

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."

"Do you think that's fair to me? 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 Laodicea; 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 throbbing 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 a snob, and by the other side, anyhow, if you've 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—"

"Don't!" he interrupted. "I don't want to hear anything from you, or to tell you anything. Don't get your impressions of him from me—they wouldn't be just. And judge of me by what you see yourself, not by what any one has told you; if I'm bad let you find it out without any telling."

She turned to him with a smile.

"No one told me you were bad; and if they did, I shouldn't believe it at second hand. There are some things I remember—"

She broke off.

"Tiddles?" he asked.

Her face lit up suddenly, wonderfully. "How did you know?"

Then they both laughed, and in the silence that followed their kinship was real to them for the first time.

"He is a most unhappy man," she said. "He has spent his life in trying to shape the souls of his fellow creatures; and there's not one living thing that loves or respects him."

"Except Aunt Sarah."

"Her life has been spent in keeping up a fiction. She's getting old now, and it's wearing thin; and she's scared at the truth underneath it, and miserable."

"The truth?"

"That she despises him in her heart."

"Was that why you couldn't come to Paris?" he asked abruptly.

"You're good at understanding. I couldn't leave her; you don't know what a desolate house it is. They go through life avoiding each other's eyes; they are like people haunted by a ghost. Uncle keeps up an elaborate pretence of having forgotten that you're not pretending."

"And you?"

"I pretend not to see. And the neighbors pretend there was never any old scandal about you. We all pretend."

"Molly, don't you see how all that will end? Some day you'll come to a split with uncle, a deadly split. That's inevitable, because you're a live human creature."

"Possibly; but it won't be in her lifetime."

"She's not so old; she may live another thirty years. And what do you suppose she'd do then?"

"Whatever he told her to do."

"And if he told her to turn you out?"

"She'd do it, of course. But it would kill her. And it won't happen. Remember, I'm just all she's got in the world, even if she is lukewarm."

Poor thing, she can't help it if she was born that way; I don't suppose the man in Laodicea could. Why didn't the Lord give him more courage, instead of abusing him for being a coward?"

He laughed softly. "At least no one will accuse you of being 'born that way,' my dear."

They walked back like old friends, talking of his plans for future work.

Since Helen died he had not spoken so confidentially to any one.

For the next month London wore a sunny face to Jack. He relaxed the grind of his work a little, and spent happy afternoons wandering about Westminster Abbey and the National Gallery with Molly. Sometimes, however, they would find themselves saddled with Mildred Penning, and all the pleasure from to death under hard, inquisitive, disapproving eyes. It was in order to escape from her that Molly one day proposed spending the next Saturday afternoon at Jack's lodgings. After a short and stormy scene with Mrs. Penning, the brother and sister climbed on to the roof of an omnibus together, unchaperoned.

"Come in, Molly; I've only a bed-sitting-room, you know. Oh, Mrs. Smith has made a fire! That was thoughtful of her."

Then he drew back suddenly and stood on the threshold, staring blankly into the room.

Theo was stretched at full-length on the hearth rug, watching the dance of shadows on the fire-lit ceiling.

"Hullo, Jack."

"Theo never needed to scramble to his feet; getting up, after lying flat on the floor, he seemed merely to change one appropriate and graceful attitude for another."

"My sister," said Jack. "Theodore Miskin."

His own voice sounded dull and harsh in his ears.

"I thought you were in Vienna," he said.

Joachim can't come, and they telegraphed, asking me to play instead of him at St. James's Hall to-morrow. I

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.

"Theo," 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, curling 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 forwards; her brow a little contracted, her eyes grave and wide in a shadowed, listening look, 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 garden? Well, I—I've been seeing that in my head lately, and it's coming into the girl's face. After a while, 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 girl's face. After a 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 nearer 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 discouragement, 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 unveiled. 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, and the post formerly filled by Stolypin and by Plevh, really means.

A Moderate Conservative.

M. Khvostoff has been described as a reactionary, and Germany has insinuated that his appointment in the place of the ultra-Liberal Prince Cherbatoff means a reversion to the most arbitrary forms of autocracy. Nothing could be further from the truth. The new Minister of the Interior and from now on the dominant figure in the Administration, has never been anything else but a Moderate Conservative, and as such has represented Moscow, the ancient metropolis of the Empire, in the National Legislature.

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.

THE ARMY STEP.

The Longest Is That of the British Infantry.

There is a great difference in the length of the steps of the soldiers now engaged in war.

The longest step of all is that of the British infantry, which is thirty-one and a half inches. Germany and Switzerland come next, each doing thirty-one inches, and France, Italy, and Austria each step out twenty-nine inches. The shortest of all is found in the Russian Army. The Czar's soldier's step is twenty-seven and a half inches, and he only does a hundred and twelve to the minute.

This is beaten by the German, who does one hundred and fourteen to the minute. The Austrians step out at the rate of a hundred and fifteen; the French and Italian at a hundred and twenty.

It therefore follows that a Russian will take twenty minutes to march a mile, the Austrian eighteen and two-thirds minutes, the French and Italian eighteen minutes, and the German ten or eleven seconds less.

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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 Krupp, at Essen, and by the Skodas, which are the Krupp's counterpart in Austria. Thanks to this dominating interest of the Krupp 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.

M. Khvostoff also exposed the particulars of how the Germans, by means of a controlling interest in the Russian Bank of Exterior Trade, in the Mezhdunarodny Bank and in a long list of similar institutions, not only organized corners in indispensable commodities since the beginning of the war, but had slowed down the output of war supplies of every kind, by diverting and withholding both imported and native coal from the factories. Khvostoff made many other revelations of the same kind during a speech that lasted for more than a couple of hours, and which was listened to with rapt attention, indeed, open-mouthed, in astonishment, and punctuated with exclamations of indignation by the members.

At the close thereof loud demands were made for the immediate organization in the Legislature of a National party, embracing all political factions and united with the one purpose of emancipating everything and everybody in Russia from German influences and control. It is this new party that M. Khvostoff heads in the Duma that is now once more about to

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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 Krupp, at Essen, and by the Skodas, which are the Krupp's counterpart in Austria. Thanks to this dominating interest of the Krupp 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.

BLACK, GREEN OR MIXED. SEALED PACKETS ONLY.

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