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Old Hagar's Secret

BY MRS. M. J. HOLMES

Author of "For a Woman's Sake," "Love's Triumph," "Purified by Suffering," "A Grass Widow," "Woman Against Woman," Etc.

CHAPTER III.

"It is over now," old Hagar thought, as she laid the children upon their pillows. The deed is done, and by their own hands, too. There is nothing left for me now but a confession, and that I cannot make:" so, with a heavy weight upon her soul, she sat down resolving to keep her own counsel and abide the consequence, whatever it might

But it wore upon her terribly— that secret—and though it helped in a measure to divert her mind from dwelling too much upon her daugh-ter's death, it haunted her continually, making her a stra ge, eccentric woman, whom the servants persisted in calling crazy, while even Madam Conway failed to comprehend her. Her face, which was always dark, seemed to have acquired a darker, harder look, while her eyes wore a wild, startled expression, as if she were constantly followed by some tormenting fear. At first, Mrs. Miller objected to trusting her with the babe; but when Madam Conway suggested that the woman who had charge of little Theo should also take care of Maggie, she fell upon her knees, and 'begged most piteously that the child might not be taken from her. "Everything I have ever loved has left me," said she, "and I cannot give her up."

"But they say you are crazy," answered Madam Conway, somewhat surprised that Hagar should manifest so much affection for a child not at all connected to her. "They say you are crazy, and no one trusts a

"Crazy"' repeated Hagar, half scornfully, "crazy—'tis not craziness—'tis the trouble—the trouble—that's -'tis the trouble—the trouble—that's killing me. But I'll hide it closer than it's hidden now," she continued, "if you'll let her stay; and 'fore Heaven, I swear, that sooner than harm one hair of Maggie's head, I'd part with my own life;" and taking the sleeping child in her arms, she stood like a wild beast at bay.

Madam Conway did not herself really believe in Hagar's insanity. She had heretofore been perfectly faithful to whatever was committed to her care, so she bade her be quiet, saying they would trust her for a time.'

for a time. 'It's the talking to myself,' said Hagar, when left alone. 'It's the talking to myself, which makes them call me crazy; and though I might call me crazy; and though I might talk to many a worse woman than old Hagar Warren, I'll stop it; I'll be still as the grave, and when next they gossip about me, it shall be of something besides my craziness."
So Hagar became suddenly silent, So Hagar became suddenly silent, and uncommunicative, mingling but little with the servants, but staying all day long in her room, where she watched the children with untiring care. Especially was she kind to Hester, who as time passed on proved to be a puny, sickly thing, never noticing any one, but moaning frequently as if in pain. Very tenderly old Hagar nursed her, carrying her often in her arms, until they ached from very weariness, while Madam Conway. who watched her with a vigilant eye, complained that she

vigilant eye, complained that she neglected little Maggie.

"And what if I do?" returned Hagar, somewhat bitterly. "Ain't there a vast difference between the "wo?

S'pose Hester was your own fiesh and blood, would you think I could do too much for the poor thing?" And she glanced compassionately at the poor wasted form, which lay upon her lap, gasping for breath, and presenting a striking contrast to the little Maggie, who, in her cradle, was crowing and laughing in childish glee, at the bright frelight which

glee, at the bright firelight which blazed upon the hearth.

Maggie was indeed a beautiful child. From her mother she had inherited the boon of perfect health, and she throve well in spite of the bumped heads and pinched fingers, which frequently fell to her lot, when Hagar was too busy with the feeble child to notice her. The plaything of the whole house, she was greatly petted by the servants, who vied or the whole house, she was greatly petted by the servants, who vied with each other in tracing points of resemblance between her and the Conways: while the grandmother prided herself particularly on the arched eyebrows, and finely cut up per lip, which, she said, were sure marks of high blood, and never found in the lower ranks! With a most scornful expression on her face, old Hagar would listen to these reold Hagar would listen to these remarks, and then, when sure that no one heard her, she would mutter, "Marks of blood! What nonsense! I'm almost glad I've solved the riddle, and know 'taint blood that makes the difference. Just tell her the truth once, and she'd quickly change her mind. Hester's blue, pinched nose, which makes one think of fits, would be the very essence of aristocracy, while Maggie's lip would come of the little Paddy blood there is running in her veins!"
"And still Madam Conway herself was not one-half so proud of the

"And still Madam Conway herseif was not one-half so proud of the bright, playful Maggie, as was old Hagar, who, when they were alone, would hug her to her bosom, and gaze fondly on her fair, round face, and locks of silken hair so like those now resting in the grave. In the meantime Mrs. Miller, who, since her daughter's birth, had never left her room, was growing daily weaker, and when Maggie was nearly nine months old, she died, with the little one folded to her bosom, just as Hester Hamilton had held it, when, she, too, had passed from earth.

Doubly blessed," whispered old

Hagar, who was present. Hagar, who was present, and then when she remembered that to poor littl? Hester a mother's blessing would never be given, she felt that her load of guilt was greater than she could bear. "She will perhaps forgive me if I conless it to her over Miss Margaret's coffin," she thought and once when they stood together by the sleeping dead, and Madam Conway, with Maggie in her arms was bidding the child kiss the clay-cold lips of its mother, old Hagar attempted to tell her. "Could you bear Miss Margaret's death as well," she said, "if Maggie, instead of being bright and playful as she lis, were weak and sick, like Hester?" and her eyes fastened themselves upon Madam Conway with an agonizing intensity which that ladycould not fathom. "Say, would you could not fathom. "Say, would you bear it as well—could you love her as much—would you change with me, take Hester for your own, and give me little Maggie?" she persisted give me little maggie? sne persist-ed, and Madam Conway, surprised at her excited manner, which she attri-buted in a measure to envy, answer-ed coldly: "Of course not. Still, if God had seen fit to give me a child

like Hester, I should try to be reconciled, but I am thankful He has not thus dealt with me." not thus dealt with me."

"Tis enough. I am satisfied,"
thought Hagar. "She would not
thank me for telling her. The secret
shall be kept;" and half exultingly
she anticipated the pride she should
feel in seeing her, granddaughter
grown up a lady, and an heiress.

Anon, however, there came stealing
over her a feeling of remorse, as she
reflected that the child defrauded of
its birthright would, if it lived, be
compelled to serve in the capacity
of a servant; and many a night,
when all else was silent in the old
stone house, she paced up and down

of a servant; and many a night, when all else was silent in the old atone house, she paced up and down the room, her long hair, now fast turning gray, falling over her shoulders, and her large eyes dimmed with tears, as she thought what the future would bring to the infant she carried in her arms. But the evil she so much dreaded never came, for when the winter snows were again falling they made a little grave beneath the same pine tree where Hester Hamilton lay sleeping, and while they dug that grave old Hagar sat with folded arms and tearless eyes, gazing fixedly upon the still, white face, and thin, blue lips, which would never again be distorted with pain. Her habit, of talking to herself had returned, and as she sat there she would at intervals whisper: "Poor little babef I would willingly have cared for you all my life, but I am glad you are gone to Miss Margaret, who, it may be, will wonder what little thin-faced angel is calling her mother! But somebody'll tell her introduce you, somebody'll tell her

Margaret, who, it may be, will wonder what little thin-faced angel is calling her mother! But somebody'll introduce you, somebody'll tell her who you are, and when she knows how proud her mother is of Maggie she'll forgive old Hagar Warren!"

"Gone stark mad!" was the report carried by the servants to their mistress, who believed the story, when Hagar herself came to her with the request that Hester might be buried in some of Maggie's clothes.

Touched with pity by her worn, haggard face, Madam Conway answered: "Yes, take some of her common ones," and choosing the cambric robe which Hester had worn on the morning when the exchange was made, Hagar dressed the body for the grave. When, at last, everything was ready and the tiny coffin stood upon the table, Madam. Con-

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way drew near, and looked for a moment on the emaciated form which moment on the emaciated form which rested quietly from all its pain. Hovering at her side was Hagar, and feeling it her duty to say a word of comfort, the stately lady remarked that "'twas best the babe should die, that were it her grandchild, she should feel relieved; for, had it lived, it would undoubtedly have been physically and intellectually feeble."
"Thank you! I am considerably comforfed," was the cool reply of Hagar, who felt how cruel were the words, and for a moment was strong-

words, and for a moment was strong-ly tempted to claim the beautiful Maggie as her own, and give back to the cold, proud woman the sense-less clay on which she looked so calmly.

calmly.

But love for her grandchild conquered. There was nothing in the way of her advancement now, and when at the grave she knelt her down to weep, as the bystanders thought, over her dead, she was breathing there a vow that never so long as she lived should the secret of Maggie's birth be given to the world, unless some cfroumstance then unforescen should make it absolutely and unavoidably necessary. To see and unavoidably necessary. To see Maggie grow up into a beautiful, re-fined and cultivated woman was now the great object of Hagar's life; and

fined and cultivated woman was now the great object of Hagar's life; and tearing lest by some inadvertent word or action the secret should be disclosed, she wished to live by herself, where naught but t winds of heaven could listen to her incoherent whisperings, which made her fellow-servants accuse her of insanity.

Down in the deepest shadow of the woods, and distant from the old stone house nearly a mile, was a half-ruined cottage which, years before had been occupied by miners, who had dug in the hillside for particles of yellow ore, which they fancied to be gold. Long and frequent were the night revels said to have been held in the old hut, which had at last fallen into bad repute and been for years deserted. To one like Hagar, however, there was nothing intimidating in its cracking old floors, its rattling windows and noisome chimney, where the bats and the swallows built their nests; and when one day Madam Conway proposed giving little Maggie into the charge of a younger and less nervous person than herself, she made no objection, but surprised her mistress by asking permission to live by herself in the "cottage by the mine," as it asking permission to live by herself in the "cottage by the mine," as it

in the "cottage by the mine," as it was called.

"It is better for me to be alone," said she, "for I may do something I would sooner die than do," and her eyes fell upon Maggie sleeping in her cradle.

This satisfied Madam Conway that the half-crazed woman meditated

the half-crazed woman me harm to her favorite grandshild, and she consented readily to her removal to the cottage, which by her orders to the cottage, which by her orders was made comparatively comfortable. For several weeks, when she came, as she did each day, to the house. Madam Conway kept Maggie carefully from her sight, until at last she begged so hard to see her that her wish was gratified; and as she manifested no disposition whatever to molest the child, Madam Conway's fears gradually subsided, and Hagar was permitted to fondle and caress her as often as she chose. Here, now, for a time, we leave them; Hagar in her cottage by the mine; Madam Conway in her gloomy home; Maggie in her nurse's arms; and Theo, of whom as yet but little has been said, playing on the nursery has been said, playing on the nursery floor; while with our readers we pass silently over a period of time which shall bring us to Maggie's girlhood.

(To Be Continued.)

One of the most heroic figures o

One of the most heroic figures of the present-day world is a man whose very name is known to few and whose life is familiar to even fewer. He lives in a small hired house in the City of Tokio. His name is Samuel I. J. Schereschewsky. For eix years he was Missionary Bishop of Shanghai. Nineteen years ago illness, contracted largely through his work, rendered him almost help-less. Refusing to be a hunden for the property of the state of the stat mission, he resigned his see. But he refused to consider that his working

days were over.
With his paralyzed boy he could With his paralyzed boy he could no longer go about the work of evangelization, but he could at least sit in a chair and work for China by translating the entire Bible into easy Wenli, so that more of the common people might read its message. This he has been doing for many years, working with such restless energy in his struggle against pain and helplessness, that he has kept two secretaries busy. He wrote his translation of the entire Bible in Roman characters upon a typewriter, though he could use only one finger of each hand and needed eight years to complete the task. He has worked under conditions that put to shame many of us who speak or think of the great deeds we might do if our circumstances were only do if our circumstances were different -Japan Weekly Sun.

A Big Public Library.

Dr. Bain gave the other day some interesting facts about the Toronto Public Library. The circulation library, which was established 19 years ago with 20,000 volumes, valued at \$25,000, has increased to over 130,000 volumes, whose value was estimated at over \$180,000. During this 19 years over 9,000,000 books had been issued for home reading, and of this number 5,000,000 were historical, biographical, scientific works, etc. In other words, despite all that had been said about the reading of fiction, not more than hulf the books issued were works of fiction. Associated with the library are 55,000 readers, or one out of three of the entire adult population of the city. The reference library branch has grown in fifteen years from nothing to 60,000 volumes, and was perhaps the most valuable English library in Canada. A Big Public Library

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have left me. Life seems new and sweet to me, and everything seems pleasant and easy.

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help."—Mrs. B. A. BLANCHARD, 422 DIOMI SU, Dashville, 1911.
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