropped asleep; who will sit by him and keep him from waking until Anne comes back?"

"I, mother," said Harold, and "I, mother," said Daisy.

"That is best," said the gentle-voiced mother; "you both shall keep him very quiet and safe; Harold shall sit at this side of his little cot and Daisy at the other."

Both children placed themselves, mute as mice, by the baby's side, with the proud look of being trusted on their little faces. The mother kissed them and flew down-stairs. There was no time for quiet or leisurely movement in that little house in the dingy parlor, the gas had now been lighted, and the fire burned better and brighter, and Anne, with most praiseworthy efforts, was endeavoring to make some toast, which, alas! she only succeeded in burning. Mrs. Home took the toasting-fork out of her hands.

"There, Anne, that will do nicely; I will finish the toast. Now please run away, and take Miss Mitchell's dinner up to her; she is to have a little pie to-night and some baked potatoes; they are all waiting, and hot in the oven, and then please go back to the children."

Anne, a really good-tempered little maid-of-all-work, vanished, and Mrs. Home made some fresh toast, which she set, brown, hot, and crisp, in the china toast-rack. She then boiled a new-laid egg, and had hardly finished these final preparations before the rattle of the latch-key was heard in the hall-door, and her husband came in. He was a tall man, with a face so colorless that hers looked almost rosy by contrast; his voice, however, had a certain ring about it, which betokened that most rare and happy gift to its possessor, a brave and courageous heart. The way in which he now said, "Ah, Lottie!" and stooped down and kissed her, had a good sound, and the wife's eyes sparkled as she sat down by the tea-tray.

"Must you go out again to-night, Angus?" she said presently.

"Yes, my dear. Poor Mrs. Swift is really dying at last. I promised to look in on her again."

"Ah poor soul! has it really come? And what will those four children do?"

"We must get them into an orphanage; Patterick has interest. I shall speak to him, Lottie."

"Yes, dear."

"Beat up that fresh egg I saw you putting in the cupboard when I came in; beat it up, and add a little milk and a teaspoonful of brandy. I want to take it round with me to little Alice. That child has never left her mother's side for two whole

days and nights, and I believe has scarcely tasted a morsel; I fear she will sink when all is over."

Lottie rose at once and prepared the mixture, placing it, when ready, in a little basket, which her husband seldom went out without; but as she put it in his hand she could not refrain from saying—

"I was keeping that egg for your breakfast, Angus; I do grudge it a little bit."

"And to eat it when little Alice wanted it so sorely would choke me, wife," replied the husband; and then buttoning his thin overcoat tightly about him, he went out into the night.

CHAPTER III.—THE STORY.

The children were at last in bed, the drawing-room lodger had finished her dinner, the welcome "me of lull" in the day's occupations had come, and Mrs. Home sat by the dining-room fire. A large basket, filled with little garments ready for mending, lay on the floor at her feet, and her working materials were close by; but, for a wonder, the busy fingers were idle. In vain Daisy's frock pleaded for that great rent made yesterday, and Harold's socks showed themselves most discretely out at the heels. Charlotte Harman neither put on her thimble or threaded her needle; she sat gazing into the fire, lost in reverie. It was not a very happy or peaceful reverie, to judge from the many changes on her expressive face. The words, "Shall I, or shall I not?" came often to her lips. Many things seemed to tear her judgment in divers ways, most of all the look in her father's eyes when he asked that eager, impatient question, "Mother, why aren't we rich?" But other and older voices than little Harold's said to her, and they spoke pleadingly enough, "Leave this thing alone; God knows what is best for you. As you have gone on all these years, so continue, not troubling about what you cannot understand, but trusting to Him."

"I cannot; I am so tired sometimes," sighed the poor young wife.

She was still undetermined when her husband returned. There was a great contrast in their faces—a greater almost in their voices, in the tone of her despondent, "Well, Angus," and his almost triumphant answer—

"Well, Lottie that hard fight has ended bravely. Thank God!"

"Ah! then the poor soul has gone," said the wife, moving her husband's chair to the warmest corner.

"She has truly gone; I saw her breathe her last. But there is no need to apply the word 'poor' to her; she has done with all that. You know what a weakly, troubled creature she always was, how temptation and doubt seemed to wrap her round like a mist, and prevent her seeing any of the shining blue sky. Well, it all passed away at the last, and there was nothing but a steadfast looking into the very face of her Lord. He came for her, and she just stretched out her arms and went to Him. Thank God for being privileged to witness such a death; it makes life far more easy."

A little weariness did creep perceptibly into the brave voice of the minister as he said these last words. His wife laid her hand sympathizingly on his. They sat silent for a few moments, then he spoke on a different subject.

"Is it baby to-night, Lottie?"

"Better, I think; the tooth is through at last. He will have rest now for a bit, poor little darling."

"We must be careful to keep him from catching another cold. And how is Anne getting on?"

"As well as we can expect from such an ignorant little mite, and oh! Angus, the nursery is such a cold, draughty room, and I do—I do wish we were rich."

The last words were tumbling out with a great irrepressible burst of tears.

"Why, my Lottie, what has come to you?" said her husband, touched and alarmed by this rare show of feeling. "What is it, dear? You wish we were rich, so do not I; I am quite content. I go among so very much poorer people than myself, Lottie, that it always seems to me I have far more than my fair share of life's good things; but, at any rate, my Lottie, crying won't make us rich, so don't waste your strength over it."

"Yes, dear,"

"Beat up that fresh egg I saw you putting in the cupboard when I came in; beat it up, and add a little milk and a teaspoonful of brandy. I want to take it round with me to little Alice. That child has never left her mother's side for two whole

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