

THE LAST SCENE OF THE PLAY.

(CONCLUDED.)

She did not answer, the words seemed so out of place, so foreign to all things possible; they fell unnoticed on the space about them. For a few moments there was silence again. . . . Suddenly she looked up at the man beside her, at his tall figure, his handsomeness, at his strange, uncertain eyes. She had been very proud of him. There had been phases during their married life when he had been cold and strange, but never a time since she had first known him, when she had not loved him, when he had not seemed like no other man on earth. It was all over. For ever and for ever finished. There was nothing in the living world that could adjust things, no chances, no possibilities that could set them right; nothing that could bring to life a woman whose white face and closed eyes were always before her as though in some dim shadow—a face that waited, she did not dare to think for what. He, watching her, understood something of what was in her heart. He felt that in a measure she had softened towards him. He put out his hand; she drew back, but more gently than before.

'Charlotte,' he said, 'my wife, will you kiss me?'

But though his voice was gentle, it was still curious; he was still experimenting upon her. He had loved her in the past, and he remembered it; but it was doubtful if he loved her much now. She heard his words, but did not move till he repeated them. Then she dragged herself a step towards him, and, with a shudder, put the knowledge of all things from her. Her heart filled with tenderness—miserable, aching tenderness. Weary and desperate, she felt as if for a single moment she must feel herself clasped to him once more, it might be for the last time on earth. Something like a sob broke from her. He took her in his arms and put his face against hers; and so there came to them a moment's rest—the only living rest that was possible to him in all the world.

'God help me, Charlotte,' he said. 'Let me be what I may, I have loved you with all my heart.'

The shifty look had gone from his eyes—his voice was natural. It was as if his life, touching hers, was for a moment purified by it; as if the evil that had possessed him stood a little way off, waiting till she had drawn apart from him. 'But you shudder when you come near me now, you are afraid.'

'No, no, not of you; but of—that, of what you did.'

'Have you any love for me still?' he asked. She did not answer for a moment. He looked down at her face and mentally traced out the lines that misery had drawn on it. 'But I can feel that it is all gone,' he said cynically; 'you only love the good in me, and there was never much of that. Now you are merely doing your duty, and trying to bear with me.'

She looked at him almost in wonder, and spoke in a low voice that seemed to come from the depth of her soul.

'There has never been a time when I have not loved you since the day we met first, when I was a little girl. It has grown with me and strengthened with me; it is my life to love you, a thing I cannot shake off. Even though it shrinks from you or make no sign, it is there—but this,' she said, clasping her hands, 'kills me. It is worse than death. I know I shrink from you and shudder, and dread your touch and shiver at your voice, at your step, and yet I love you. Oh, if I could for ever and ever be burnt for you, so that you might be without that crime upon you, it would be sweeter than heaven—far.' For a moment she stopped. He did not speak. He stood waiting for her to speak again, in doubt, almost in awe, like one who has strayed into a church and stands before the altar of a religion at which he has sometimes scoffed, but suddenly feels to be true. 'It is my life to love you,' she repeated. 'Do not doubt me or think that I shall fail you because I could not kiss you or let your arms go round me. There is something stronger in me than my shrinking self, something that clings to you, and cannot swerve from you.'

'Not though you know me now for a coward and a murderer,' he asked.

The bitter tears fell down her face. 'No,' she said slowly, 'not even though I know you are a murderer—but her lips refused to say the word. 'Oh that I could have been both for you,' she cried, bowing her head, 'could have done the crime and borne the load, and you never knowing.' She put her face down on her hands and rested them on the escritoire, while he stood silent and ashamed, seeing clearly as though a door had opened.

'I cannot tell,' he said at last, 'what put it in your head to care for me. I have never been fit for you for one single moment in my whole life.'

'Oh, yes, yes, you have been.'

'No; I was never worth your loving,' he said in a low voice, 'and yet though I have been not only what you know me now, but everything else on earth that was bad, I have loved you.' As if her measure were not quite full, some fiend put a sudden thought into her heart. She raised her head and looked at him eagerly.

'Harford,' she said, in a voice that had changed altogether, 'you have loved me—well and truly? Tell me that: I know it, but let me hear you say it.' There was no doubt of this in her heart; it was but to hear him say it, and to get such comfort as she could from his words. But he turned away and was silent. A new terror possessed her. 'I do not mean that time before, but since we married, dear,' she said entreatingly, and a world of tenderness came into her voice. 'Since I have been your wife you have loved me truly and been faithful?' There was a long moment's silence before he spoke.

'There shall be no lie between us now, Charlotte,' he said. 'I have not even been faithful to you. Yet I have loved you, do not doubt that. You have been the one woman in the world to me.'

'And yet not faithful?' She could not say another word; her life seemed to wane, her senses to stupify.

The man looked at her wonderingly, doubtful what to do, cursing the folly that had made him betray himself. He had had other things to say when he called her from the inner room. There was a matter of life and death to arrange, and quickly, and as yet he had not entered upon it. For a moment he stood considering, then, kneeling by the sofa, he leant over her.

'Charlotte,' he said tenderly, 'look up. You were always the bravest woman on earth. You are not going to break down now?'

'No,' she answered bitterly, 'you need not fear that.'

'You women do not understand men, the power that mere flesh and blood has over them, and yet the little difference it makes to their best feelings. I have never swerved from you in my heart, even when I have been falsest to you. I have loved no other woman on earth, could have endured life with no other, have trusted thoroughly no other human being. Men and women are so different; a man can separate life, feeling one thing for one woman and one thing for another, yet truly love just one. A woman puts all she has on one man, and would think anything short of that treason. I have been a scoundrel, everything that is bad, but you have been the one woman of my life; any good that was in me, any strength, has been spent in loving you; only the badness and weakness have gone elsewhere.' She raised her head. Her face was proud and white.

'I only saw the good, and did not think the other existed. It seems as if there had been two men—the one I knew, the other some fiend that mocked and tempted him.' 'That is so, Charlotte,' he answered simply. She lifted her eyes to his face—the dear face she had loved so well. Good or bad, he was everything to her even now, and her heart clung to him as the ship wrecked soul clings with despairing hands to the battered, broken thing that was once a ship with a freight of happy life; clings desperately, knowing that when it is gone there will be only the black water and the everlasting silence.

'If we could get away into some other world—' she began, with lips that quivered.

'We will, we must.'

'Leaving behind this woe and misery, and begin some new life together—if we could die out of this one we have known, and in some unknown land—' she went on, with a voice full of infinite longing, after all that she felt was for ever at an end.

'My dear,' he said gently, 'we must. In one form or other we must die, either by those, or he made a sign towards the drawer, 'or, living, we must vanish and leave no track behind.'

'Why?—Why?' she repeated, for he half-hesitated, as if he were loth to break in upon her momentary calmness, her ghost of a dream of a future.

'I think we are getting towards the end,' he said, slowly; 'that this is somehow,' and he looked round the cold, bare room, 'the last scene of the play.'

'What do you mean?—tell me.' She put her hands on his shoulders and forgot everything but his danger.

'I called you just now to break it to you—'

'Have they traced us?'

'Pretty nearly,' and the old calm manner came back. 'This morning I bought a paper at Vevey. They have traced us to Lausanne, they will not be long doing the rest. I came back by the upper paths again, and looked round the firwood above; there is no practicable escape in that direction. But we must get from here at once—as soon as it is dark to-night.'

'Why not now?'

'We may be watched; we should certainly be seen. I have planned it all. They may be a little time getting the clue to us

up here. To-night, when the old woman is asleep, I will make a new start—'

'You?' He felt the tug had come. He knew she would help him, but whether she would trust him too he was waiting to find out. For he did not know himself what the result of his going would be, even though he escaped safely. How much he still cared for her and how necessary he would find her he wanted to prove. He had not been able to help wondering how it would feel to be cut absolutely adrift from all his present ties. After all, this world might contain more surprises yet; but if it refused him liberty, or threatened still worse, he could give it the slip, and perhaps from across the strange boundary look back, unseen and triumphant, at the things that had perplexed him and that in the end he had baffled. Meanwhile he looked at the woman before him.

'You?' she repeated.

'I think it would be better for me to go alone, if you have the nerve to stay; I have thought it well over. I can disguise myself a little and get towards the Rhoné Valley, perhaps cross the lake unnoticed by one of the morning steamers, and so get over to Savoy, and there trust to chance; or I may push along the valley and get by some lonely pass into Italy.'

'And I?'

'You must stay and pretend that I am ill to the woman below. She need not enter the bedroom and will think I am there. I must devise some means of letting you know where I am, and when it is safe you shall come to me; but they know we are together, and are less likely to trace us if I start alone. Besides you could not walk and bear the fatigue that I can. You see I have thought it out. Can you do it?'

'Yes, I can do it,' she answered; 'you know that. You had better go as soon as it is dark; you will get further on by the morning. But you must have food. At seven the woman will bring our supper; she had better see you—'

She stopped, for he was not listening to her.

'I thought I heard a footstep go round the house,' he said. They stood up breathlessly; for a moment she felt paralysed. He opened the door and looked down the stairs; all was dusky and silent. The woman beneath was still sleeping beside the empty stove. He went along the landing to the window at the back of the house, and came back quickly, with his face pale and determined. He hurried towards the closed shutters and looked through the bars. Then he turned quickly round.

'It is too late,' he said; 'we are surrounded back and front. They are at the door.' For a moment she stood helpless looking at him; the dazed manner passed from her.

'What must we do?' she asked in the voice of a woman awaking.

'There is only one thing; there is no other chance left.' His anxiety to see how she would act now that the test had come seemed to be his strongest feeling.

'Is there no escape?' she gasped.

'None. We will be absolutely certain first; but half-a-dozen men can hardly be round the house for any other purpose.' They stood by the open door of the salon, he with his arm just touching her waist, yet drawing back a little, she leaning forward, her face ashy white, her eyes flashing with a strange fire.

There was a loud knock at the barred front door; with a loud throb her heart echoed it. They could almost hear the old woman start from her sleep and push back the stool on which her legs had rested; it made a grating noise on the stone floor. The knocking was repeated. The two listening above drew closer together. They heard the old woman going slowly to the door. The man looked at his wife and made a step towards the escritoire. With a cry she threw her arms round him, kissing him as if she would draw his whole soul into her heart.

'I will not live one hour without you, my love, my own. Oh, if I could but give you my life and soul and take yours into mine!—'

'You forgive me,' he said gently, smoothing back her hair, and looking at her face as he held it between his hands. The strange light was in his eyes; even then he could not give himself up wholly to a last farewell. He was alive to the finger-tips with the whole situation, eager to see what the next thing would be in this world or the other. Her agony was odd to him still, but a great tenderness came into his heart, a great gratitude to the pure woman who had loved him. For the first time he shuddered, though only for a moment, at his own past. He kissed her, and as he did so there swept over him the sudden knowledge that here they parted, that in any life to come together they would be no more. Already space seemed to be wrenching them asunder, and his heart grew cold as he felt it.

'You forgive me, darling, I know that,' he said, with a long sigh; and then his composure and coolness came back to serve him to the end.

'Forgive you?' she said. 'Oh, don't ask me that. You are my life, my heaven,

my eternity—there is none other for me, and I will have none other. Do life and heaven ask forgiveness?' The door had been opened below; as in a dream they had heard their own names uttered. There were voices and steps coming along the passage; already at the foot of the stairs. There was not a moment left; he looked at her; she understood. Her head had been on his breast—she lifted it; her tender hands let go, and they had parted. He took the pistols from the drawer; he hid one under the hard cushion of the sofa, looking at her meaningly, with the gleam of triumph in his eyes. The footsteps came round the bend in the stairs. She nodded to him with a scared look on her face, but he was satisfied. The men coming up were in sight of the doorway. In a second she was outside of it, holding the door handle in her hands. Tall and erect she stood, without a sign of fear, and faced them.

'What do you want?' she asked. For a moment she hesitated, as if uncertain what to do. Her hands trembled; otherwise she did not stir, but like a flash it went through her that she was holding the door too while her husband died.

'Mrs. Harford Wilson?' one of the strange men said in English.

'Yes, Mrs. Harford Wilson,' she answered defiantly, and waited for the sound from within. Her heart throbbed. What did it mean, the strange silence. Had he faltered? Was he to be taken after all—taken and hanged as a felon? She had left him with the pistol in his hand. She remembered the second one ready beneath the sofa-cushion.

'Madame,' said an old man with a silver-headed stick (he was the representative of the police from the village), 'you must stand aside; we have to arrest your husband.' They advanced a step. They were four stairs from the top, within two yards of her. She grasped the handle more tightly, almost supporting herself by it, but her calmness staggered the men before her. She looked scornfully at the old man who had spoken.

'We have a warrant for his apprehension on the charge of murder,' the Englishman said, in the business voice of an officer of the law. 'You must stand aside,' and he advanced, 'or we shall be obliged to use force and—there was a sharp report, the sound of a heavy fall. The men started back in dismay. The woman's hands fell from the door handle, and with a click the door opened for an inch or two. She staggered, but for a second there was a smile of triumph on her lips; the gleam that had been in Harford's eyes seemed to pass through her, then a cry burst from her.

'You can enter—there is only a dead man there,' she said, and fell senseless across the doorway.

THE END.

Victims of Fear.

Now that such precautions are being taken against cholera, it is well to remember that one of the surest safeguards is a firm mind and an equable disposition. Cholera is a malady that assails the bowels, and fright affects the same regions in a peculiar way. One of the common sayings descriptive of a person under the influence of fear is "his bowels turned to water." A resolute will can often conquer fright and ward off the disease. An old German story that illustrates the point runs as follows:

Many years ago, while cholera was raging in parts of Germany and extending daily its baneful influence, an old doctor, taking an evening stroll outside the gates of his town saw coming toward him a horrible object. Its form and shape was human, but its aspect was a mass of corruption.

'Who are you?' asked the doctor.

'I am the cholera.'

'Where are you going?'

'I am going to that town.'

The doctor, terrified, pleaded and begged for the monster to change its route, but to no purpose. Its road led through the town, and into the town it must go. But to compromise with the good old doctor, the cholera promised not to kill more than five persons in the town. Next morning the physician was called to a patient, whom he found to have the cholera. The cases multiplied hourly, and consternation spread among the people of the city, and all those who could get away did so. There were not five, but there were 5,000 deaths in the town. After the cholera had subsided, the doctor, in his walks, again met the cholera spectre, and upbraided it for not having kept its word with him. Said the cholera: 'I swear I have kept my promise—not killed more than five of your fellow-citizens. The others died of fear.'

Here's a Fine Specimen of Protection.

Seven cents to a poor shop girl to make a shirt! exclaimed Harford, and ten to Chinese laundryman to spit on it and iron it each week! That's what they call protection to American industry.

How is your father? Very bad sur, indeed. The doctor sez if he duzn't rest easy to-morrow he'll be dead before morning.

CHOLERA CURE.

Common Sense Treatment by an Old Physician.

The following appears in Sunday Truth (Buffalo) and is guaranteed by that paper to be the experience of a reliable physician:—

Much has been written of cholera; its history is to be found in all the text books of practice, to which those who are interested in pursuing the subject more deeply are referred. The object of this article is to offer to our people a simple, almost domestic, view of the disease and its treatment.

When cholera has become a fact in any community, when it is actually present, there is in the general mind of the people a keen anxiety, a fear, that scarcely any visible danger equals; a sort of passive waiting for something. Each wonders how soon he or his may be victims. Now this very passiveness is a bad thing. When the disease is present let every one cultivate cheerfulness. When an epidemic has to select its victim it usually seizes him who is scared. Fear is a great depressor of the system. Cleanliness in person is to be looked to. A tepid (half warm) bath should be taken every other day; eating and drinking in moderation; avoiding indigestible things. Ice water, in large quantities, is also to be avoided; small pieces of ice, put into the mouth, is better to allay the thirst of hot weather.

Avoid everything calculated to induce looseness of the bowels.

The usual and very important matter of sanitary inspection of foul places and things, disinfectants, etc., is always looked after by boards of health, and physicians are always ready to suggest public measures for the general good. So, then, it only remains for the writer to make such suggestions as will assist those who may fall into the danger that may menace us should we be unfortunate enough to be waited upon by the Asiatic terror. The simple hygienic directions given above will suffice in that direction, so we will

SUPPOSE A CASE OF CHOLERA.

The symptoms occur quickly, vomiting, purging—in the order given, sometimes the reverse. In any case the first thing to be done is to clean out the stomach thoroughly. Give the following emetic: Pulverized ipecac, twenty-five grains; tartar emetic, two grains; mix well in a cupful of warm water or milk and let the patient swallow it. Vomiting will follow from it in a few minutes. The vomiting itself will often effect the action of the bowels—checking them. After the emetic has operated, continue to give the patient a cupful of warm water every ten or fifteen minutes for awhile to help clean out the stomach. But should the vomiting appear obstinate or alarming, give fifteen to thirty drops of Dilute Sulphuric Acid (to be had at the druggists') every fifteen or twenty minutes in a wine glassful of water.

This, in a little while, will generally check both vomiting and purging. In case it does not do so in a short time, an hour say, use the following prescription, remembering always that if the first symptoms, such as diarrhoea and vomiting, are controlled and checked, the graver, fatal phases of the disease, as cramp, collapse, etc., will rarely occur. Cut short, then, the first diarrhoea.

RECIPE.

Tincture kino, tincture of rhubarb, tincture of cayenne, red pepper, tincture of opium, essence of peppermint, spirits of camphor; equal parts of each. Mix well and give fifteen to thirty drops in a wineglassful of water every fifteen to twenty minutes, till diarrhoea or vomiting is checked, if the remedy is administered early and faithfully very few cases will reach the stage of cramp. Should this state unfortunately be reached, larger doses of the same remedy may be given, in addition to stimulants, such as brandy—a tablespoonful, in which ten grains of Carbonate of Ammonia (hartshorn) is dissolved, every fifteen minutes, till relief is obtained. Hot flannel blankets wrapped about the body, bottles of hot water to the feet, sides of the body and between the thighs, to restore heat. The great thirst present can be relieved by small bits of ice put into the mouth. Strong beef tea with brandy should be given in repeated small quantities to keep up the strength. If the stomach will not retain it, it should be injected into the bowels.

The foregoing is a brief outline. In times of epidemic physicians are in great demand, hence many suffer for the want of medical advice. Much precious time is lost waiting for the doctor, hence everyone when cholera is threatened may, by a little trouble, put themselves in possession of the means of saving life should they be obliged to face the plague.

A half hour at the beginning of an attack of cholera is the most important period in the case.

She was a girl of wisdom. He said to her: Do you love to wander in the moonlight? Yes, she answered. Why? Because it saves gas. Then he did some mental arithmetic, thought it over, and said Will you be mine?