

A LITTLE BIT OF PRAISE.

BY JOSEPHINE POLLARD.

My Uncle David was a man.
So proper and so nice,
We always used to go to him
When needing good advice;
He knew the rules of etiquette,
And all the points of law,
And in each finished piece of work
Was sure to note a flaw.

Severely simple were his tastes,
Yet no one could deny
That in his views of men and things
He used a critic's eye.
And oh! the look of stern reproof
Our worthy kinsman gave,
If any little rascal dared
To call him Uncle Dave!

As dignified as any don,
He held himself aloof
From all the merry games and sports
That shook the household roof;
In manners we were so uncouth
And rude—it was a shame
There was so little to commend,
So very much to blame!

To Uncle Ben, who was, in truth,
A simple-hearted man,
With all our little woes and griefs,
And greater ones, we ran;
He seemed to understand the case,
Though blunderingly told,
And often kissed the very one
We thought he ought to scold.

And babies always used to act
Their very worst, and cry,
When Uncle David was around;
I need not tell you why;
And these same little ones would laugh,
Stretch out their arms and crow,
Whenever Uncle Ben appeared,
Because they loved him so.

The one was wise in books, and all
The knowledge they impart;
The other understood the need
Of every human heart.
And wisely did his best to smooth
Life's crooked, tangled ways,
By giving, every now and then,
A little bit of praise.

A little bit of praise will do
A world of good, you'll find;
'Tis strength and courage to the heart,
'Tis medicine to the mind;
And oft has welcome sunshine lent
A brightness to our days,
Because of one who kindly spoke
A pleasant word of praise.

MY FIRST DUEL.

It is the fashion nowadays in this country to reprobate dueling as foolish and immoral. However much it may still linger amongst other civilized nations, *viz.* at any rate (so we tell ourselves), have drifted far away from the absurd habit of considering a cartel as the necessary consequence of the slightest provocation, the most effectual settlement of every trivial dispute.

It may, perhaps, be doubted whether the entire abandonment of the practice of duelling has, in its results, been productive of unmitigated good; whether cases have not arisen, and do not frequently arise, of which a duel would be by far the most satisfactory solution,—cases in which the most severe moralist could scarcely sternly condemn the course,—where a man might take his own life in his hand for the sake of inflicting well-merited punishment upon another, and yet hope to meet with no harsh, inexorable doom if summoned to the presence of the all-merciful Judge; where the mere knowledge that a certain line of action must inevitably be pursued at the risk of his own life would suffice to deter a man from an infamous, and at this age, too little punished crime. Such cases, however, if they exist at all, are, it must be admitted, rare; and at any rate duelling is now extinct in England. Nevertheless, it is not so very many years ago since the practice fell into disrepute, and I have still a vivid recollection of all the incidents connected with my own first duel.

Malta, in 18—, not Malta as it is now; no mighty casemated fort towering in colossal strength below the Barracca; no huge cavernous tank or naval prison on Corradino; no dry-dock at the Marsa—no, not Malta as it is now, certainly, but still the same Malta, still the same paradise for nine months of the year, the same purgatory for the remaining three. The fierce heat of summer is giving place to the more tempered warmth of autumn, and men, worn out and enervated by an unusually hot season, are rejoicing in the prospect of a change, and looking anxiously, longingly, for the first shower of rain that shall impart some slight degree of coolness to the air and render life somewhat more endurable. The eye, wearied with the continual glare reflected eternally from the white houses, dusty roads, and the bare, glowing rock, in vain seeks relief from the brown, hardened fields. The grass is parched and withered, save in some few favored sheltered spots; and the only green thing upon which the throbbing, blinded eye can rest is an occasional carob or fig-tree. The very ground is athirst for rain, and the shrunken earth opens in great yawning fissures, as if riven by some dire convulsion of nature. Every one, pallid and enfeebled with the heat, is looking forward to the approaching winter; and many are projecting pic-nics and excursions to some one of those few spots where vegetation is still to be found, and where, under the luxuriant shade of some welcome tree, with the slumberous murmur of a tiny streamlet, or the ceaseless ripple of the ever-heaving ocean, falling sooth-

ingly on their ears, and the sweet odor of the orange-blossoms hanging heavy in the motionless air, they may alternately watch the shimmering heat arising from the glowing ground and refresh their eyes, wearied with the dazzling glare of the Valetta streets, with the sight of a green tree or a small patch of verdure-clad ground.

Just at this time the ship to which I belonged, his Majesty's frigate *Spartiate*, came into Malta harbor to get a new bowsprit fitted, in place of the one which she had "sprung" in a squall off the Greek coast a few days before. We had been at sea nearly the whole of the long hot summer, and officers and crew were now equally delighted at the prospect of a run on shore. Most of us, however, were very soon tired of the parallel dusty terraces and steep flights of stone steps that constitute the streets of Valetta, and longed for something more nearly allied to the green fields and shady lanes of home. So, starting off one forenoon, and taking my servant with us with a hamper of provisions by way of luncheon, four of us chartered a calèche and bade the driver take us to Elm Tahleb, a precipitous valley hidden amongst the rocky hills, somewhat to the southward of the centre of the island, calm, secluded, beautiful and green; and, even then, famed for its strawberry gardens, and a favorite resort for a day's excursion. We strolled about and lounged under the trees and dreamily smoked our cigars, and had luncheon, and lazily smoked again; and then I, who had never visited the place before, quitted the others, and started off on a short tour of exploration in the neighborhood. I had not proceeded far, and was sauntering meditatively beside a thick hedge of the prickly-pear cactus that separated me from the narrow path running through the grounds, when I heard a sound that caused me to stop short in my walk and look eagerly around. It was a slight cry, evidently born of fear, and issuing from feminine lips, and appeared to come from the other side of the hedge, to climb over or break through which seemed equally an impossibility.

Fortunately, however, a few yards in front of me, where some herdsman had torn down the succulent plants to eke out the scanty sustenance which the withered herbage afforded to his milch cows, was a large gap. Thither I quickly bent my steps, and emerging upon the pathway, became at once aware of the cause of the cry that I had heard. Standing hesitatingly, evidently unwilling to turn back, and yet afraid to advance, was a tall and beautiful girl, while coiled up in the centre of the path, directly in front of her, fierce and menacing in his lion-som strength, with head erect and his bright, red eyes gleaming with malice, lay a large black snake.

I have often since thought that, much as the girl was terrified at the reptile, those two formed, by nature, no ill-assorted pair. But I did not think them so then. I suppose no man ever cares to expatiate in detail upon the charms and beauty of the woman who has aroused in his heart all the passion of which his nature is capable. It sounds too much like profaning the sacredness of love, and putting the woman upon whom one's dearest affections are concentrated on a par with a horse one is anxious to dispose of. At any rate, I am not going to give a detailed description of Rose Cornewall. It is sufficient that, as I saw her then for the first time, timid and shrinking, with her cheek pallid, and her large, lustrous eyes dilated with aversion and fear, I thought I had never gazed upon a sight so beautiful. As I ran toward her, the snake took fright, and, gliding away, succeeded, much to my annoyance, in making good his escape amongst the strawberry plants that fringed one side of the path; and then the least I could do was to offer my arm to the trembling, terrified girl, and crave permission to escort her to her party. We had not far to go, and then I gave my name, and was duly introduced to her aunt, a Mrs. Luton, who warmly thanked me for my opportune interposition. Aunt and niece, I found, had not long come out from England, and were going to spend the winter in Malta. So, after expressing a hope that I should meet them at some of the balls during the coming season, and obtaining leave to call upon them in the mean while, I rejoined my companions and recounted my adventure.

The season began early that year in Malta. The summer cruise of the Mediterranean fleet was an unusually short one, and when the ships had returned to their winter moorings, balls and parties soon commenced in earnest. The intervening period had been a busy time for me. When once the *Spartiate* got into the hands of the dockyard, it was discovered that she stood in need of all sorts of repairs; that she wanted calking; that her lower rigging was worn out and required to be replaced; so altogether my time was pretty well occupied. Nevertheless, I had found leisure to call twice at Mrs. Luton's, and each time I had had the good fortune to find her and her niece at home; so that I was already engaged for several dances before I entered the room at the first ball of the season, and found that Rose Cornewall had arrived there before me.

There is no need to chronicle the events of the next few weeks. They were very much a repetition of the old, old story. Absurd as it may seem to say so, I was really hopelessly in love with a girl whom I had not seen half a dozen times; and before Christmas came, standing with her in the shelter of one of the bastions of Saint Elmo, watching the huge white waves as they came towering in, driven onward before the fury of a fierce gregale, and sending great

showers of spray high into the air over the high battlements of the fort, I received from her lips the solemn promise to be my wife.

Only a few days after my engagement to Rose had received the formal sanction of her aunt, Harry Gordon, my old messmate in the *Argus*, came to join the *Spartiate*. He was one of the best fellows that ever drew breath, high-minded, honorable, and true as steel, and proud of my beautiful fiancée, I took him one day to be introduced to her. Rose's back was turned as we entered the room; she was standing by the window, and had not heard the servant announce us; but hearing my voice, she looked round and came toward us. As she did so, her gaze rested for a moment upon Harry. She started, as I fancied, perceptibly, and every particle of color left her face, returning in an instant with a rapidity that flushed even her neck with the deepest crimson. In astonishment I turned to Harry, and, as I did so, fancied I intercepted a quick glance of puzzled recognition; but as he did not claim acquaintance a moment afterward when I introduced him, and as Rose ascribed her momentary indisposition to the shock of suddenly meeting a stranger when she imagined I was unaccompanied, I had no option but to conclude that I must have been mistaken. Nevertheless, I had an uneasy, indefinable sensation, almost amounting to a dread of I knew not what. The conversation flagged, and Harry and I presently left together.

My companion was unusually silent as we walked along; so, partly by way of starting a conversation, partly to quiet the uneasy feeling in my own mind, I asked him whether he and Miss Cornewall had met before. He hesitated a moment ere he replied, and then said,—

"No. To tell you the truth, Charlie, she is the very image of a Miss Douglas that I used to know in London a couple of years ago, after we were paid off in the old *Argus*. That was what made me look so queer when I first saw her. But of course they can't be the same."

"No, of course not, as your friend's name was Douglas, and Rose's is Cornewall," I answered, pettishly.

"Yes, of course they are different," he assented. "Well, I will go on board again. I suppose you won't come just yet! Good by."

I went for a short walk that day before I returned to Mrs. Luton's. I was thoroughly vexed and uncomfortable. That Harry was not quite sure that the resemblance between Miss Cornewall and Miss Douglas was only a resemblance I was perfectly certain of from the tone in which he spoke, and I could not but confess that Rose's sudden pallor was, at any rate, an unfortunate coincidence; but then, to admit the possibility of this opened up the way to a whole train of suspicions that I would not put into words, even to my own heart; that, indeed, when I returned to Miss Cornewall's, I felt ashamed so far to yield to as to ask her, as I had intended to do, whether she had ever before met Harry Gordon. From that day forward, however, an estrangement gradually sprang up between Harry and myself. I felt instinctively that he did not like Rose, and would not be sorry to see my engagement to her broken off; and this gave rise to a feeling of irritation and pride on my part that frequently prompted me to say things to him which but for his uniform courtesy and good-nature might have caused an open rupture. And so a coolness gradually grew up between us that threatened to increase as time went on and to sap even the very foundations of our old friendship.

All this time, too, the uneasy feeling that originated in my mind on the day that I introduced Harry to Miss Cornewall had been gaining strength. I could not account for it nor analyze it; it seemed like a vague dread of some impending evil, and, much as I struggled against it, I could not shake it off. Even in her presence it did not always entirely disappear; but there, at any rate, it was repressed by my passionate love for her, which forbade me even to hint at anything that might imply any want of confidence on my part. And so things went on, until the day was fixed that was to make Rose and me one. I had made up my mind that I would invite Harry to the ceremony, and the following morning I took an opportunity of doing so, moved thereto more, perhaps, by bravado than by any wish that he should actually be present on the occasion. He congratulated me, as I thought, very coldly, upon the approaching event, and courteously declined my invitation; then turning suddenly toward me with a burst of his old cordial manner, and speaking very rapidly and earnestly, he said,—

"Nolan, I can't let this go on without an effort to stop it. I must tell you—I ought to have told you long ago. For heaven's sake, don't marry Miss Cornewall. I have the best of reasons for knowing that she is the same girl I used to know in London as Hester Douglas, and you know I was not living a very steady life then. Yes, strike me if you like, Charlie," he continued, as I made a step toward him; "only listen. You and I are old friends, and I can't stand quietly by and see you innocently marry a girl that I know ought not to be your wife. Don't believe me; ask her—ask her whether she ever knew a Miss Douglas in London, or ever lived at Surbiton; and draw your own conclusions from her answers. You might have seen from her face, when you introduced me to her, that we had met before," he went on with a half-sneer.

I had been silent with astonishment during Harry's speech; but the last few words, the cutting reference to that event, the origin of all those uneasy doubts and half-formed suspicions

that had ever since so cruelly haunted me, gave words to my anger, and caused me to form a sudden determination.

"I will ask her; and if, as I suspect, your statement is false—" I paused, almost choking with passion.

"I will abide the issue," he said, calmly, and left the cabin.

Two hours afterward I was in Miss Cornewall's presence. I had been at first all impatient to hear her denial of any acquaintance with Miss Douglas; but during the long row to the shore, and the toilsome walk up the steep hill that leads from the custom-house to the gates, I had full leisure to grow cool, and to reflect that Harry had spoken of no suspicions, but had made a positive statement, which he, with his habitual caution, would be, of all men, the least likely to do unless he had good reason for believing in its truth. And if it were true; but by the time my reflections had reached this stage I had arrived at Mrs. Luton's door, and after a moment's pause I rang the bell.

Rosa was seated at the table, writing a letter, as I entered. She got up and came toward me, and taking her hand in mine, I led her to the couch at the end of the room, and seated myself beside her.

"Rose, when you were in London did you ever hear of a Miss Douglas?"

Her eyes flashed under their long black silky lashes.

"Mr. Gordon has been talking to you," she said, vehemently.

I looked at her in amazement. If Harry's statement were untrue, what possible association could there be in her mind between him and Miss Douglas? She saw that she had betrayed herself, and continued gently:

"I thought you knew that he called here the other day. Did he not tell you of it? I forgot to do so. I don't think he likes me, Charlie. Oh, my darling, don't let him come between us!" she murmured softly, as she nestled closer to my side.

I am neither able nor desirous to follow out the interview. A loving woman's (and with all her faults Rose did love me) endearments and caresses are too sacred to be lightly spoken of; and, excepting in so far as the narration of them may serve to the gratification of a morbid curiosity, it can be a matter of but little interest to any excepting the two most intimately concerned. I suppose I was a fool; perhaps my love blinded me. No doubt I ought to have seen through it all, but somehow I didn't. I only saw a beautiful girl whom I passionately loved, an angel who had been maliciously slandered. Carried away by the witchery of the moment, I forgot my long cherished doubts; I forgot the probabilities, the suspicious circumstances of the case. It seemed impossible to associate anything evil with one so fair, so gentle, so loving; and returning once more to the unswerving allegiance, to the unwavering confidence of old, I wondered with shame how I could ever have allowed myself to doubt. My heart wanted to be convinced, and it was convinced; but my reason was stubborn, however much I might decline to listen to its voice; and this did not tend to abate the irritation which, by an utterly irrational but perfectly natural reaction, I felt against Harry, and which induced me to regard him rather as one who had wilfully insulted my future wife than as one who, wishing to save me from what he justly regarded as an irreparable disgrace, had been led to make a false statement under the belief in its truth,—a mistake for which an apology might be a sufficient atonement.

No doubt, had I time for reflection, I should have viewed it in this light; but unfortunately, before I had left Mrs. Luton's house many minutes, whilst the glamour was still upon me, I met a party of men, foremost among whom was Harry Gordon. They were most of them acquaintances of my own, and little as a conversation with them accorded with my mood of the moment, I knew it was impossible to pass them without speaking.

"We are going up to Marti's to play a pool, Nolan," said Bertie Chestle, when the first greeting was over. "Will you come?"

"Thanks, I'm going on board."

"Oh, nonsense; you'll do better on the board of green cloth. Come along."

"It's no good, Chestle; Nolan has given up all that sort of thing," broke in Harry, with a laugh.

The speech was innocent enough; but in my then state of feeling toward Gordon I was chafed that he should make any remarks about my actions; and in as hard, cold a tone as I could assume, I replied, "Mr. Gordon is requested to confine his attention to his own affairs, and when he does meddle with other people's, not to make statements which are deliberately untrue."

Every one looked at me in astonishment. Harry turned very white, and from between his compressed lips came the word "Charlie!"

"I said, sir, that your statement was deliberately untrue. Need I say more?"

One glance of pained surprise, and, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, he took the arm of one of his companions and walked away. As soon as he was gone, I turned to a man whom I knew, a captain in the 205th.

"Lane, you must see me through this," I said, impetuously.

"With all my heart. Let us go to my quarters. Gentlemen, *au revoir*. If Gordon or De Lacy want any information, tell him that Nolan is with me, will you? Nolan, what is all this about?" he continued as soon as we were