

exists, make my wife low-spirited? Her past is gone and done with, and she is far too good and—"

"Oh! very well, Colonel—very well. Let us change the subject; it only came upon me from you being so certain they had never met before—which I'm sure I'm quite willing to believe. He's a handsome man, this new lord, isn't he? Quite the ladies' style. Young and tall, and with such fine eyes; I daresay there are a good many after him."

"I daresay they are."

"Quite a catch for the London ladies. I wonder why he isn't married?"

"There's plenty of time for that, Quekett."

"I don't know, Colonel. They say 'better late than never,' but it doesn't apply to marriage; 'no fool like an old fool' is a more appropriate motto for that."

At this home thrust the Colonel becomes uneasy, and tries to shift the subject.

"Lord Muiraven will remain here for some days longer, Quekett."

"Ah! will he? Has he ever been in this part of the country before, Colonel?"

"Not that I know of; why do you ask?"

"There is an uncommon likeness between him and that little boy there. They're the very moral of each other; everybody is talking of it!"

Colonel Mordaunt flushes angrily.

"What absurd nonsense! I do beg you'll do your best to put such gossip down. If there is any resemblance, it is a mere accident."

"It generally is, Colonel."

"Quekett, I thought you had more sense. Do you think for a moment, that even supposing Lord Muiraven, had been near Priestley before (which I am sure he has not), a man of his position and standing would lower himself by—"

"Making love to a pretty girl! Yes! I do, Colonel! and that's the long and the short of it. However, I don't wish to say any more about it; I only mentioned they were very similar, which no one who looks at them can deny. Good-night, Colonel. I hope your lady's spirits will get better; and don't you think too much about them—for thinking never mended heart nor home—and I daresay she'll come round again as natural as possible." With which piece of consolation, Mrs. Quekett leaves her master in the very condition she aspired to create—torn asunder by doubts and suspicions, and racking his brain for a satisfactory solution of them.

Meanwhile Muiraven, who is always on the look-out for a few private words with Irene, which she appears as determined he shall not gain, professes to have conceived an absorbing interest in Tommy, and teases her for particulars concerning his parentage and antecedents.

"I don't know when I met a child that interested me so much as this protégé of yours, Mrs. Mordaunt. He doesn't look like a common child. Where did you pick him up?"

"You speak of him just as though he were a horse or a dog; why don't you say at once, 'Where did you buy him?'"

"Because I know that the only coin that could purchase him would be your benevolence. But, seriously, does he belong to this part of the country?"

"He belongs nowhere, Lord Muiraven. He is a wretched little walf and stray whose mother was first betrayed and then deserted. A common story, but none the less sad for being common. I think the heaviest penalty for sin must be incurred by those who heartlessly bring such an irretrievable misfortune upon the heads of the unwary and the innocent."

"I quite agree with you," he answers abruptly. "How hardened he must be to show no signs of feeling at the allusion," is her comment as she regards his face, half turned away.

"But to return to Tommy, resumes Muiraven, 'do you really intend to bring him up in your own station of life—to rear him as a gentleman?'"

"I have not yet decided."

"But if you do not decide shortly you will injure the child. Having once permitted him to assimilate himself with gentlemen and gentlewomen, it will be cruelty to thrust him into the company of a lower class."

"You misunderstand me. I do not intend that Tommy shall ever again descend to the class from which, at all events on one side, he sprang; but, at the same time, I am not sure that Colonel Mordaunt will permit to have him educated to enter a profession, or that it would be kindness in us to permit him to do so. He will most probably be brought up to some business."

"Poor child!—not because he is going into business (I often wish I had been apprenticed to some good hard work myself), but because, wherever he goes, the stigma of his birth is sure to rest on him."

"Poor child, indeed!" she repeats, with an angry flash in his direction, which Muiraven is totally at a loss to comprehend; "but, so long as he is under my protection, he shall never feel the cruel injury which has been done him by those who should have been his truest friends."

"You say, 'so long as he is under your protection,' Mrs. Mordaunt; but—forgive me for questioning—suppose anything should happen to withdraw that protection from him; your death, for instance (we are not children, to be afraid to mention such a probability), or Colonel Mordaunt's disapproval; what would become of Tommy then?"

"God knows," she answers sadly. He is speaking to her so much as he used to speak of old, when they were wont to hold long conversations on topics as far removed from love or matrimony, that she is becoming interested, and has almost forgotten the rôle she has hitherto preserved towards him of haughty indifference.

"I wish you would make me his second guardian," he says quickly, with an access of color in his face.

"What do you mean?"

"That, in case of this child ever being thrown upon the world again, I am willing to carry on the protection you are so nobly according to him now!"

"You!"

"Yes, I—why not? I have no ties, Mrs. Mordaunt—nor am I likely to make any—and I have taken a fancy to this little boy of yours. My own life has been a great mistake—it would be something to guard another life, as fresh as mine once, from the same errors."

"You—you want to take Tommy from me—oh! Lord Muiraven, you don't know what you are asking for. I cannot part with him—I have grown so fond of him—pray don't take him away!"

In her surprise and agitation, Irene is forgetting the manner in which the proposal of her companion has been brought about; and, only remembering the prior claim he has upon the child, for the moment that he is aware of and intends to urge it.

"I will take every care of him," she goes on impulsively, "of course I will, loving him as I do—but leave him with me. He is all I have."

"What have I said?" exclaims Muiraven, in astonishment. The question brings her to her senses.

"I—I—thought you—you—wanted to adopt the child!" she says, in much confusion.

"Only in case of his losing his protectress, which God forbid," he answers gravely. "Perhaps I have been impertinent, Mrs. Mordaunt, in saying as much as I have done; but I have not been able to help observing, whilst under your roof, that your husband does not take quite so kindly to this little bantling as you do; and I thought, perhaps, that should any difference ever arise concerning him, you might be glad to think that I was ready to carry on what you have begun—that Tommy, in fact, had another friend beside yourself. But if it was presumptuous, please forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive," she answers sadly; "the thought was kind, and some day, perhaps—"

"Perhaps—what?"

"I will tell you—or write to you the particulars—all that I know, I mean, about the sad case of this poor child."

"Some day you will write, or tell me all the particulars about the sad case of this poor child," he repeats slowly and musingly. "I wonder if, some day, you will let me write, or tell you, all the particulars about a case far sadder than his can be—a case that has wrecked my earthly happiness, and made me careless of my future."

There is no mistaking the tone in which he says these words: there is a ring of despairing love in it which no laws of propriety can quell or cover over.

"Lord Muiraven!" she cries indignantly, as she retreats a few paces from him. But he is bold to pursue her and to take her hand.

"Irene! I can endure this misery no longer. It has been pent up in my breast for years, and now it will have its way. I know you have had hard thoughts of me; but, if I die for it, I will dispel them. Irene, the time is come, and I must speak to you!"

(To be continued.)

PLAYS.

BY GEORGE HOBY.

I once on a time
Saw a comical rhyme,
Which was called, as I think, "A Bill Poster's Dream,"

Where the notices placed,
Were so interlaced
That the reading should strange and ridiculous seem.

So I had an idea,
Which may seem rather queer,
That the plays on the stage would make such a verse,

And I write it below,
In order to show,
What I mean to express, which simply is thus:—

There was "Barney the Baron" on a stroll in
"Central Park,"
Just "Under the Gaslight" and also "After Dark."

With "Little Nell" behind him to hear what he might say,
While "Leatherstocking" watched for fear she would be "Led Astray."

Next came the "Man of Honor" gazing at
"The Wicked World,"
Beside the "Ticket-of-Leave Man" with his blonde wig nicely curled;

Then "Wilkins Micawber," with his quaint
"Geneva Cross,"

Who, from sweet "Madeline Morel," was suing for "Divorce."

All the "Belles of the Kitchen" had "A Decided Case."

With jolly "Rip Van Winkle," "The Wrong Man in the Right Place";

While the "Lady of Lyons," with her blood-red "Convict's Braud,"

Was teaching "Humpty Dumpty" how at "School" to be "On Hand."

Then "Fritz" and "Alixé," ("Man and Wife,") for "Rosedale" made a start,

Behind came "Max" and "Agnee," with some one's "Marble Heart."

While "Eilleen Oge" quite lightly into the line then fled,

Together with the "Femme de Feu" and "Madame Angot's Child."

Then we next saw "Lord Dundreary" oft posted as a "Liar,"

Together with his "Brother Sam," who had been "Playing with Fire;"

While "Kit, The Arkansas Traveler," with many "A Cup of Tea,"

Throughout the long "Streets of New York," was giving "Charity"

To those "Black Sheep," who cried for "Help," and cursed their cruel "Fate,"

Tho' treading upon "Delicate Ground," compelled to "Watch and Wait;"

Next "Mimi," "Mora," and "Follins," all looking rather funny,

They'd been caught in a "Regular Fix" and none of them made "Money."

The next I saw old "Daddy O'Doud," stuck up in many places,

With "Fanchon" (Little Barefoot) trying on some "Masks and Faces;"

When "Enoch Arden" ("Lost at Sea") quite rudely spoiled their sport,

And took both of them, "Neck and Neck," away to "Atherley Court."

Then I saw the "Connie Soogah" "Hand in Hand" with sweet "Frou-Frou,"

Reading both from "Onole Sam," by Victorien Sardou,

While close behind was "Kerry," side by side with "Jesse Brown,"

Who from the "Clouds" o'er "Notre Dame" had just been "Hunted Down."

And so the Plays went fitting by, some well-known and some rare,

But there were some for which I looked, but which I found not there;

For where was "Henry Dunbar," where "Falstaff" and "Jack Cade"

Their names have vanished from us, but their memories ne'er shall fade.

And so my rhyme is ended, which, Reader, cease to mock,

I've sat up toiling at it while the hands went "Round the Clock";

So take the thing for what it's worth, no matter for the cost,

But let me know, when all is done, 'tis not "Love's Labor Lost."

THE WHITE CAT.

I.

Some years are profitless when we look back to them, others seem like treasures to which we turn again and again when our store is spent out—treasures of sunny mornings, green things, birds piping, friends greeting, voices of children at play. How happy and busy they are as they heap up their stores! Golden chaff, crimson tints, chestnuts, silver lights—it is all put away for future use; and years hence they will look back to it, and the lights of their past will reach them as starlight reaches us, clear, sweet, vivid, and entire, travelling through time and space.

Our children have never ceased to speak of the delights of a certain August that some of us once spent in a Presbytery with thick piled walls and deep out windows and an old enclosed courtyard. The walls and windows were hung with ancient clematis hangings, green, and starred with fragrant flowers. They were dropping from the stones where the monks, who once lived in the old presbytery and served the Church, had nailed them up, a century before. These sweet tangled hangings swayed when the seawind blew villagewards; sometimes a bird would start from some hidden chink, and send the white petals flying into the room where we were sitting at the open window, or upon the children's yellow heads, as they played in their shady corner of the courtyard. Played at endless games—at knights, kings and queens, sleeping beauties, fashionable ladies, owls in ivy towers, beggars and giants. Tiny Dodo and baby Francis are the giants, and Marjory and Binnie are the reasoning knights, and little Anne is the captive maiden with a daisy in her hat.

We have all, been children at more or less distance of time, and we can all remember the wonderful long games, the roses and daisies of early youth—their sweet overpowering beauty. Once upon a time there was a great French cabbage rose at the end of a garden pathway, hanging to a wall behind which the sun always set. A little girl, a great many years ago, used to fly to that rose for silent consolation, and after half a lifetime, being still in need of consolation, came back to look for the rose—and found it. The rose was still hanging to the wall, scenting the air in conscious, sweet flush of

dignity. The charm was still there. Something of the same aspect seemed to cling to the straight poplar roads, to the west and east of that wide and tranquil land—where the lights broke into clearer changes day by day, where a family party had assembled after long separation. The elders and the children had come from two ends of the world; H. and I arrived first, then came Major Frank and his wife, with their Indian boxes, H. scarcely believing in her own tender heart's happiness as she clasped her son once more. Its happiness had been hardly earned by many a long hour of anxious watch; by many a cruel pang of terrified parting. But she may rest now for a time. Hence bats, owls, apprehensions, new's tongues, evil things—come peace, innocent pleasures, good coffee, and fine weather, golden content, friends meeting, and peaceful hours in the old Presbytery, which has opened its creaking gates to us.

There is a courtyard in front of the house, enclosed by crumbling walls, wreathed, as I have said, with clematis and straggling vines, in neglectful profusion. Outside our great gate the village passes by, in blouses, in cotton nightcaps and cart wheels, in chattering voices, that reach us, with the sound of bells from the Norman tower of the church. We can hear them from the garden at the back of the house, which Madame Valentin, our landlady, used to cultivate herself, with the assistance of her cook. Madame was to be seen opening her shutters in her camisole and nightcap to the sound of early chirrupings and singings, in the light of morning dew-drops and rainbows. The old Presbytery garden of a morning seemed all strung with crisp crystal. They broke from the mossy apple trees, flashed from the spiky gooseberry bushes, hung from trailing vine branches that the monks had nailed up against the grey stone. It was almost a pity the monks were gone and had given place to the very unpoetic and untidy old lady, whom we used to see clipping her lettuces from the Prior's room.

The children had never been abroad before, and to them (as to their elders, indeed) the commonest daily commonplaces of life in the little seaport were treats and novelties. The white caps, the French talk, the country-women and vegetables in the market-place, the swaddling babies, the fishermen coming up from the sea, with their brown bare legs and red caps, carrying great shining fish with curly tails. Madame Valentin, our landlady, herself was a treat to our children, though I must confess that their mother and H. and I all fled before her. There was also a certain Madame Baton next door who kept a poultry yard, and who for Marjory and Binnie, and the rest of them, seemed to be a person of rare talent and accomplishment. She milked a cow (she kept it in a room opening out of her kitchen); she made lace on a cushion; she was enormously rich—so the bathing woman had said in the water. She clacked about in her wooden shoes for hours before the children were up, drove a cart, and had seemed to possess some strange attraction for little Binnie especially. One day I found the little girl standing alone with the old peasant woman in the courtyard, quietly facing Madame Baton, with little folded hands, and asking endless questions in her sweet whistle, to which Madame Baton answered in the gruffest French, while the cow stood by listening and nodding its stupid head. Binnie could not understand what Madame Baton was saying, but she invented it as she went along, and thought it was grand-mama's story (so she told us afterwards) about the cotton nightcaps. "Would the cow and the farm fly away if Madame Baton took off hers?" said little Binnie; "O I wish, I wish she would try!" H. and I used to tell the children a story about enchanted caps and hard-working peasant people, who prospered so long as they kept to their caps and labored in their fields; and who lost all their prosperity when they threw off their homely head-gear and went away in fine feathers and ribbons to walk in the streets of the neighboring towns. Then came the apertures to clear their stores, to ruin their farms, to suck their eggs and milk their cows, and the hens ceased to lay, and the crops dwindled and dwindled, and the fish failed in the nets. It was a very self-evident little apologue. But Binnie and little Annie firmly believed in it. Marjory, who was older, had her doubts. Meanwhile, we all took to calling the place "White Cotton Nightcap Country." They are playing at ogres in the courtyard in front of the happy little day. H. and I sit listening to the happy little voices that reach us in a cool, green-lighted room, which the priests once used as a refectory and whence we hear all the choir, of flutes and dulcimers, of sweet childish prattling and piping in the sunny court. Our landlady looks out, in her camisole, from a bowery shutter; the priest, who is lodging in the empty wing of the house, crosses in the sunshine, with a long shadow zigzagging after him. The little golden-headed ogres stop short in their game to watch him go by. As he pushes at the great gateway, a lean, black-robed figure thrusting at the rusty bar, the swinging bell begins to ring, the great gates suddenly fly open, the priest starts away, and a stranger walks in quickly.

He carries no breviary in his hand, but a newspaper under his arm. He wears a straw hat, no black ropes flap about him; but as he comes towards us, walking straight and quickly across the yard, H. and I, who from long habit guess at one another's thought, glance at the retreating priest, and then look at each other and think of the preachers who, coming in; commonest garb, teach true things to true men;