

the spiky irregular hand in which it was written.

It was the note intended for Lady Spence-laugh, which had been enclosed by Mrs. Winch in the wrong envelope!

It ran as follows: 'DEAR LADY SPENCELAUGH—Be on your guard against the stranger who will come up to Belair to-day to ask permission to take some photographs of the Hall. Refuse his request, and do not allow him to see Sir Philip. *He is dangerous.* He knows something, but how much or how little I cannot at present tell. I am unable to see you, having just been summoned to the bedside of my mother, who is dying.—Your Ladyship's devoted M. W. Burn this when read.'

I sat staring at the letter like a man in a dream, till Mrs. Jakeway's shrill voice recalled me to the necessity of explaining my silence. 'A nasty awkward hand to read, ain't it, sir?' said the old lady. 'Folk now-a-days seem to try how badly they can write.'

'Pardon me, Mrs. Jakeway,' I replied very gravely, 'but Mrs. Winch has evidently made a mistake in sending this note here. It is intended for Lady Spence-laugh, to whom the note for you has probably been sent. If you will oblige me with a light, some sealing-wax, and an envelope, I will at once enclose it to the writer, and your maid can take it down to the *Hand and Dagger* some time in the course of the day.'

I think it probable that the old lady would have demurred to my summary disposition of her note, but I spoke so authoritatively, and looked so grim and determined, that she was frightened into submission, and got me the articles I wanted without a word. I addressed the envelope to Mrs. Winch, and marked it with the word *Private*, and wrote inside, 'With Mr. John English's compliments: sent in mistake to Cliff Cottage'; and then enclosed the note, and sealed it up in the presence of Mrs. Jakeway, who looked on in wondering silence, and promised faithfully that it would be delivered at the hotel in the course of the day. 'If the mistress of the *Hand and Dagger* and I are to be enemies,' I said to myself, 'the warfare on my side at least shall be fair and above board.'

Having completed all needful arrangements with regard to my apartments, I set out for Belair with a heart that beat more high and anxiously than usual. What did that woman mean by saying that I was dangerous? I, at least, was ignorant of my own power for harm. And why should I be dangerous to Lady Spence-laugh, of all persons in the world, of whose very existence I was utterly ignorant three days before? Into the heart of what strange mystery was I about to plunge? Vain questions, but pondered so deeply as I walked up to Belair, that I had no eyes for the beautiful scenery through the midst of which I was passing.

How I sped at Belair, I must leave for another epistle. This one is so unconscionably long, that I am afraid you will never wade to the end of it. Write soon, old boy, and let me have a good account of your health. *Vale.* Ever thine,  
JOHN ENGLISH.

## THE BETTER ANGEL TRIUMPHS.

IN the vicinity of a pretty and thriving village, on the southern coast of England, a wealthy and respected family, of the name of Hazelton, had resided for centuries. Time had worked changes in the condition of the family, and, from being owners of a wide extent of rich domain, the descendants of the original stock had gradually sunk to the comparatively obscure, but yet respectable, grade of yeomen; the present representative of the line occupying, as tenant, a small portion only of the lands once held by his progenitors in fee. Mark Hazelton was a thriving, well-to-do specimen of the English farmer of the last century, and was looked up to by his neighbours and companions as a model of the class to which he belonged. In addition to the land tenanted by him, he was owner of the only mill within a very considerable distance of the village and adjacent home-

steads, and it was generally supposed that whenever Esther Hazelton, his only child, and the most cherished object of his love, should give her hand in marriage, she would take with her an ample dowry, with which to gild the fetters of Hymen.

Esther was a girl of uncommon beauty, and her personal charms were enhanced by the graces of her disposition, and the advantage of an excellent education. She was the light that cast a radiance over the widowed home of her father, and her sweet voice, as she carolled about the old-fashioned dwelling, imparted joyousness throughout the whole establishment.

Esther was, at the time to which my story refers, just entering upon her eighteenth year, and, with the advantages she possessed of personal attraction and local position, it was not strange that she should be looked upon as a prize worth contending for by the swains of her native village.

But Esther had not reached her eighteenth year without certain aspirations of her own in reference to the future; and the object on which her "maiden fancy loved to dwell" was a cousin Frank Merton, whose predilection for the sea had induced his parents to apprentice him at an early age to the merchant service, and he at this time held the important position of first-mate on board a first-class Indiaman.

Esther and Frank had been brought up together almost from infancy, and the mutual love of childhood had grown into the love of their youth; and, now that they were verging upon a more advanced stage of existence, it developed itself into a perfect union of affection and of faith; they were pledged to each other for "weal or woe—through life to death."

With a perfect reliance upon each other's love, Frank and Esther parted on the 9th of November, 1847; he to perform his last voyage out and home; she to provide the *ménage* which should grace their nuptial ceremony and future home. The blessings of the parents on both sides were with their children.

Shortly before the occurrence just spoken of, a new incumbent had been dedicated to the vicarage of—The stranger was a person of commanding presence, of decidedly aristocratic tendencies, and about thirty years of age. He was unmarried, and was accompanied to the vicarage by a maiden sister, who presided over his household. In the course of his introductory visits to the members of his new flock, the Rev. Basil Hinton very early became acquainted with the family of Farmer Hazelton; and whether it was that he felt more than usual interest in the spiritual welfare of that particular family, or whether he was fascinated by the natural loveliness of its special ornament it is certain that his calls at the miller's homestead were more frequent than at any other residence within the limits of his fold. His attentions to Esther were earnest, yet ever delicate, until, at length, he could no longer conceal from himself that he loved her with a passion that at times absorbed every other faculty of his nature.

Still, there was the pride of birth, of social position, of the world's opinion, ever antagonizing with his love, and so restraining him from saying what he would have given thousands to say had such saying been reciprocated. He would have said to Esther, "I love you," and he dared not! For, besides obstacles in his way on his own side, he knew that Esther was affianced to her cousin.

In love, as in war, difficulties only sharpen the desire to overcome them; but the consciousness of these difficulties did not render the vicarage a happier home than it should be. Basil was fretful, impatient, impetuous, and, on returning home, at any time, instead of joining his sister, would retire to his room, and brood in silence over the obstacles in his path to happiness.

"My dear brother," said Margaret Hinton, as she one day advanced to salute him on his return from a protracted walk, "do look cheerful once more! My heart aches when I see that continual gloom upon your brow—do tell me if I can relieve you from the weight that oppresses you?"

"No, Meg, no! you cannot help me, and I beg of you not to add to my annoyance by questioning me about the cause of it."

"Brother, I know the cause, and need not question you. You love Esther Hazelton?"

Basil started as though a dagger pierced him. "How know you that?" he asked, passionately.

"Dear Basil, I have seen it for some time past; but you have become so reserved, and so unapproachable, that I dared not speak to you upon the subject."

"And if you had dared to speak, what would you have said to me, Margaret?"

"I would have told you, Basil, that Esther Hazelton is the betrothed wife of another, and that, as such, you love for her is sinful."

"My dear monitress, I know it is; but my love for that girl is the master-passion of my soul. For her I would sacrifice everything—surely she might sacrifice her girlish love in return."

"Basil! remember your sacred calling—remember your vows at ordination—remember your duty to your Maker, and to His creatures! Oh, get rid of this fascination, my brother; do not peril your soul by persisting in evil."

"It is useless, Margaret. Esther Hazelton shall be my wife, or the wife of no other man. There leave me; I shall remain in my study to-day."

Margaret looked at her brother, and with streaming eyes and hardly-suppressed sobs, left the room.

About three months after the occurrence of the incident I have related, a rumour became prevalent that the—Indiaman, on board of which Frank Merton was on his outward voyage, had been wrecked, and that all on board had perished. It is unnecessary to dilate upon the feeling of distress and anguish with which the intelligence was received at the home of Esther, and it would be uncharitable to dwell upon the sensations of mingled pity and gratification that prevailed at the vicarage. The Rev. Basil Hinton beheld in fancy a stumbling-block removed from his path by a dispensation of Providence. Why should he not press forward?

Misfortunes rarely visit mankind singly—you seldom lose a valuable horse, but you learn that your rickyard has been the playground of an incendiary—so the news of Frank Merton's death was presently supplemented by rumours of Farmer Hazelton's difficulties.

Between filial affection and the heartbreaking consciousness of her lover's death, it may well be imagined that poor Esther had little thought of anything but the misery in her own heart, and in that of her father. Still, for his sake, she kept bravely up, and, hoping against hope, resolved to preserve her pledged faith to her cousin until death put its eternal seal upon her fidelity.

There was now a double motive for the attentions of the Rev. Basil Hinton at the residence of Farmer Hazelton—to impart feelings of resignation for a loss that was irrecoverable on the one hand, and to suggest measures for alleviation of pressure on the other. He did not omit to avail himself of it, and while he delicately sympathized with Esther on her bereavement, he also comforted her father with assurances that affairs were, perhaps, not so bad as they appeared to be.

"But, farmer, suppose the affair is so desperate as you imagine, there are ample means at hand for extricating you from your embarrassment. Let me be your banker for the moment."

"No, sir! I never borrowed money yet, and my child shall never say I was the first of the house to accept aid from strangers."

"Nonsense Hazelton! I like your spirit, but I condemn your pride. For your child's sake let me assist you."

"No."

"You refuse my assistance simply because I am a stranger."

"Not so, Mr. Hinton; but I would rather endure the worst that can happen than lay myself under an obligation I may not be able to relieve myself from."

"Listen to me, Mr. Hazelton, and think well over what I shall say to you. Your daughter's affianced husband has gone down with his ship, has he not?"