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THE FAMILY HONOUR.

BY MRS. C. L. RALFOUR.

Continued from page 229.

"Yes, all," Mr. Austwicke answered, proudly. "Speak freely: I'm not bound to believe all I'm told; but I'll hear it."

Mr. Hope had been placed in a chair at the end of the table, and the two young men stood on either side of him. All three faced Mr. Austwicke, who sat at the other end, while Dr. Griesbach and Allan were at the side.

Mr. Hope drew from his pocket the marriage-lines, and a bundle of letters, proving his connection with the matter as having had charge of the children. The papers were passed to Mr. Austwicke, who examined them in silence. After a few moments he said angrily—

"And you have lived, Mr. Hope, on my land, and your daughter in my house, and never explained this till now! Am I to conclude that you were in league with my sister, sir? Do you know what the word *conspiracy* means?"

Thus adjured, Mr. Hope earnestly related how he came to have the charge of two—as he thought, twin—children, explaining that he never thought them other than he had known them from their infancy in Canada; his struggles to rear them well; his troubles; the appearance of Burke on the scene—which Mr. Austwicke recognised as being at the time of his brother Wilfred's return, and death. Mr. Hope continued his narrative with the flight of the boy, and his daughter Marian being engaged as Gertrude's governess; the sum paid by Burke for Mysie Grant's being placed as articled pupil (a double amount being noted down in Miss Austwicke's papers); then their coming, father and daughter, to live at Austwicke; and their entire ignorance both of any connection of the child or any children with the Austwicke family, or whether the boy was alive, until—

"Until when?" exclaimed Allan, "until last night?"

"What, then, you saw my sister before—before—" said Mr. Austwicke.

"I saw the youth himself," added Mr. Hope, feebly, being much exhausted.

A look of intense defiant enquiry was on the faces of Mr. Austwicke and his son, as the one word "Where?" shaped itself upon their lips.

Just then Dr. Griesbach laid his hand on Mr. Austwicke's arm, and pointing with his other hand to Norman, said in a low voice, which however, was perfectly audible to all present—

"He is here now. There he stands!"

There was a dead pause, in which none spoke or moved. Norman's face, as all eyes perused it, was very calm, but pale to the lips. For a moment he cast down his eyes, but rallying, raised them and looked steadily, yet sadly, towards Mr. Austwicke, who, after a few moments, with natural warmth—for was not his own son Allan there before him, disinherited and ruined?—said—

"Dr. Griesbach do you call yourself my friend, and at the very first blush of this plausible yet strange tale you believe it, and expect me to do so? But the law is not so easily satisfied: for a far less prize than the Austwicke estates a scheme like this might be organised. Young man you will not win so easily." He addressed the last sentence to Norman, who now spoke, the light coming to his eye, and the colour to his cheek—

"Sir, if it's the Austwicke estates you speak of, I don't want to win them. I come here to displace no one; certainly not those who never sought to injure me, and who have been used to that which, as I never knew the possession of, I cannot miss."

"Then what brings you here?" said Allan Austwicke, in breathless surprise.

"I came to seek one whom I left rashly, if not ungratefully. I came to get Mr. Hope's forgiveness; and in my efforts to find him, I made the discovery you seem to charge on me as a sin. Though why or how being wronged and injured—as it seems I have been, I, and another far more helpless—makes me an offender, I know not. There is one now in this room who can vouch for my life within six weeks of my leaving Mr.

Hope. He—Dr. Griesbach—knows I can work—maintain myself—with God's blessing, make my way; and that I am not without a friend—a kind friend—in his own near kinsman. I don't want the Austwicke acres, if it displaces or injures any one. I should certainly like to bear my father's name; that's not much, but it's something to one who has feared he had no name. I think I'd care not to disgrace my rightful name."

The youth's words had come hurriedly; strong emotion gave a natural grace to his erect attitude and outstretched arm, and stamped the lofty impress of truth upon his features.

"Disgrace it! no," said Mr. Austwicke, his better nature roused, in spite of his prejudices. "You shall bear it for me, come what may."

Allan had left his place as the youth spoke, and drawn near to Norman, his face kindling with enthusiasm. When, at his father's words, all the barriers of reserve were thrown down, he took both Norman's hands in his and shook them heartily, saying bluntly—

"I'm no cheat. You'll not find me the fellow to oust anybody out of his rights. Why, then, you're our Gertrude's brother—that's something to be proud of, I can tell you."

He shook his honest head ruefully as he spoke, for at that moment the loss of a brother's place to True seemed almost as bad as the loss of Austwicke.

"Gertrude's brother!" said Norman in a perplexed tone; "that's to me another marvel. All this morning I have been saying, who is Mysie?"

"Nay, I can unravel that," said Mr. Nugent, "and I'm here for that purpose. When I came from my sister Maynard's yesterday, whither I had gone with Mr. Allan, I found a letter at home waiting me from a brother clergyman. Its contents were so important, that I did not go to Mr. Hope's at once about it, wishing to have some time—that is, a night's consideration—over it."

He paused, for the recollection of the tragedy of the previous night weighed on them all, and would not bear allusion. It was a relief to read the letter.

MY DEAR SIR,—You may not have wholly forgotten me, as I passed a fortnight with you once at our friend Archdeacon Wincanton's. But my object in writing is not so much to recall myself to your recollection, as to state a matter to you which, from the name of your parish, I think concerns the leading family there.

I was called, last week, to a Mrs. Johnston, a widow, who wished, before her death, to tell me something about her late husband, which she thought of importance. His former wife came out to Canada with her brother, a man named Burke, who soon after returned to England. They brought two children with them—twins—a boy and a girl, whose maintenance was paid for by some relatives in India or England; I am not clear which. It transpired, however, in a quarrel between Burke and his sister, that the children were not related—that the girl had been taken from a soldier's widow, named Grant, who died on the voyage. She was coming out on speculation, and had not a friend in the world. The motive for taking the child was not kindness, but to substitute her for the real twin sister of the boy, who had either died or been left in Scotland. My informant was much troubled in her mind when I questioned her closely, for she said her name had once been McNaughton; that her first husband, an elder of the kirk, "and well-doing man," had compelled her to turn her sister, Isabel Grant, out of doors. That she had since learned from Johnston that her sister had really been married to a gentleman named Austwicke, and that the boy brought to Canada was hers; also, that the child had a twin sister. She added that Burke paid the money so irregularly, that Johnston, when his first wife died, was glad to give them into the charge of a Mr. and Mrs. Hope, who took both children, believing them to be twins, to England. The woman told me this at intervals, and expressed repentance for her hardness to her sister, who it seems, became insane, and, she supposed, was dead. She added, nothing had prospered with her. She had been wronged in her widowhood, by her husband's