

NO MORTGAGE ON THE FARM.

BY JOHN H. YATES.

Mary let's kill the fatted calf and celebrate the day. For the dreadful mortgage on the farm at last is wiped away.

Don't all the Yankees celebrate the fourth day of July. Because 'twas then that freedom's sun lit up their Nation's sky?

I've risen many mornings an hour before the sun, and night has overtaken me before the task was done.

And, Mary, you have done your part in rowing to the shore, by taking eggs and butter to the little village store.

And Bessie, our sweet daughter—God bless her loving heart; that lad that gets her for a wife must be by nature smart.

I'll build a little cottage soon, to make your heart rejoice; I'll buy a good piano to go with Bessie's voice.

Lay by your faded calico and go with me to town. And get yourself and Bessie a new and shinier gown.

While our hearts are now so joyful, let us, Mary, not forget. To thank our God in heaven for being out of debt.

TO THE BITTER END. By Miss M. E. Braddon.

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By Miss M. E. Braddon.

AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' ETC.

CHAPTER XLIII.—(Continued.)

For some minutes after this Sir Francis Cleveland was inclined to be angry, and George had to be apologetic, and to assure her husband that she had never doubted him, not even for a moment.

"It may have been poor Harcross's picture," suggested Sir Francis.

"O no, it was much too handsome, and much too young."

"But it was painted when he was five years younger, you see, George, and it may have been a flattering likeness then."

"It may," said George doubtfully. "But it was your face, looking at me with dreamy gray eyes. O Frank, think what I must have suffered."

"Then you must have doubted me, George, and that was a crime,—matrimonial high-treason. But for heaven's sake, tell me all about this man Redmayne, and his accusation. The clue to this murder may be in that."

"I know that he was dreadfully angry," answered George, "and that he seemed desperate, like a man who could do anything."

Questioned closely by her husband, George described the scene in the library, repeating as faithfully as she could every word that had been spoken by Richard Redmayne.

"This would fairly account for Harcross's objection to come here," thought Sir Francis.

"He kissed his wife, and gave her a free pardon for that offence which he had called matrimonial high-treason."

"But don't do it again, George. You might take up some other delusion, and I might not be able to prove an alibi quite so easily. And now I must go and talk to Valery about this business, and perhaps to Mr. Rufnell the constable."

"O Francis, will they hang that poor farmer?"

"Inevitably, I should imagine, if he shot Harcross."

"But he had been so badly treated—his daughter tempted away from him."

"Granted, my dear; but the law does not recognise the shooting of seducers."

summer at Brierwood—just five years ago—and was unceremoniously upon the subject—never would talk of it, or even tell the name of the place till it was dragged out of him.

Mr. Rufnell the constable came in while they were talking, with an important air, as of a man whose genius had coped with stupendous difficulties, and emerged victorious from the struggle.

"I think we've got a clue, Rufnell," said Sir Francis gravely.

"Have you, sir?" said the constable, with a saturnine smile. "Very likely, sir; but I've got the man."

"What, you've found out—"

"I've got him, sir; leastways, I've got his gun, which is pretty much the same thing. The man is Joseph Flood, your groom; and we've got as neat a chain of circumstantial evidence against him as was ever laid before a jury."

But to have murdered a man who had never injured him—to have shed innocent blood! That was different, and the burden of this fatal unnecessary deed weighed him down to the ground.

He went home to Brierwood, but not to rest. There was a nameless horror in the place—a horror of stillness and narrowness and airlessness. The familiar rooms seemed no wider than a prison cell—in the garden there was neither air nor freedom, only a sultry heat that stifled him.

The sound of Mrs. Bush's voice droning some ancient ditty, with a quavering turn at the end of each line, jarred upon his nerves to excruciation. He was in that state of mind in which a man can hardly support his own existence—in which his most natural impulse is to blow out his brains.

Richard Redmayne had thought of this manner of escape from a present that was intolerable into an unknown future. He had gone up stairs to his room and had handled his pistols; had stood for a few moments irresolute with one of them in his hand, looking down the barrel, and thinking how swift a settlement that might make of all his perplexities. Yet after that brief deliberation he put the revolvers back into their places.

"I must see the end of this business," he said to himself. "It would be a cowardly thing to turn my back upon it."

Had it not been for this thought—had it not been for the apprehension that some innocent man might be charged with his crime—how gladly would he have fled from that narrow world to the wide pastures and broad blue lakes of his beloved Gippisland; to that newer wilder life beyond the fern-tree scrub, among the waters of many rivers winding down from breezy mountain-tops, to that fresh untrodden world, where he could wander with his gun from sunrise to sunset shooting wild duck or bandicoot—where he had the freedom and the power of a savage king! For all the days of his life until now he had loved this Kentish homestead with an abiding affection—had preferred it above all other scenes, however glorious in their wilder beauty; but to-day his heart sickened at sight of the narrow fields, the patch of fertile landscape shut in by woods and hills that seemed to be within his arm's length. To-day he was seized with a wild yearning for that other home beyond the southern sea.

"O God, why could I not wait?" he asked himself. "Why could I not wait to be sure of my man? My wrongs had kept so long, that they might have kept a little longer. Was there any fear that my hatred would grow cold? And to fire like that—at random—in the dark! Yet I could swear that it was his face I saw—it was a trick that the devil played upon me, perhaps. And I might have drunk more than usual yesterday—I drowse I did. My brain was on fire after I had seen him, and I may have drunk a good deal without thinking what I was doing. Yet, my senses were clear enough when I fired that gun, and I can swear that it was his face I saw in the moonlight."

He was not a superstitious man—was indeed too unlearned for much superstition. But he had heard country folks talk of witchcraft, and began to think he had been the dupe of some diabolical influence, so very certain was he that the face in the miniature was the face of the man he had slain.

He walked up and down by the broad flower-border where the roses were still blooming—the roses she had loved and cared for—not slim aristocratic standards, but broad spreading bushes or veritable trees straggling upward in unkept profusion. There were many of them older than himself, bushes from which his young wife had gathered nosegays for the Sabbath-day adornment of the best parlour; old-fashioned cabbage and maiden's bluish and white and red moss roses, no *Gloire de Dijon*, or *Malmaison*, or *Lady Banks*, or later fashionable products of the horticulturist's art.

He paced to and fro in an agony of doubt and expectation. It was long past two, and the inquest at Clevedon was on, if not over. What would be the result? An open verdict, perhaps—by some person or persons unknown! In that case what should he do? Consider his own safety, his own inclination, and start at once for Brisbane? How if he chose that selfish course, the natural course for guilt; and how if, when he was gone, circumstances should so shape themselves as to weave a halter for the neck of an innocent man? A luckless wretch might be suspected, tried, and hung before he could hear of it yonder.

"No," he said to himself resolutely; "I'm not such a scoundrel as that! I'll stand by my guns. So long as there's no mistake made, I'll hold my tongue. But if an innocent man should be in danger, I'll give myself up."

He thought of the result of that act. It would be a hard thing to die a shameful death before the eyes of the people who had known him, and respected and liked him, from a boy; to bring the name of Redmayne, the good old name, for whose redemption from the stain of debt and difficulty he had worked so hard out yonder; to bring that time-honoured name under so deep a disgrace, that no future generations of honest Redmaynes could ever wash the

foul blot away. To stand confessed before the world as a midnight assassin, a wretch who had not even given his foe a chance of defending himself, a purposeless shedder of blood, whose crime bore a double odium for having been a blunder! He fancied himself hooked upon the scaffold, and jerked into eternity amidst the execration of his fellow-men. He fancied what Jim and Mrs. Jim would say when the hideous news came to them, and a vision of that fair home which he was never to see again, and of all the things that he might have done there in years to come, arose before him. Those future unknown years seemed strangely sweet to him now that he had forfeited the right to live them.

He had eaten nothing since yesterday, but he did not get through those dismal hours of suspense without an occasional "nobbler." A slow fever devoured him, and his dry lips needed to be moistened now and then, although the spirit which he drank raw to-day did not exercise a cooling influence upon his system. In vain did Mrs. Bush urge him to pick a bit of a savoury roasted spare-rib of pork with sage-and-onions, which she had prepared as an appropriate dinner for a sultry summer's day; "something light and tasty," as she remarked, when recommending it to her employer. "Do try and eat a bit, now, Mr. Redmayne," she pleaded. "It don't do nobody any good drinking raw spirits on a empty stomach. A glass of brandy's not half the harm if yer inside's lined with good victuals. But to go on pouring that burnin' stuff on yer emptiness is regular suicide. There's no call for you to be upset by this here murder; and when your spirits have had a turn like that, you seem to want something substantial to settle them."

Mr. Redmayne declined the spare-rib, however, nay, would not even sit down, or make any pretence of eating his dinner. He paced the garden, listened to the striking of the distant church-clock, and waited for tidings of the inquest. Somebody would surely bring the news he longed for, and yet dreaded.

Somebody did. At half-past five Mrs. Bush's goodman came home to his tea, a cool and pastoral meal of bread-and-butter and green-stuff, which he took in the back-end of back kitchen, among Mrs. Bush's pails and mops and brooms and black-lead brushes; that industrious man holding her principal kitchen, with its snow-white hearthstone flags and shining range, a chamber far too sacred for the defilement of daily meals, and preferring to eat and drink as it were on the outskirts of Brierwood. Very quiet was Mr. Bush's usual return from his afternoon labour, nay, indeed, somewhat furtive and sneaking of aspect was Mr. Bush in a general way, as of a man who had never solved the mystery of his own existence, and felt himself more or less a mistake or superfluous atom in the scheme of creation. To-day, however, he approached the back kitchen with a victorious air, full to the brim and overflowing with startling information, and, unduly elated by the sense of his abnormal condition, no longer a man to be curiously told to eat his tea and look sharp about it, as Mrs. Bush would to clean herself, and wasn't going to have her back kitchen cluttered up with tea-things all the evening; a man to be deferred to rather, as the possessor of a treasure which it was in his power to impart or withhold.

"Well!" he began, with a pompous air, seating himself at the narrow window table beside the window ledge, where the blacking-brushes lived, and whence came a pungent odour of Day and Martin diluted with vinegar.

"Well, what?" cried Mrs. Bush sharply, as she hoveled the big loaf with a broad kitchen knife. "Lord, how the man do stare! Don't sit with your mouth open like a scarecrow. What's the matter now?"

"O, well," growled Mr. Bush, "if you don't want to hear nothink, I don't want to talk. There's no call to take me up short like that, as if you was a going to snap my nose off."

"It ain't handsome enough to tempt folks snapping at it," the matron replied contemptuously; "you look as big and puffed out as a Christmas turkey this afternoon. I suppose you've been loitering about Clevedon way instead of doing your work, and have heard something more about the murder."

"I haven't been loitering nowhere; but I may have heard something for all that," returned the outraged Bush, with a wounded air.

"If you've got anything to say, say it," exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with supreme disgust; "if there's anything in this mortal world as I hate, it's his shilly-shally."

"Well," said Mr. Bush solemnly, with his mouth half-full of bread-and-butter, and a *Cos lettuce* in his right hand poised over the salt-cellar; "the inquis is over; and as I come along the road home, who should come up along of me but Sam Grinway, and says he, 'Well, Bush, have you heard this here about the inquis?' and says I, 'No, Samuel; is the inquis over?' and says he, 'Yes, and I bin up by the west lodge and heard all about it. They've brought in a vordick again Joseph Flood, Sir Francis's groom, and they've took him; and it was all along of Bond's daughter as he was jealous of, and she'd been carryin' on shameful with this here Mr. Arkwright, which was a swell from London; and Joseph went profligate about after dark with his gun—and took and shot him!'"

"A bold-faced hussy!" cried Mrs. Bush indignantly. "I allus said she was no good, flaunting and flaring with her starched print frocks and neck-ribbons, in spite of her father being as pious a Primitive Methodist as you'd find between here and Maidstone. Why, it's her that ought to be hung, if there was any right or reason in the law of the land, and not the young man as did it!"

Mr. Bush chumped his green-stuff meditatively, and responded to this proposition only by a dubious shake of his head. This tracing of criminal acts back to their first causes was an advanced idea which he hardly saw his way to.

"Joseph Flood did it," he said, "and Joseph Flood must swing for it. The gal may have been fighty, I won't say as she wasn't, but gals; they've as good a right to that saying as byes has to be byes."

"Hah!" exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with suppressed contempt, "if a gal happens to be 'ood-looking, every fool in the parish will stand up for her. Lord a-mercy, Mr. Redmayne, what a turn you did give me, to be sure!"

This ejaculation was evoked by the apparition of Richard Redmayne looking in at the open lattice. He had come to the window in time to hear the news about Joseph Flood.

"Is Flood in prison?" he asked, with an ashen face which struck terror to the soul of Mrs. Bush.

"Yes, sir; he's put him in Kingsbury lock-up, if Samuel Grinway speaks the truth, and I never knowed Samuel to tell a falsehood."

Mr. Redmayne waited to hear no more, but walked away from the window, went into the house to refresh himself with a final nobbler, and then set his face towards Kingsbury. No innocent man should lie in durance for his sin.

"Lor, Bush!" cried the matron in a feeble voice, as if ready to sink swooning on the back-kitchen bricks; "did you ever see any one so gashly pale as master was, when he looked in at that window? If Joseph Flood had been his own son, he couldn't have looked more took aback!"

CHAPTER XLV.

BY THE SAME MADNESS STILL MADDER BLIND.

Richard Redmayne skirted the fields once more by the familiar track, beholding the free and happy barley with indifferent eyes, all his agricultural instincts in abeyance, with no room for any other thought in his mind than that he was going straight to his death. Not once did the steady course of his thoughts swerve from that direct line; not once did he speculate on remote possibilities of escape from the law's worst penalty. He was going to give himself up to justice; he was going straight to his death.

Strange how his thoughts fled yonder, even in this dire hour, over the width of half the world, to that other land where the skies are brighter and bluer, and the very air has an influence which makes men glad. O fair Gippisland, never more should he wander on her plenty-yielding plains, or climb her mighty mountains; never more should he shoot wild duck on her inland seas, or follow the winding river in its upland water-shed, or spend adventurous nights hunting for strayed sheep; or sleep away the summer noontide in the deep shade of a fern-tree gully, while his weary beasts enjoyed their spell close by; or short-hobble his horses under the moon on that liberal half-mile margin of pasture which the squatter's generous rule allows to the traveller's cattle. All that bright free open-air life was lost to him; and it seemed to him now, in this sudden darkness which he deemed the shadow of a swift advancing doom—it seemed to him now that he might have been happy at Butrush Meads even without Gracey—with a lessened happiness, of course, but still with a heartfelt appreciation of that bounteous land, and all it could yield him.

By one hasty mistaken act he had cut himself off for ever from these things. It would have been sad even, dying peacefully on his bed at Brierwood, to consider that he should see that a new world no more. How much harder, then, to face the horror of an ignominious doom; to know himself the destroyer of that good old name which he would have given his life to uphold! And while suffering all this loss, to know that he left his daughter's temper triumphant, his daughter's early death unavenged. That was the sharpest sting of all.

He walked slowly, and lingered now and then on his way, sitting down to smoke his pipe, and think over his position. He was scarcely in a situation in which a man would care to hasten his steps. The sun was going down; the ripe corn melted into a sea of gold where the edge of the uplands met the western sky. It was a very beautiful world, on a small scale—a baby-world that had never attained to the vigour and grandeur of manhood, but had kept its infantine graces and childish dimples and smiles.

He looked at the peaceful scene fondly, with mournful loving eyes. How hard he had laboured that he might keep Brierwood and his own good name! And now both were gone—his name rendered for ever execrable, his estate confiscated as the property of a felon.

It was growing dusk as he crossed Kingsbury common. He had waited for that, not wishing to face the light of day when he should leave John Wort's cottage, like Eugene Aram, with gyves upon his wrists.

Very peaceful was the aspect of Kingsbury this calm summer evening. The unwonted bustle and excitement of the morning had worn itself out. There may have been a few more gossips that the nightly conclaves in the tap-room of the Coach and Horse, but that was all. A murder is an appalling event in the records of a country village; but people cannot stand still to talk about it for ever; there must come a period of exhaustion.

Richard Redmayne went straight to the little office tucked on to Mr. Wort's dwelling, lifted the latch, and went in. He had a notion that the steward would be at work here to-night, but the office was empty—a dismal chamber to look upon in the dusk, with its unpainted match-board walls, against one of which hung a dilapidated map of the Clevedon property, much scored about with a red pencil, its ink-splashed deal desk, and battered office stools. These shabby surroundings had the true business flavour to John Wort's mind. He could not have worked in a room with easy-chairs and a Turkey carpet, like Sir Francis Clevedon's study. His business facilities would have been stultified by a morocco and mahogany desk on which he could not splash his ink freely.

Mr. Wort's housekeeper heard the door open and shut, and looked into the office from a door communicating with the kitchen.

"Is your master at home?"

"No, sir. He's been at Clevedon all day—not been home for a bit of dinner, even. But I expect him at any minute."

"I'll wait, then," Richard answered shortly.

This was almost a superfluous question, since the office reeked with stale tobacco.

"O dear, no, sir. Master's a rare one to smoke."

The housekeeper retired, and Richard took out his black neck-cutty-pipe. He smiled grimly as he filled it. How long would he be allowed this constant comforter? Would they let him smoke in prison?

He filled and refilled his pipe, and sat smoking on as the shadows deepened, till the wooden wall opposite to him was veiled in darkness. The woman peeped in and asked if he would like a light, but he answered in the negative. He would rather sit in the dark, he said.

By and by the moon began to climb the heavenly zone, and the first glimmer of her silvery light sent a shudder through Richard Redmayne's frame. That soft fatal radiance brought back the horror of last night.

"The moon's always been mixed up with witchcraft," he thought; "and there was something worse than witchcraft in last night's business. I'm not such a fool as to take one man for another in a light that I could have read my Bible by, if the devil hadn't blinded me."

It was past nine o'clock and broad moonlight when John Wort came home. He came in at the office door, his habitual practice, as he had generally letters or memoranda of some kind to deposit in his desk before he could settle down comfortably to his evening meal; sometimes even a letter or two to write for the night post, or for hand delivery to some defaulting tenant. He came in to-night with a very weary air, and recoiled with a start at sight of the seated figure, half in moonlight, half in shadow.

"What's the matter now?" he said sharply, not recognising his visitor.

"A good deal," answered Richard Redmayne.

"Redmayne! Why, what brings you here again to-night? I thought you'd cut me."

"I'd good reason to do that, John Wort, for it was your lies that brought misery and death upon my poor child."

"My lies! What do you mean by that?" asked the steward quietly.

He was not going to put himself in a passion with Richard Redmayne, a man whom he liked—whom he pitied with all his heart.

"What do you mean by calling me a liar, Rick? I never told you a falsehood in my life."

"What? Not when you brought your master to my house, under a false name?"

"My master! Why, man alive, what madness is this?"

"Your master, who had a fancy for coming to our neighbourhood on the sly, and stealing a look at his own estate, like a prince in disguise; or like a sneak and a liar, as he is by nature, and as he proved himself by his acts. 'Twas you who brought him to Brierwood, John Wort; 'twas you who lied about him to my sister-in-law. She would never have opened my doors to a stranger but for your recommendation."

"My master! My master at Brierwood?"

"Your master, Sir Francis Clevedon."

"Now, look here, Rick Redmayne," cried Mr. Wort, folding his arms upon the desk, and facing the farmer steadily in the moonlight, "make an end of this madness at once and for ever. Sir Francis was never in Kent, to my knowledge, until he came home to take possession of his estate just a year ago."

Richard Redmayne laughed aloud—a scornful strident laugh.

"What, you'll face it out, will you? He never came to Brierwood? You never brought him there, and planted him on my foolish, money-grubbing sister-in-law as Mr. Walgry? Sir Francis Clevedon and your Mr. Walgry are not one and the same?"

"As there is a God above me, they are not," answered Mr. Wort, firmly. "Hubert Walgry lies dead at Clevedon Hall. He changed his name to Harcross when he married an heiress."

Richard Redmayne started to his feet.

"What?" he cried, "is that the truth? Is it this man's likeness I've got here in my waistcoat pocket, the miniature that was sent to my girl? Why, it's the image of Sir Francis Clevedon! Do you mean to tell me that man—strangers—could be so much alike as that; as much like each other as twin brothers?"

"There was a striking likeness between Sir Francis and Mr. Walgry, though not such a close resemblance as you make out."

"G-t-a light and let me show you the miniature," answered Richard Redmayne.

The steward struck a lucifer, and lighted an oil lamp that hung over his desk. Mr. Redmayne put the open locket into his hand without a word.

"Yes," said John Wort, looking at it gravely. "This is a portrait of Hubert Walgry; very much flatterer, I grant, and making him pretty near ten years younger than he looked of late years; but not by any means a bad likeness for all that."

"His portrait!" exclaimed Richard, with suppressed exultation. "The likeness of the man who lies murdered at Clevedon Hall?"

"Yes," answered the steward impatiently. "How many times must I tell you the same thing?"

"Then God is just," cried Richard Redmayne; "I killed the right man!"

"You killed!" exclaimed Mr. Wort, aghast, staring at the farmer's triumphant face with unutterable horror in his own. You killed him! You a murderer! Rick Redmayne, you must be mad!"

"No, John, not mad—not mad now, or mad then; never sadder than when I fired that shot. Why, when I came home from Gippisland I meant to kill him."

"For God's sake, don't tell me that! What, you, Richard Redmayne—a man we've all liked and respected; you that anybody in Kingsbury would have trusted, or stood by, through thick and thin—you confess to a dastardly murder?"

"Not a dastardly murder. I tell you I meant to have his life; was there anything less that would have wiped out the score between us two? If I'd asked him out to fight me—as gentlemen used to fight each other thirty years ago—do you think he'd have done it, or listened to me? I tell you there was no other way of settling that account. I was bound to kill him."

John Wort looked at him for some minutes in silent wonder, biting his nails doubtfully. No one but a raging madman would have talked like this, surely; and yet this man was perfectly calm and collected, and spoke with an air of conviction that was more strange than the fact of his guilt.

"Good God! Rick Redmayne," he exclaimed at last, with a groan, "what have you done?"

(To be continued.)