

The Vicar's Nephew; or The Orphan's Vindication

CHAPTER XI.—(Cont'd).

They went out in silence, while Mrs. Penning stood amazed. On the doorstep Molly turned to her brother, her nostrils quivering.

"Those women are spies," she said. He accepted the statement in grave silence, acquiescing, and they walked on without further speech.

"Do you know what I came to London for?" she began at last.

"I know nothing, Molly; not even what sort of sister I have."

"I came to see you."

He turned, without comment, and looked at her. Her face was hard and resentful.

"I don't know what sort of brother I have, either, and I thought it was time to find out. I have more curiosity than you."

His mouth set in a sudden line, and the girl, watching him from under level brows, saw that she had stung him. He paused an instant before answering.

"I am glad you came," he said.

Molly flashed another look at him. "Are you? I'm not sure I am. It depends on—"

She broke off; then plunged on recklessly.

"Such as you are, whatever you are, you're the only near relative I've got. Don't you think we might as well know something about each other at first hand, now we're both grown up, instead of taking things for granted through other people? Or do you think blood relationships are all rubbish?"

"No, I don't think that; and, Molly, I have taken nothing for granted."

"Nothing? Not when you refused an invitation to come and see me after—how long was it? Seven—eight years?"

"It was an invitation to uncle's house. As for seeing you, I had waited so long for that that I could have patience a little longer till you could come to me rather than—"

After a little pause he added slowly:

"I couldn't go into his house. If ever we get to know each other well, you'll understand why; but I can't explain."

"Jack!" she burst out suddenly; "What was it between you and uncle? No, don't tell me if you don't want to. I had no right to ask; it's not my business. But one hears bits and scraps of things—all sorts of things."

"You have every right to ask," he answered gravely. "But I don't think I have any right to tell you."

"No, but then it's not a fair position all round. I think while you are accepting anything from uncle he has a right to ask that his enemies should not tell you things against him. Don't you?"

"Does that mean that you are his enemy? In the real sense of the word? Have you nothing to tell me but things against him?"

"Nothing."

"And nothing about Aunt Sarah? Are you her enemy too?"

He paused a moment.

"I have nothing to say about her, one way or the other."

"Jack, whatever the thing was that happened, it's more than ten years ago; and she lies awake at night and cries about you still. Last winter, when she had pleurisy, and we thought she was going to die, she clung to me and kept on repeating that she had 'done her best' for you. I don't believe Aunt Sarah ever harmed a fly in her life. Granted, you may have something against uncle; but why should you hate her?"

He put the subject aside.

"I don't hate her."

"You despise her then," the girl broke in quickly.

"That I can't help. She's lukewarm, like the angel of Laocœus; I would she were hot or cold."

Passionate tears glittered in Molly's eyes.

"You will make me hate you!" she said, in her suppressed, vehement way.

"An old woman, as broken down and feeble as she is; and you will let her go on worrying and fretting over some dead-and-gone quarrel of your schoolboy days. She asked me the other day to forgive her if she'd made mistakes in bringing me up. To forgive her, the only person in the world that ever cared for me! She's got it into her head that you were made what she calls 'wicked' by being unhappy at home and that it was somehow her fault. Were you so unhappy, Jack?"

"Unhappy!" He repeated the word with a quick throbb in his voice that made the girl start and look round at him.

"Look here, Molly," he went on with evident effort, "what's the use of raking up all this? I've nothing against Aunt Sarah, except that she was a coward and passed by on the other side. Anyhow, if she's been kind to you, I'm grateful to her for that, and she needn't worry about the rest. As for uncle, I haven't anything to say except what's better said. If you want to know why I couldn't come to the house—well, I tried to kill him once, and that's reason enough."

"I asked him about it one day, and he told me you—"

THREE VITAL QUESTIONS

Are you full of energy, vitality and general good health? Do you know that good digestion is the foundation of good health? Pains and oppression in stomach and chest after eating, with indigestion, Mother Selig's Syrup, the great herbal remedy and tonic, will cure you.

AFTER MEALS TAKE MOTHER SEIGEL'S SYRUP AND BANISH STOMACH TROUBLES

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was glad enough of the chance to see you. Why, Jack, I never saw you look so well, or so sulky. Don't you want me? You can turn me out, Miss Raymond, if I'm in the way."

"I'm afraid it's I that am in the way," said Molly. Her voice fell like a little icicle into their midst, chilling even Theo.

Jack did his conscientious best to smooth away the queer awkwardness between his visitors. But, looking from Molly to Theo and back again to Molly, he realized how hopeless it was. The miserable effort at small-talk failed at last, hopelessly, and Jack looked up from the red coals with a desperate feeling that something must be done to end the silence before it became unbearable.

"Thee," he said, "I wish you'd play. My sister has never heard you."

The musician rose at once, and fetched his instrument.

"What do you want?" he asked, springing himself down on the hearth rug with his violin against his neck.

"Folk-songs? They don't want accompaniments."

"Slavonic ones, if you will. Did you ever hear a Polish folk-song, Molly?"

"You know I've never heard anything."

She leaned back, drawing the fire-screen forward; her brow a little contracted, her eyes grave and wide in a shadowed, listening face, while the folk-songs trailed their low sound through the half-darkened room like disembodied ghosts of music buried long ago.

"Jack," said Theo, laying the violin down on his knee, "do you remember a fancy mother had just before she died, about the crocus-flowers in the grass? Well, I—I've been seeing that in my head lately, and it's coming into me, I think it's going to be for orchestra, I'm not sure yet; but I must play you some bits. Miss Raymond, did you ever look at a crocus?—I mean, really look at it?"

"Yes," she answered from the shadow of the screen. "But not often."

Her brother glanced at her in wonder; it was as if Helen had spoken.

He began to play; very softly, his eyes still on the fire, as if he were while he drifted unconsciously into improvisation, pausing now and then with lifted bow and filling the spaces with low, rhythmic speech. The violin, with its faint, waiting, its dim, inadequate murmur; the flicker of the fire; the shabby, dingy, lodging-house room; all lost their separate characters, merged into a common background of dreams. To listeners and artist alike, the glittering spears of visionary warriors, the sight and sound of a great army marching, were an actual presence, living and intense.

Silence followed, and Theo sat with bent head, trembling a little, the violin still in his hand. It was Jack who spoke first, rising to light the lamp.

"Old man," he said, "there's one thing you might try to remember now and then."

"Yes?" Theo murmured vaguely.

"Only that ordinary mortals are your fellow creatures, after all, and can sometimes see when you guide their eyes over though they're not crowned kings by right divine."

Molly made a sudden passionate movement, as though he had hurt her. Theo started up, a sort of horror in his face.

"Kings by—?" Jack, how can you! Just because I can see things in my head! Do you think I wouldn't give it all—fiddle and everything—to do things and be things like you?"

"What's nearest to being a king by right divine—to see God's warrior flowers, or to be as they are? What am I but a fiddle?"

He turned away, his voice quivering with bitter discontent, as with suppressed tears. Molly raised her head slowly and looked at her brother.

(To be continued.)

WOMEN MAKE BEST MUNITIONS.

Now Making Entire Shell of Heaviest French Guns.

Albert Thomas, the Lloyd George of France, Secretary of State for Artillery and Munitions, asked if the experience of fifteen months had demonstrated the feminine dexterity at a task so unaccustomed as shell-making, just unlearned. Then reaching into a drawer of his desk, he brought forth a fuse of a 75 shell—the most delicate part of a very finely adjusted mechanism.

"All this work," he said, pointing to the mysterious inside of the fuse, "can be done better by a woman, once she is trained to it, than by a man. And there is no part of a 75 shell a woman cannot make as well as a man. Why, in certain establishments women are carrying out the particularly ticklish job of charging the shells with high explosive. And at Lyons they have gone even further—they are making complete shells like that one there; women are doing every bit of it, from moulding the molten steel to polishing up the finished product."

The projectile he indicated stood upon his mantelpiece. It was of 155 millimetre calibre—the heaviest shell fired from a French field gun.

"Would it be a good thing to organize women workers for the purpose of enlisting their aid regularly in the industrial mobilization?" was the next question.

"Yes, yes, certainly," M. Thomas replied enthusiastically. "It would be an excellent step, and I believe would please the women and be satisfactory to the men workers as well, for the demand for labor in the munitions industry is tremendous. Of course, we have already organized the workwomen to a certain extent. They are under military orders, just as their co-workers of the other sex are. There are between thirty and forty thousand women now engaged in France in the manufacture of munitions."

KHVOSTOFF A BIG MAN IN RUSSIA

WILL ELIMINATE GERMAN INFLUENCE THERE.

He Exposed German Plots to Spread Confusion in Russia After War Began.

How little truth there is in the stories to the effect that the pro-German party, such as it is, has acquired the upper hand at Petrograd and a dominant influence over Emperor Nicholas is best shown by his appointment of M. Khvostoff, former Governor of Nijni-Novgorod and more recently one of the leaders of the party of the Right in the Duma, to the post of Minister of the Interior in the place of Prince Cherbatoff, who had only held the office for a few weeks. For M. Khvostoff, who is a very remarkable man, of great force of character, is the acknowledged head of that particular group in the Duma which aims at the complete de-Germanization of Russia and the elimination of all Teuton forces and influences from Muscovite commerce, finance, industry, agriculture, art, science, and literature, and, indeed, from Muscovite life generally.

He regards the German element in Russia, which has been a powerful factor there for the last 200 years, as a blight and as a curse on the nation. He is bent upon the emancipation of his countrymen from everything Teuton. That is the great aim of all his policies. That is what he stands for in public life. That is the cause that he has championed above every other in the Duma. So it will be readily understood what his appointment by the Czar to the Department of the Interior, the most important of all the Ministerial posts at Petrograd, the post formerly filled by Stolypin and by Plevhe, really means.

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He is very proud of his membership in the Duma, expresses his determination to retain his seat there as Deputy, in addition to the one to which he is entitled as Minister of State. He declares that the principle in which he will proceed will be centralization of policy and the decentralization of administrative work. He proclaims himself a warm friend of Finland and as favoring the complete freedom of her cultural development, of her religion, and language. At the same time he emphasizes the necessity of strengthening the authority of the Government, which is not surprising when it is mentioned that one of the reasons which led to the retirement from office of his Liberal predecessor, Prince Cherbatoff, was that when the latter decreed the dismissal of some two-score of Governors of Provincial towns and cities for failure to preserve law and order, they contemptuously refused to obey his commands or to vacate their offices.

That Khvostoff tolerates and even approves of legislative criticism of the Government is best demonstrated by the fact that since the beginning of the war he has repeatedly assailed the Administration, particularly the Ministers of Finance and of Industry, whom he has charged with favoring banks and syndicates at the expense of the consumers. A relative of the Minister of Justice, he is reputed to have a large commercial experience, acquired when Governor of Nijni-Novgorod, perhaps the greatest centre of trade in Russia, and is also an authority on banking institutions in the land of the Czars.

Three months ago M. Khvostoff delivered in the Duma the most popular and remarkable speech of the entire session, upon the machinations of the Germans in the internal affairs of Russia. Among his extraordinary revelations, which created a widespread sensation throughout the Empire, was one to the effect that more than half of the shares of the great National Bank of Siberia, controlling that powerful financial institution, were owned by the Deutsche Bank of Berlin.

German Plots.

He further brought to light the fact that more than half the shares of the biggest of the ordnance and munitions concerns in Russia, the immense Putiloff works, which until the beginning of the war enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the production of munitions, ordnance, and small arms, were owned jointly by the Kruppss, at Essen, and by the Skodas, which are the Kruppss' counterpart in Austria. Thanks to this dominating interest of the Kruppss and of the Skodas in the Putiloff Company, thousands of the latter's skilled workmen were dismissed, and the remainder put on a five-hour-day basis, when they should have been working without any interruption, in day and night shifts, after the outbreak of the war.

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"Nothing But Leaves" Not Tea Leaves Intermixed with Dust, Dirt and Stems but all Virgin Leaves.

"SALADA"

has the reputation of being the cleanest, and most perfect tea sold.

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BRITISH PAY BIG TAXES CHEERFULLY

"IT'S BETTER TO PAY MCKENNA THAN THE KAISER."

Many Trades Are More Prosperous Than Ever and Don't Care About Taxes