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For the "Ecclesiastes."
VAIN REGRETS.

BY M. R. MICHALL.

Why, my heart, such vain regrets
For those bright hours fled for ever,
Joyous hours when first we met,
Then I dreamt not we must sever.

As in fancy sweet I roved
In a world before unknown,
Then I felt, indeed, I loved,
And my love was thine alone.

But 'twas far too sweet to last,
Gone and leaving only sorrow;
Memory clinging to the past,
Trying vainly joy to borrow.

Joy from each remembered word,
Loving words too lightly spoken,
Softly whispered, fondly heard,
But, alas! too lightly broken.

Through the world I'll onward go,
In my heart a restless pain,
Thou the cause of this deep woe,
Give me back my heart again.

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COLONEL BENYON'S ENTANGLEMENT.

BY MISS M. E. BRADDOCK.

CHAPTER II.

"NAME HER NOT NOW, SIR; SHE'S A DEADLY THING."

For the first fortnight of his sojourn at Trowardell, Colonel Benyon's Cornish experiences were altogether agreeable. The weather was brilliant; and in a county much given to moisture he was not inconvenienced by a single shower. There was plenty for him to see within a day's ride; here a ruined castle, there a nobleman's seat renowned amongst the show places of the west; and during those first two weeks the Colonel spent the greater part of every day in the saddle; or on foot, tramping over sunburnt hills high above a broad sweep of sea, while his horse rested at some solitary rustic inn. He was somewhat inclined to forget how short a time had gone by since he was lying in his Indian bungalow, well-nigh given over by regimental doctors. Perhaps in that first fortnight of genuine enjoyment he sowed the seeds of a mischief which was to overtake him by and by. The third week brought him into September, and he had a good time of it amongst the partridges, with Andrew Johns for his guide and counsellor. For three consecutive mornings the two men set out at daybreak when the dew was heavy upon the ground, and tramped over miles of stubble and turnip-field before breakfast. On the fourth day the Colonel suddenly knocked under, and told Mr. Johns that he had had enough, just for the present. Partridge-shooting was all very well in its way; but there were shooting-pains in the Colonel's limbs, and a dull perpetual aching in the Colonel's shoulders when a man of forty rarely cares to cultivate. There was a drizzling rain, too, upon that fourth day of September; and Colonel Benyon was very glad to find a blazing fire in the bright looking drawing-room, wherein he had a knack of painting imaginary scenes—scenes out of that tragical drama of which Flora Hammersley had been the heroine.

In his enforced idleness to-day, the thought of his friend's sorrow, and the woman's sin, haunted him more vividly than ever. That young soldier lying dead in the chill autumn sunrise on the sands near Blankenburg, slain by a hand that had never before been lifted to do a cruel thing—the hand of a generous single-minded man. As to the fact of Fred Hammersley's share in this transaction, Colonel Benyon felt no doubt. His friend had killed the seducer. It was the thing he would have done himself, unhesitatingly, under like circumstances. He walked up and down the room. He had read yesterday's *Times* and *Globe*, *Standard* and *Telegraph*, and there was no more mental pabulum for him till a post came in—a per special messenger on pony from the nearest post-town—at five o'clock p. m. At another time Mr. Hammersley's splendid library might have afforded him ample entertainment; but to-day he was in no humour for books; he had opened half a dozen or so, and after skimming a page or two absently, had put each volume back on its particular shelf. He could not fasten his mind upon any subject.

The rain came down in a monotonous hopeless way; even the standard roses on the lawn outside had a dreary look. The Colonel longed, like Horace Walpole, to bring them indoors and put them by the fire. Sometimes Colonel Benyon stood staring out at the deluged garden; sometimes he threw himself into a low-arm chair by the fire, and amused himself by a savage demolition of the coals; anon he placed the room again, pausing now and then, in an idle way, to examine some one of those womanly trifles whose presence reminded him of the lost mistress of Trowardell.

The day seemed interminable. He was glad when it grew dark; still more glad of the slight distraction afforded by his seven-o'clock dinner, though he had no appetite—an utter distaste for food, indeed—and a burning thirst.



HE KNEW THAT HE WAS AT TROWARDELL, AND THAT THIS BLACK-ROBED WOMAN WAS A STRANGER TO HIM.

upon the Colonel, not caring to trust that delicate office to the fat-faced rustic handmaid. "The girls we got hereabouts are so rough," she said; "and this one has never been used to much out of the dairy. We had a houseful of servants when Mr. Hammersley lived here; but since he's gone abroad there's been scarcely enough work for me and a girl."

The dame gave a profound sigh. Colonel Benyon perceived that she was garrulously given, and perceived that if he had a mind to hear about his friend's history in this house, it would not require any great effort to set Mrs. Johns discoursing thereupon.

"Do try one of those red mullet, sir; I dressed them with my own hands. It's a sauce that Mr. Hammersley was fond of—poor dear gentleman!"

Here came another profound sigh; and the dame lingered, trifling absently with the arrangements of the sideboard, as if willing to be questioned.

"You seem to have been very fond of your master," said the Colonel.

"We shouldn't be much account if we weren't fond of him," replied Mrs. Johns. "He was as good a master as ever lived. We'd know him from a boy, too. He used to come down to Penrose Abbey for his holidays in the old Squire's time—Mr. Penrose; you've heard tell of him, I dare say, sir. Andrew and me were butler and cook at Penrose for twenty years. Mr. Hammersley was only a distant relation to the Squire, you see, sir, and nobody thought that he'd come in for all the property; but he did. I suppose Mr. Penrose took a fancy to him when he was a boy; but there were plenty more young nephews and cousins on the look-out for his money. I can tell you."

"I'm sorry to do injustice to such good cooking; but upon my word, I can't eat a morsel. If you'll make me a stiffish glass of brandy-and-water, as hot as you can make it, I think perhaps it might do me some good. I had a bad fever in India, and seem to have a touch of my old enemy to-night."

"Wouldn't you like Andrew to ride back for the doctor, as soon as he comes in? or I could send one of the men at once, sir."

"On no account. Pray don't make an invalid of me. I walked a little too far after the partridges yesterday; I dare say I've knocked myself up, that's all. Even if I should feel worse, which I don't expect, I've some medicine in my dressing-case."

Mrs. Johns mixed the brandy-and-water with an anxious face, and watched the Colonel while he drank it. Then she persuaded him to return to the drawing-room, where she ensconced him luxuriously in an easy-chair by the fire, with a tiger-skin carriage-rug over his knees.

"Don't hurry away, Mrs. Johns," he said, after duly acknowledging her attention. "I like to hear you talk of my poor friend Hammersley; sit down by the fire, do, there's a good soul. That's right; it looks quite comfortable and homelike to see you sitting there. I could almost fancy I'd discovered some treasure in the way of an aunt. I can't tell you how dreary I've felt all day. My mind has been running feebly upon poor Hammersley and his wife. It's no use speaking of them to your husband; if he do, he tightens up his lips in a most impenetrable way, and is dumb immediately."

"Yes, sir, that's just like Andrew," replied the dame, smoothing her white-muslin apron and settling herself comfortably in the chair opposite the Colonel; "I think he'd lie down on the ground for his master to walk over him; but you can never get him to talk about him, nor of her either, poor soul."

Such a noble generous creature, no one could ever have thought she would do such a wicked thing. She hadn't been here very long before I found out that the love was all on one side in that marriage. She was very gentle and winning in all her ways towards her husband; but she didn't care for him, and never had cared for him, and never would; that was plain enough to me. And she wasn't happy; do what he would to please her, he couldn't make her happy. There was a look in her face of misgiving something—a sort of blink look; and whenever her husband was away—though goodness knows that was not often—she would roam about the house in a restless way that gave one the shivers only to watch her."

"Did he see that she was unhappy, do you think?" asked the Colonel.

"No, sir, I don't think he did; and that's why it came upon him like a thunderclap when she ran away. He was so bent upon making her happy, that I think he believed she was so. He was so proud of her too. Everybody admired her. She was the loveliest woman in the county, they said, though the west is famous for pretty women; and she was so clever—such a sweet singer. It was she who painted all the pictures in this room and in the hall. It was Mr. Hammersley's fancy to have none but what she had painted."

"Did she belong to this part of the country?"

"O dear no, sir. Her family were Suffolk people, I've heard say; her father was a colonel in the Indian army, and there was a very large family of them—not too well off, I believe; so of course it was a very good match for her. I suppose she married to please her friends; such things seem common enough nowadays. She was always very sweet-spoken and affable with me. One day when I was talking to her of a son of mine—my only child, that died young—she said, 'Ah, Mrs. Johns, I have my dead too' and I fancied she was speaking of some sweetheart very like that she'd had in this part."

"Did Captain Champey come home Hammersley's friend?"

her to go with him; but she wouldn't, not being over well or strong at the time. She'd had a low nervous fever in the spring, that had pulled her down a good deal. It was the morning after her husband left—I remember it all as well as if it was yesterday—she had been out in the village and round about the lanes visiting the poor—she was a rare hand at that always—and she came in at one of those windows while I was dusting the china in this room. I never shall forget her. Her face was as white as a sheet, and she walked in a strange tottering way, with her eyes fixed, until she came right up against me. Then she gave a start and dropped into the nearest chair, half fainting. I brought her a glass of water, and asked her what had happened. "O, Mrs. Johns," she said, "I've seen a ghost!" I couldn't get her to say more than this; all the rest of the day she was shut up in her room. The next day there came a messenger with a letter for her, and late in the afternoon if a same man came again with another letter. They were both from the Captain, of course; but all that day she never stirred outside the doors, not so much as to go into the garden, though it was a splendid summer day. Early the next morning she wrote another letter, and in the afternoon she went out. She wore her garden-bud and a light muslin dress, and she took nothing with her. I could say my life that when she left the house that afternoon she had no thought of going away; but she never came back."

"Were the two seen together in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes; a lad met Mrs. Hammersley and a strange gentleman in Farmer Goldsmith's field—there's a short cut across that way to the Pen-Judah-road—she had her hands clasped over her face, and was sobbing as if her heart would break, the boy said, and the gentleman was talking to her very earnestly. The boy turned and watched them. They talked about, talking for half an hour or so, Mrs. Hammersley crying almost all the time; and then the boy saw them get into a close carriage that had been waiting in the Pen-Judah-road, and heard the gentleman tell the man to drive to the station. This was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the Plymouth train leaves Pen-Judah at a quarter to five. It came one afternoon that Captain Champey had been staying at the Rose and Crown at Pen-Judah, and had hired a close fly on that day. The driver could tell all the rest—how he had waited above an hour in the road near Trowardell, and picked up a lady there."

"How soon did Hammersley learn what had happened?"

"My husband telegraphed to him that night, and he was back early the next evening. He was very quiet. I never saw any one take a great blow so quietly. He didn't bluster or rave, as some gentlemen would have done; but he sat in the library for some whole days, writing letters and seeing every one who had anything to tell him, while Andrew was about making inquiries quietly in every direction. There was no fuss or talk, considering, and it was only a few people knew anything of what had happened. As soon as Mr. Hammersley had heard all he could hear in this place he started off—after those two, I suppose; and that's the last we ever saw of him. He wrote to Andrew soon after, telling him how the house was to be kept up, and so on; and that was all."

"You heard of Captain Champey's death, I suppose?" said the Colonel.

"Yes, Mrs. Johns replied, with a doubtful air, "we did hear that he was dead."

"And you heard the strange manner of his death, no doubt?"

"We saw something in the papers, but didn't take much heed of it," replied Mrs. Johns, with an air of not caring to pursue this subject. The Colonel did not press it. There was no doubt in his own mind as to the hand that had slain Captain Champey, and he fancied that Mrs. Johns shared his conviction upon that subject.

"Have you ever heard what became of Mrs. Hammersley?" he asked presently.

"Not a word, sir. That's what makes me pity her sometimes, in spite of myself. It's a hard thing for her to be left like that, without a hand to care for her—him that she stinned for dead and gone. She may be starving somewhere, poor misguided creature! Without a roof to cover her perhaps, and these empty rooms looking as if they were waiting for her all the while, with all the pretty things she was so fond of just as she left them. It always gives me the heartache to think of her, or to touch any of the things that belonged to her."

"Was it Hammersley's wish that the place should be kept just as she left it?"

"Yes, sir, that was one of his orders in the letter of instruction that he wrote to my husband before he left England."

"Is there no portrait of her anywhere about the house?"

"No, sir. There was a likeness of her, painted by some great artist in London, but I never saw that after the day when Mr. Hammersley came back and found her gone. Whether he destroyed it in secret that day, or put it away somewhere under lock and key, I can't tell. I only know that when I came into this room next morning the picture was gone. There's the blank space where it hung just above your head."

The Colonel looked up. Yes, there was the empty panel. On the opposite side of the fireplace there was a portrait of his friend, little more than a head, against a dark background, bold and truthful, by the hand of John Phillip. He had made a shrewd guess why the companion picture was missing.

He had been so much interested in the house-keeper's talk as almost to forget his pain and weariness; but by this time the stimulating effect of his dose of brandy-and-water had worn off, and he felt really ill, quite as ill as when the first warning of his fever came upon him up the country.

"I'm afraid I'm in for it, Mrs. Johns," he