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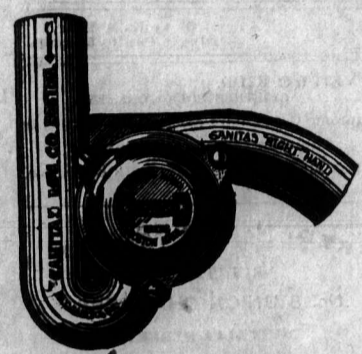
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SALLY.

By Albert Fleming.

It was a hot day in August, one of those reeking hot days that begin to be hot early in the morning and go on getting hotter and hotter till nearly midnight.

In the year 1870 Cow court and its unwholesome cluster of neighbors still hung to the skirts of Holborn and festered round St. Alban's church, stretching from Gray's inn road to Leather lane. The fine shops and warehouses, that now adorn Gray's inn road then only existed in the brain of some city architect. Of all these alleys Cow court carried off the palm for squalor, dirt and general decay. You had to turn out of Leather lane to get there; the turning was flanked on either side by a tavern, and these taverns, with their plate glass and gilding, were the only things that were bright and cheerful in this region. If you explored farther you saw an archway on the right, made by sweeping away the ground floor of one of the crazy tenements. This was the postern gate to Cow court. If any one ever got so far in as this and retained his watch and chain, he always lost them on approaching this archway.

On this August evening a young man was passing through Leather lane in search of Cow court. He was dressed in the latest West End fashion; but even the hideous chimney pot hat, pointed shoes and rigid collar could not disguise his comeliness. At a guess he was three-and-twenty. Being of a trusting nature, he allowed his gold chain to dangle across his waistcoat, and his jeweled pin remained in his scarf.

Kenneth Gordon was down from Oxford, and had been calling on one of the clergymen at St. Alban's, who had asked him to take a letter to a dying girl in Cow court. He strode through the dingy street, sometimes asking his way of one of the residential ladies of Leather lane, and always winning a civil answer by the force of his genial smile. When he reached Cow court a pleasant thrill of excitement pervaded that locality; the watch and chain had survived Leather lane, and now flashed gayly in the evening light; his pin held its accustomed place; his handkerchief gleamed white against his coat. Inquiring of a boy, he learned that Polly Turner lived at No. 7, and was escorted there by a crowd of loafers. The girl was dying; the stuffy room was crowded with friends, nearly dark and unpeppably miserable. Kenneth gave her the letter, but had to take it back and read it to her. In the presence of that deathly white face he felt usual forms of speech to be useless. He held her hand for a minute, tried to say a few kind words, and then felt that he had failed; but the gentle touch and words went straight to the girl's heart, and there rested until it ceased to beat.

When Kenneth left No. 7, a child was lying in a doorway just opposite. Dirt, famine, and ill-usage had effectually obscured the bloom of youth in her. Her face was so dirty that he could only see two large eyes flashing from a tangled mass of hair. This was "Sally." As she never owned a surname, it is impossible to introduce her more formally; if her friends wished to identify her with precision, they called her "Tim's Sally." Tim was her father, and his surname was also hidden in obscurity. Sally had heard that a young swell had come into Cow court, and was waiting to have a look at him. On that she reckoned without her father, for Tim, coming down the passage behind her, enforced parental discipline by a vigorous kick on her shins. When you have kicked a body for 10 years you acquire precision in the art, and Tim planted his kick with such exactness that the girl fell down on the doorstep and there she lay too listless to cry out. Now, nothing is tamer or more monotonous than to waste good kicks on an irresponsible person; so Tim was aggrieved, and followed up his first kick by others, accompanying them with a volley of insipid oaths. The last kick must have caught Sally in a sensitive place, for she gave a sharp scream of agony.

"What's that?" cried a woman from an inner room.
"Oh," said another, "it's only Tim awaking up his gell."
As Kenneth left No. 7 he saw this kick and heard Sally's scream. He instantly strode across the court. Tim was girding himself up for more kicks. For the first time in his life he found this simple pastime of his interfered with.

Kenneth faced him sternly.
"Leave the girl alone, you blackguard. How dare you kick a woman!"

Not kick a woman! Cow court was convulsed. Why, women were kicked every day; they expected it—accepted it as a law of nature. Tim and the bystanders paused for a moment to grasp the full absurdity of the idea; but only for a moment. Then Tim

turned on him like a wild beast, the veins in his great bull's neck swelling like cords.

"Who the—-are you! Can't a man kick his own gell? Get out of this, or I'll kick you, too!" Then, in mere bravado, he lifted his foot to give the girl another refresher.

"Touch her at your peril!" cried Kenneth, flushing to the roots of his hair. In another moment he heard the thud of Tim's foot as it drove lustily into the girl, and, at the self-same moment, Kenneth's fist crashed into Tim's face, catching him on the jaw, and sending him reeling backward down the passage. Then Cow court perceived that their was a joyful prospect of a Homeric combat. In a few moments a ring was formed, and old Biddy was whisked aloft in her chair in the arms of two stalwart supporters. Kenneth's blood was up; he flung his coat and waistcoat to one by-stander and his hat to another. Cow court accepted them with alacrity. Tim divested himself of some superfluous rags, bared his stalwart arms, and prepared to "smash the swell." Biddy surveyed both combatants with a critical eye; she knew the points of a man.

"Blood'll tell," she said oracularly, as she saw Kenneth straighten himself for the fight; he had boxed at Oxford, and was in fair condition, sound in wind, above all tem-

perate and cool. The first round resulted to him that Tim fought in a very effective but utterly unscientific manner. He came at his enemy with a furious rush and planted terrific chance blows; but he left himself unprotected, and wasted a lot of strength to no purpose. Kenneth quietly bided his time, parried Tim's blows and let him exhaust himself. Tim drew first blood, beating down Kenneth's parry, and landing on his temple a considerable force; still Kenneth kept his temper, and the cooler he was the more savage grew Tim; the ring cheered him on, exhorting him to go in and do for the swell. Kenneth now began to act on the offensive, letting drive, he caught Tim full on the mouth with all the strength of his sturdy left hand. His knuckles cut deeply into Tim's lips, and sent him crashing to the ground. Biddy rapped applauding her crutch; she loved to see a straight blow well planted. Tim was set on his feet, rather giddy and dazed—he was not a pretty sight; his lips were like raw liver, and his face distorted with passion; what little steadiness he had been thrown to the winds, and Kenneth's next blow caught him full in the eye. After this he summoned his strength for one more furious onslaught. His blow was partially parried, but landed on Kenneth's shoulder; in reply, Kenneth caught him full in the forehead, felling him to the ground as a butcher does an ox. After this Tim did not come up to time; he was dragged off into some back region, and left Kenneth undisputed master of the field. Old Biddy took a pull at her pipe, expectorated, and said simply:

"Ah, blood has told!"

When Kenneth pulled down his shirt sleeves and turned to the crowd to demand his coat and waistcoat they were not forthcoming—they had vanished. Then Kenneth flashed out, called them curs, sneaks and thieves. Cow court being accustomed to language of far greater pungency, preserved an unbroken calm. Then Biddy rose in her wrath, and, steadying herself on her crutch, vowed, with many bloodcurdling oaths, that the missing garments should be forthcoming, and that quicklings should be infernal torments. The clothes appeared and it was an enabling sight to see the old crowd stand up and order him to search his pockets, while she asked categorically: "Purse? Wipe? Cigar case? Watch? Chain?" etc. Each had been honestly replaced. Kenneth then took Biddy by the hand and gave her a sovereign to distribute among her subjects.

Just then he felt something at his feet. He had almost forgotten the girl he had fought for. She had crawled to his feet and kissed them; there was a pathetic and dog-like fidelity in her look and gesture.

"Don't leave me here," she said. "He'll do for me worse no w than ever when you're gone."

Kenneth paused. It was easier to fight than to know what to do with the damsel he had rescued, but he acted on impulse and threw his card to Biddy.

"There, mother, is my card. I'll take the girl and get a good home for her. That's my address; come and see her when she has pulled round."

"You have fought for her and won her," said Biddy. "I'll bet you're honest, and will do well by her—so take her."

II.

Kenneth lived in an old-fashioned house in Kensington, fenced from the outer world by well grown trees. His father and mother had lived there before him, and had died there. Kenneth then asked his two aunts to live with him. Aunt Hannah was tall, bony and vigorous; Aunt Matilda fat and gentle. Hannah Gordon was well known in the philanthropic world; she was an active member of the charity organization—in fact, organization was her forte. Her special session began about November, when the first touch of winter woke up the poor. Then, take up what paper you like, and ten to one that in some corner of it you would find Aunt Hannah enlightening the world as to what they should do or not do. Exeter hall knew her not, nor did she subscribe to African missions or soup kitchens. What she gloried in were boards. School boards, poor boards, parochial boards—all kinds of boards. Nothing she enjoyed more than ferreting out abuses and getting them remedied. Her abomination was promiscuous charity. It was beautiful to put her on the track of some philanthropic impostor and observe with what holy zeal she would hunt him down to the death! It was she that opened people's eyes to the iniquities of that arch impostor, the archdeacon of Saratoga; before that she was the darling of West End drawing rooms. When she took him in hand he exchanged Belgravia boudoirs for Holloway jail and wasted much persuasive penitence on the chaplain. How many sham mendicants did she not expose!—pouncing upon them in the highways and byways, and giving them in charge with joyful alacrity. It was Aunt Hannah who plunged into a crowd in Piccadilly when a poor man, seized with an epileptic fit, was surrounded by a ring of sympathetic bystanders. Elbowing her way through them, she speedily seized him by the collar.

"Epileptic fit is it! I'll soon cure you!" "Leave the poor man alone!" cried a tender hearted bystander. "Don't you see he's foaming at the mouth?" "Soap!" cried Hannah contemptuously; and lo and behold the man did come out of his very artistic fit, spat out a lump of soap, and said:

"Let me go, can't yer! You're either the devil or old Hannah!"

"You're right!" she said, triumphantly. "I am old Hannah, and, what's more, if ever I catch you having a fit again, I'll run you in."

Aunt Matilda was the very reverse of this. Aunt Hannah always alluded to her in her milder moments as "Poor, dear Matilda," and in her more vigorous ones as "that fool Matilda."

Matilda had never been on a board in her life; but if you looked down the subscription list of any missionary society you would be sure to find her modest initials.

"I never put my full name," she said, meekly. "Hannah makes such a fuss."

It was to this household that Kenneth brought Sally. Kenneth placed her on the seat; but Sally preferred lying on the floor of the cab, and coiled herself up at his feet like a dog.

When they got home Kenneth carried the tired girl in, and seeing that she was not fit for the drawing room, placed her on the mat in the hall, where she lay—a little heap of rags, dirt and towzled hair. As he entered the drawing room he heard Aunt Hannah reading in her very emphatic voice the summary of a paper she intended to deliver at a charity organization conference next day. It was entitled, "Sixteen reasons against the present system of outdoor parochial relief." She had got as far as the tenth. Kenneth's entrance was hailed with joy by the long suffering Matilda.

"Oh, here you are!" she cried. "Ten o'clock, and you were to be here by five."

"I've brought home a girl."

Aunt Hannah dropped the 16 reasons, and ejaculated, "What?" Matilda started. Those five words might mean so much. With the calm that precedes a storm, Aunt Hannah took off her glasses, rubbed them slowly, and waited; but further explanation was interrupted by a scream from Aunt Matilda.

"Why, Kenneth, you've got a great cut on your temple, and there is blood on your collar!"

"It's nothing. I've had a fight. A brute was kicking a girl and I licked him and brought the girl home. She's only a child."

Aunt Hannah put her glasses into their case with a snap and recovered her voice. "Brought her home! Is this house a casual ward or night refuge? Why, Heaven bless us, the boy's gone stark, staring mad!"

Matilda had forgotten the girl and was giving her mind to sticking plaster.

"I've left her on the mat outside," added Kenneth, apologetically. "She isn't as clean as she might be." Hannah strode to the door. The hall was pretty with its fresh flowers, ferns and bright tiles—its prettiness emphasized the incongruity of Sally's appearance. She was lying where Kenneth had left her, her one shoe was tied on with a bit of string, her frock was ragged but the rents did not show, for her skin was as black as her frock. One frightfully bony arm fell across her knee and the other hid her face.

Matilda peeped from behind Hannah. Hannah said, authoritatively:

"Get up and be off with you!" Sally immediately gave vent to such a torrent of bad language that the two ladies rushed away and shut themselves in the drawing-room. Matilda began to cry, but Hannah seated herself rigidly in the arm-chair.

"This is too much, Kenneth."

"It's getting awfully late," said Kenneth. "Suppose we don't talk of this till to-morrow. I'll get Bridget to wash Sally and make her up a bed somewhere."

"Keep that thing in the house and be murdered in our beds and have the house ransacked from top to bottom!" "You can't turn her into the street at 10 o'clock at night. Bridget can surely give Sally some supper and a blanket, and we will lock her in the back kitchen."

The aunts protested, but yielded. Sally followed Kenneth down stairs like a lamb, but fresh difficulties arose with Bridget—they increased when Sally announced that she would tear anybody limb from limb who touched her. To when Kenneth told her he wished her to be clean and neat, the child changed, and she informed Bridget that "she might boil her alive if the boss wished it done."

III.

Next morning Kenneth surveyed the position. Of course he could send Sally to a workhouse school, or to a refuge, but he did not want to let the girl he had won by his bow and spear drift away from him.

His old nurse was now living on a pension, and he resolved to send Sally to her. This seemed easy while he was dressing, but much less easy when he saw his aunts. Matilda was nervous, Hannah full of repressed vigor.

"It's a comfort that we still have spoons to stir our tea with," said the latter.

"I have been thinking about Sally," he began. "I am sure, Aunt Hannah, you will help me." He was interrupted by a sound of crashing china—a scuffle, accompanied by piercing shrieks and the sound of hurrying feet. Aunt Hannah made a dash at the bell, exclaiming:

"Has the devil broken loose?" The door was flung open, and the servants dragged in Sally. She resisted violently, kicking, plunging, and swearing like a trooper. Bridget began: "And I do say, sir, it's too bad to go and bring home such scum, and expect decent people to sit with her. She's half killed James!"

"Yes!" cried the housemaid, "she up with a plate and broke it over his head, and he's a mass of gore in the kitchen this minute."

"Come here, Sally!" said Kenneth, sternly. She released her, and she stood before him with flashing eyes and cheeks, flushed with the glow of combat. An old dress of the cooks had been pinned round her—it was half torn off now; her matted hair had been combed out and rolled up—it lay on her shoulders now in a shaggy mass; and, as Aunt Hannah said, she looked a little demon.

But when Kenneth took her in hand and spoke kindly, the flash in her eyes turned to tears.

"Sally, what have you been doing? How dare you attack James?" "What call 'ad he to lay 'ands on yer boots?"

"What on earth does she mean?" "Why, sir, after breakfast James began to clean your boots as usual, and she flew at him like a tiger, tore them out of his hands, broke a plate over his head, and swore she'd kill him. And as for her language—"

"If he touches them again I'll cut his liver out!" interrupted Sally.

"Now, look here, girl!" Aunt Hannah began.

"One moment, aunt," said Kenneth, turning Sally's tear-stained face to the light. At his touch the hunted, wild beast look passed from her eyes; then he said, "Now, Sally, listen. I want you to forget your savage ways, and be a good child. If you use bad language and frighten and hurt people, you must go back to Cow court, and I shall be sorry I tried to save you from your father. I know it will be hard for you at first; but all good things are hard. You must tell James you are sorry you hurt him, and I'll promise that every day you are good you shall clean my boots yourself."

"Blest if I won't try, and I'll go this moment and ax his blooming pardon." And, so saying, Sally picked up her trailing garments and rushed out of the room.

"A perfect little savage!" said Hannah. "Two years at a reformatory might do good; but I doubt it."

"I thought I saw tears in her eyes," said Matilda.

"And what handsome eyes!" said Kenneth.

"Now, just answer me this," said Hannah. "What on earth made you bring this vagrant here? You plunge into some filthy court, get your head cut open and have this creature flung on your hands. If it is sentimental rubbish, you are a bigger fool than I thought you. If you flatter yourself it's philanthropy you have begun at the wrong end."

"It is a little of both. You do your philanthropy in a scientific, wholesale way; I am beginning mine with a small retail sample. And it is sentiment, too, for I feel rather like a knight who has rescued a maiden and is forbidden by the laws of chivalry to abandon her."

"Then, by the laws of the Round Table, the knight is bound to wed the maiden, and—I wish you joy of your bargain."

"Well, aunt, let Sally have a month under your supervision and then we will hold another meeting upon her." The aunts at last reluctantly agreed to give her a trial.

IV.

The month passed and even Aunt Hannah owned that there was "good stuff" in that girl. Matilda had her baptized and called her Sarah Hope. Hope was a name of good augury. She quickly fitted herself to the ways of the house, never forgot anything, never shirked her work and only had two outbreaks—but they were bad ones, and crockery flew about so freely that Aunt Hannah tied her hands behind her back and locked her up till Kenneth returned. Never in Sally's life had she known what it was to blush, but when he saw those discreditable bonds a flood of shame and contrition dyed her young cheeks. This was the last of her outbreaks. When the month was over she was sent to Nurse Brown and the nearest boarding school. Every Sunday afternoon she went to Bedford Lodge and soon Aunt Hannah owned that Sally was growing quite a decent looking girl. She was indeed rapidly changing in everything but in what was unchangeable—her fidelity to Kenneth and her love for him.

Six months after Kenneth's memorable fight there was no little commotion in Cow court one afternoon, for Biddy announced her intention of "looking up that gell." Out of a dirty receptacle she produced Kenneth's card. It had changed to a dull yellow, for whenever the famous tale was told of how the "young swell licked Tim" the card was handed round to finish off the story. The call was to be made in style. So at 3 o'clock a costermonger's barrow with a donkey harnessed to it was drawn up at the entrance to the court; in the barrow was placed an upturned fruit basket and on to this Biddy was hoisted. The crutch went, too, as sign of her temporary power in Cow court, and to be handy to belabor the donkey with. According to the tradition of the court the best female headgear was a shawl thrown over the head, and thus attired Biddy drove through the stately streets of the West End. As the day wore on she maintained her seat on the basket with increasing difficulty, for it became necessary for her to pause at sundry taverns to refresh herself, and when she reached Bedford Lodge her face was aflame. Many vagrants had stood at that door, but never a more disreputable figure than old Biddy. She did not limit herself in the matter of bell pulling, and her peal rang through the house.

"Go away!" cried the maid, trying to shut the door. "It's like your impertinence to come to the front door!"

"No, you don't, my gell!" chuckled Biddy, adroitly slipping in the end of her crutch. "I've come to Mr. Kenneth Gordon; and I don't go till I've seen him, that's more." The housemaid was so astonished that her vigilance relaxed, and Biddy established herself on the mat inside. The maid called to the cook to keep watch and ran to Aunt Hannah.

"A dreadful woman in the hall!" cried she. "I'll see to her!" And like a hawk swooping down on its quarry, she bore down on Biddy. "Be off at once!" she cried. "How dare you enter my house!"

"Stow your jaw!" said Biddy, unmoved; and then she produced Kenneth's card, and thrust it aggressively under Aunt Hannah's nose. "That's his card, ain't it? Well, I've come to see him and Sally, and don't budge till I do."

"What have you to do with Sarah? We don't want all the riff-raff of Cow court here!"

"That's just what yer will have unless I see the gell," replied Biddy; and then she seated herself on the hall chair, took out her pipe and announced her determination to stay till Kenneth came.

To the great disgust of his aunts, Kenneth, when he returned, ushered Biddy into his study, and was closeted with her for half an hour. Biddy explained that as Tim was dead she considered herself Sally's guardian, and Cow court entirely ratified this view. Before leaving, Biddy reminded Kenneth that there was an ancient and laudable custom of drinking one's host's health. Kenneth ransomed himself from this obligation by a cash payment of half a crown.

The aunts never knew what had taken place at this interview. He merely said that Biddy had something to tell him about Sally's early life.

"Nothing creditable, I'll warrant," said Hannah, and he made no reply.

V.

Seven years had rolled by. They had passed lightly over Kenneth, only changing the youth of 22 into a man of 29. They had brought a few more gray hairs to Aunt Matilda, a few more angularities to Aunt Hannah; but they had absolutely transformed Sally. During the first two years Kenneth had stayed at home, then he had accepted an appointment at Buenos Ayres, where he had to stay for five years. When he left England Sally was a promising girl of 14, and he was easy about her future, for step by step she had won her way into the household, first gaining the hearts of the servants, then Aunt Matilda's, and then by slower degrees Aunt Hannah's. Sally as a child, girl and woman was