Better Than Life

By Charles Garvice

This afternon the place looked de- to us all." serted, like the village of the Sleeping Beauty; but Ida, as she went with a wicked twinkle in her eye down the path from the vicarage, "Well, don't get tired of me, that's and strolled through the street did all." and she ran off-not feel the solitude oppressive. She She wandered around the familiar loved every stone and tree, and the place and through the narrow lanes old inn sign, as it swung gently in the slight breeze, seemed to creak and presently she came back to the a loving welcome to her. However, green again. as she reached the row of cottages, one or two women came running to use going home, for Cecilia would the doors, and she stopped to shake be shut up with her accounts, and hands and exchange a few words, the vicar would be grinding patient-They looked at her with affectionate ly at his sermon, and Bobby was admiration, and to one and all she down at the stream. gave the same assurance that-yes, she had come back to stay.

While she was talking to the wo- had learned at school and with

Ida looked after him as he turned maid of mythology. up the winding road to the Hall, and man, that's certain, Miss Ida."

can he be? Neddie, leave hold of castic Bobby all the rest of her life! dressed gentleman had disappeared.

"Can't be whom, Mrs. Matthews?" bor close behind one without know-said Ida. "Here, Neddie, run and ing it. get some sweets; and mind you give me one. Who do you think it may up and listened,

The woman nodded mysteriously. "Well, I don't know, Miss Ida, but they do say that the young earl may startle him." come upon us any minute. And this gentleman's gone to the Hall."

Ida opened her eyes. "And you think it is the earl," she said. "I wonder how he liked our staring at him-for we did stare, didn't we, Mrs. Matthews?" and and

she laughed mischievously. "I don't think he saw us, miss," and said Mrs. Matthews; "and if he did, it's only natural."

"Very," assented Ida. "We don't see a tall hat and an eyeglass in Levondale every day in the week; and if one cat may look at a king, two cats may look at an earl, mayn't they? Oh, I didn't mean to call you a cat, Mrs. Matthews."

The woman laughed. "You can call me worse than that, Miss Ida," she said, with that mixture of affection and respect which can only be found in these out-of-Ahe-way places. "I'm as glad to see you back as if-as if-there! I can't say how much. I'm sure we've all dering how we could ever find you,



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"But you like a change," said Ida

perfumed with the spring flowers,

The afternoon was hot. It was no

She crossed softly one of the French songs she man in the last cottage of the row, happy sigh dropped into one of the a gentleman sauntered by. He was wooden seats under the ivy-grown dressed in the height of fashion, and porch. She took off her hat and wore a tall silk hat and a light dust leaned back, her hands lying folded overcoat, carried an umbrella and loosely in her lap, as lovely, as insported an eyeglass.

It was delicious to be home again the woman said: "Lor' bless me! to feel that every man, woman and who can that be? A London gentle-child in the place was glad to see her. Yes, it was worth those two "Quite," said Ida, laughing. "He years of French and German classes, looks as if he had come out of a dreary walks, and fits of home-sickbandbox, doesn't he, Mrs. Matth- ness. She would never go away any more, but stay with dear old pupsie, "He do, indeed, miss. Now, who and saintly Cecilia, and rough,

Miss Ida's gown; you'll pull it out | She was saying this to herself, al-of the gathers. Why, sure he can't most singing it, when she heard the " her voice dropped reverentially, striking of a match behind her. Now, and she stopped, and stared at the the Gothic porch was arranged like road along which the beautifully a tall ottoman in a drawing-room, so that one might sit with a neigh-

She started a little, then she sat

"It's old Bourne, the shoe-maker, she said to herself, with a smile. "He was always fond of coming here. I'll She got up and crept around on

tip-toe; then stopped dead short and uttered a cry of surprise. A gentleman was sitting in the seat behind hers, leaning back with his

hat tilted over his brows, his hands clasped around his knee. He raised his hat at her faint cry,

and with a scarlet blush she exclaim "Why-oh, I am so glad!"

He rose, took the pipe from his mouth, and stared at her with the stare of recognition and astonishment; and on his tanned face came a dash of color that seemed a reflection of hers.

voice, and as if he were speaking to himself rather than to her. Ida laughed and the blush faded slowly.

"It is possible?" he said, in a low

It does seem scarcely possible," she said. "I was talking about you not -not two hours ago, and-and wonus missed you terrible; not but and here you are." He smiled a quiet hat Miss Cecilia is a perfect angel smile, that had a strange gravity and "And I was thinking-" he stopped.

"Yes; they don't book to Levon-

dale. "Oh, but I am so glad!" she said, fervently. "Papa and my sister-and of course, I myself-were dreadfully epset about my going off withoutthanking you for your kindness."

He nodded. "You looked heart-broken as the train went off," he said. "I did not think we had cut it so fine."

"I was heart-broken," she said: "That is just the word. And now" she hesitated and blushed again as she took out her purse—" and now "I must pay you before—"

"Before we are caught up in a whirlwind and separated again," he said with a smile. She laughed.

"Yes. How much was it? I had ny purse ready-" "It was my fault," he said. "The

fare was eighteen-and-fourpence, I. think-yes." She took a sovereign from her purse and held it out to him. He took it with perfect gravity and hunted up the change.

That makes us quits," he said. "Oh no," she said, seriously, and with the half-shy grace of a young girl unaccustomed to conventional phrases; "I naven't thanked you yet for your kindness to me; but I so now; and if you are staying here,

my father will come and thank you, He smiled at her with that half-amazed, half-wearied ar which the man of the world acquires uncon

sciously "That would give him uncalled-for trouble and tilt the balance my side wouldn't it?" he said. Then before she should reply he went on: "And you live here?

She nodded. "I'll get my hat." She ran around for it and came back and sat on the seat at right angles with his. There seemed nothing unnatural in the action. Had she not sat beside bim

hours on board the boat, and here was the difference between e boat and Levondale well porch? fact, she did not think of the mat-

Yes I live here. I was born here. y father is the vicar. Do youe stopped.

Do I live near here? he said, filg in the pause in his deep, quiet "I was never here before in She opened her eyes upon him

nd he looked at them and her with a ange expression in his-a look as he were repressing everything his yes might express, save grave and rteous interest.

"How strange!" she said. "But of ourse you have friends here-you staying with them?"

"No," he said without the trace of smile, and quite simply—"no, ave no friends here. I don't know soul in the place."

Ida could not very well exclaim; Then why on earth did you come? But he read the question in her and answered it.

had some business here," he Ida glanced at him with the frank

uriosity of a school-girl. He did not look like a businessman. Business men, as a rule, did not have such square shoulders, nor wore their clothes as he wore his. He looked more like a soldier, And what business could he have in Levndale, of all places in the world? Perhaps he read wonder in her

yes again. "My business is a very small affair," he said "and will be soon over. am going to London by the evening

"I am sorry for that," said Ida, in-genuously. And she was sorry, for she felt that the vicar would have liked to have thanked the gentleman who had been so kind to her. 'It is such a pretty place and you ought to see the church, and the Fairy Valley and the Hall. Don't you think it is pretty?" and she looked around the place affectionately His dark eyes rested on her face or a moment, then followed her

"Very pretty," he said. "It is one of the prettiest places I was ever and I have been in a great many." Her eyes came back to his face with a frank interest.

"It must be delightful to travel a great deal. Why, I enjoyed the trip from France. But then, you made it

so pleasant for me."
"I am glad if I was of any service," "And the Fairy Valley, and he said. the church and the Hall are worth seeing? I am sorry I can't stay."

"Oh, quite worth seeing," she said promptly; "especially the hall. It's ever so old, you know-or, rather you don't know," and she laughed softly "They say that a Levondale built it in the thirteenth century. Papa says there is some of the finest black oak carving in the county, and you know we are famous for old oak. It is a grand old place altogether, and if you come down again, you must be sure and go over it. It is closed now, but no doubt Mrs. Grandison-that's the housekeeperwould show you over it. But per-haps you don't care for old houses?" she added, as he did not evince much enthusiasm.

"Well, yes, I think I do," he said, after a moment's pause. "And if I come to Levondale again, which is not very likely, I will put Mrs.—"
"Grandison."

Mrs Grandison's good nature to the test.'

"Oh, she's the dearest old lady, and Yes, it is strange your ticket was will be delighted. The hall is closed now, because the old earl is deadhe was a great friend of papa and of all of us-and the new earl hasnt ! arrived yet; at least"-and she smil-" perhaps I ought not to say



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that, for I fancy he came to Levon-

"He looked straight before him with the half-sad, half-weary look in-

his handsome eyes.
"Indeed?" "Yes," said Ida;"I think I saw him going up to the Hall about an hour ago. A fair gentleman, ever so beautifully dressed; what some of our girls at the school, I mean-would call "a swell."

He smiled. 'Poor fellow.'

She laughed.

"Oh, I don't know why you should pity him on that account. Is'nt it the duty of an earl to be a swell?" "I don't know; I suppose it is. I hope this earl of yours will do his duty in every way, Miss-

He looked at her with respectful attention, waiting for her to fill in the blank.

"My name is Dunbar-Ida Dunbar." she said, as a matter of course. "Yes I hope the earl will do his duty." "Your tone is rather a doubtful one," he said, with a smile.

Ida laughed. "Was it? Well, I'm afraid he is not a very good young man.' "That is a pity, what has he done?"

The question would have been an embarrassing one to a woman of the world, but it did not disturb Ida. "I am sure I dont know," she replied; "but he must have done something very bad, or the dear old earl would not have quarrelled with him,

and papa would not look so grave when his name is mentioned.' Perhaps it was the old earl's fault -the quarrel, I mean," he said after a momentary pause.
"Oh, it couldn't have been!" de-

clared dla, promptly. Everybody loved the dear old man." "And despised and hated the young one. Poor dev- Poor young man! He will find Levondale a lively place

for him, now he has arrived. "You think then it was the earlthe gentleman I saw this morning? said Ida.

"It doesn't seem unlikely," he said (continued on page 9)

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