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CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

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CHAPTER VI.

SAMPHIRE COTTAGE.

The cottage bearing this name stood overlooking the sea, and on a higher situation than most of the houses surrounding it. That residence, with its green door and window-shutters, and trellis work, which formed a porch, over which climbed the sweet-scented jessamine, was well known in the neighbourhood. Standing in its own little garden, it seemed to pride itself on its superior elevation, and to cast a scornful smile on the humbler dwellings beneath it. He who occupied that dwelling was a being of an erratic brain; and one of his numerous whims had been to erect in that garden a stout mast, from the top of which on Sundays might float the national flag.

The owner and occupier of Samphire Cottage was a man without a pedigree, or such a subject of family pride as was known to himself, neither could he find any one who could give him the information on it he desired. In appearance, this strange man was a fussy, well-to-do person, with a flesh colour on his cheeks, and locks whitened with advancing years. In stature he was short, and in form thin, while his active habits told him to be a man whose brain was seldom at rest. There was a mock gravity settled on the countenance of Jacob Winter—for such is the appellation he chose to wear, his real name being unknown to himself—that gave a comicalness to his aspect, and that seemed at once to invite and repel the desire to make of him a confidant.

Jacob Winter was desirous of being thought the friend of everybody, and yet but few persons could have confidence that such was the case, and for the unfortunate reason that, in his intercourse with mankind, it did not seem possible for him to distinguish between honesty and insolvency. It was unhappy for him that, in his eager desire to demonstrate the virtue, he not unfrequently precipitated headlong into the vice. The kindness of the old man was as a sunbeam in winter; if for a moment it burst forth and thawed his rigidity, it became quickly overshadowed by an assumed misanthropy, and a stiffness of manner would follow, painful to the recipient. Yet there was not a case in the district he would not have arisen in the middle of the night to attend to, and those in trouble would obtain relief were it possible; but for all this, his kindness would not command a deep gratitude; for the sweets of his compassion were always presented in the bitter cup of reproof.

This old gentleman came to Folkstone a wealthy man. As stated, he had no knowledge of his family, and under the impression that his native place was that old tower, he had come from the East Indies for the purpose of making enquiry. Jacob Winter took it for granted that from the nature of things he must have had both a father and mother; but he had no recollection of either of them; he had also an indistinct idea of having played with a little girl, whom he now thought must be a sister; but when, and where, had faded from his memory. Moreover, a feeling possessed his mind that they both had lived with a person who, in fact, was not a relative.

Having spent all the life that he remembered in trading in the Indian Ocean, and having by such means amassed his wealth, on returning to England in charge of his own ship, he resolved to retire from business and to spend his money. From the feeling that Folkstone was his native place, he accordingly fixed his residence there, and made the generous offer of three hundred guineas to be given to any person who could tell his proper name, and point out his pedigree. This tempting proposal taxed the adventurous spirit of many of the old inhabitants, and Samphire Cottage was besieged by such as were anxious to obtain the reward. In his eagerness to get a solution of this difficulty, Jacob Winter submitted to the most vexatious questionings with a patience afterward surprising to himself. Every effort employed to solve this enigma having failed, and being unable to find out to which of all the twigs or branches of the human tree he belonged, the old man resolved to claim a relationship with all, and felt himself to be flattered in having applied to him the name of "Uncle Jacob."

From the preciseness of doing things on board a first-class ship, which had formed the school of his life, with all his volatility, Uncle Jacob was in some things a rigid disciplinarian. This was particularly seen in the domestic arrangements at Samphire Cottage, where everything was conducted with the regularity of clock-work. Indeed, they were timed by the clock placed in the hall of the cottage, and Betty, the old servant and housekeeper, and the only person who occupied with its proprietor Samphire Cottage, was charged to be in all things ready to the minute.

In the morning, therefore, breakfast was always on the table precisely at the hour of eight; dinner, at the somewhat plebeian hour of one; and tea, exactly at five o'clock. Not a minute from these hours did Jacob Winter sit down to his meals; and had not the servant been punctual, a domestic storm would have been created not to be easily forgotten. But of this there was no fear; for the old housekeeper so timed her engagements as to be in herself a kind of moral machine.

Uncle Jacob had known Captain Freeman in India; they had been companions ashore; and in the register of his good opinion he stood A 1. When, therefore, the old man heard of the loss of the *Fairy Queen*, Samphire Cottage exhibited the deepest expression of mourning, and the Union Jack floated at half-mast for a week. The leathern heart of the ex-captain was softened by this event more than by any other circumstance he had up to that time met with. From his acquaintance with the drowned man, his friend claimed the prerogative to visit the bereaved home, and the condolence he offered the widow was both deep and sincere, while Charles, from the striking resemblance he bore to his father, became a great favourite.

Jacob Winter had never loved. He had never seen any particular reason why he should love anybody; yet the heart that he possessed, if rightly trained, was capable of loving ardently and long. When, therefore, the tendrils of his affection commenced entwining themselves around Charles Freeman, the exercise from being so long delayed gave to them an increased strength, and the youth became at once the old man's idol and his torment.

From the familiar intercourse which had sprung up between himself and the family of Captain Freeman, winter evenings found Uncle Jacob sitting at the domestic hearth as the lecturer of Charles. On such occasions the severest strictures on the badness of the human race, and their base ingratitude, was dilated on freely. Often was the patience of the young man taxed to the utmost limit of endurance; and at this point the climax in the lecture was reached by denouncing him as an "idle rascal," and a "scampish dog." Had such terms been employed toward his protégé by any other person, Jacob Winter would have been tempted to commit some desperate act; but with himself they were simply teasing expressions, the result of feelings flowing pure from the fountain of his affection, but before they could reach the point of expression had become corrupted. They started immaculate from his heart, but became polluted in their transit to the end of his tongue. Yet there were times when Charles Freeman, as he drew nearer to manhood, felt a strong inclination to resent such outbursts on the part of the old man; but the slightest move in such a direction filled his soul with regret, and drew from him a thousand apologies.

Samphire Cottage was always open to Charles Freeman, and his happiness was there studied with an earnestness akin to worship. Not being burdened with an accumulation of learning, Jacob Winter was determined his protégé should have his share of the coveted treasure, that was, to use his own expression, "If the stupid fellow could be made to take it aboard." Having, therefore, made such preparations as were deemed necessary before entering college, Charles Freeman, with whom learning was a luxury, found himself matriculated at Cambridge.

The morning, at the close of each vacation, that saw the departure of the young man from home, was always a gloomy one at Samphire Cottage. The coach that was to bear him to London left his native town as early as six o'clock; but long before that hour Uncle Jacob aroused the neighbourhood in knocking at the street door of the residence of Mrs. Freeman. The old man always persisted in being at the coach office that he might say "Good-bye;" but when the moment arrived a choking sensation always prevented him.

From the coach office, after a long walk, Uncle Jacob proceeded to breakfast. There stood his early repast in the shape of eggs, bacon, dry toast and coffee—and at the minute; but at such times there it remained untouched until the servant removed it; for he who should have eaten it paced the room, calling himself an old stupid who deserved to be horse-whipped, and stood by the fire drying his pocket handkerchief.

"Drat these times!" old Betty was in the habit of exclaiming; "you'll starve yourself to death, you will."

This familiarity of his old servant was rather flattering than otherwise to Uncle Jacob, who accepted the reproof as grateful incense offered at the shrine of his affection for that "scamp."

Not only was the time for the departure of Charles Freeman a period of excitement at Samphire Cottage, but his return was, if possible of

greater importance. For weeks before the ending of the college term, Jacob Winter would daily assail the letter-carrier. Lying in wait for that servant of the public to pass his residence, the old man would pounce upon him, and with an earnestness amounting to positive anxiety entreat of him a letter. So anxious was he to receive a letter from Charles Freeman, and so earnestly did he put the enquiry, that it appeared as though he thought the postman to be the possessor of magical skill, and capable of turning any letter he held in his hand into one from Cambridge. Could the letter-carrier have accomplished this little feat, the sum of ten guineas would not have been considered too much to pay for all the effort. The aspect of Uncle Jacob was truly piteous as the "Nothing to-day, sir," of the man of letters, fell upon his ear.

This sorrow arising from being disappointed, was generally followed by an outburst of wrath, during which bitter and cruel reproaches were heaped upon the memory of the absent one. In vain it was that Mrs. Freeman tried to excuse her son to the old man; everything she urged was indignantly thrust aside, and the delay attributed to indifference and neglect. But when at length intelligence was received that his protégé would be home on the morrow, the little cottage became at once the scene of delight. Indeed, there seemed a good show of reason for the saying of old Betty on such occasions, that "If any man was ever stark staring mad on any subject, Jacob was the man on the matter of Charles Freeman." So great was his wild delight, that it was with difficulty he could refrain from forcing his housekeeper to dance with him, and the only means by which he could conquer this feeling was to run into the garden and hoist the flag to the mast head.

The meeting of Uncle Jacob with his young friend was always the same. Full an hour before time he would be pacing to and fro in front of the coach office; and when that vehicle arrived he would assume a dignity, and stand as unconcerned as though it were no business of his who were the passengers. Charles Freeman always knew when to look for him; and on meeting him knew full well the salutation he should receive. Still maintaining his assumed dignity when addressed, he would turn suddenly and exclaim:

"What! Bless me! can it be you! I thought you to be dead and buried, and by way of respect was just thinking about ordering a mourning suit. Alive, and not to write! but it is the way of the world, and every generation gets worse and worse. This world! it is the worse place in creation, and the wonder to me is that it has not long since been burnt up to a cinder and pitched into the sea."

Sometimes Charles felt a desire to enquire of his friend how many worlds he had visited, that he could thus speak of our own by comparison; and also to ask for information on the possibility of casting our calcined earth into the sea; but usually he submitted in silence. It was a standing rule with Uncle Jacob when they met that not a step should be taken in the direction of home before they had both drunk of the glass of welcome. In the summer it was champagne, and in winter a glass of brandy and water stood ready for them. With his antiquated ideas he did not believe in any man being cordially received unless on his arrival he imbibed a cheering potation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISTAKE OF ONE BECOMES AN EVENT IN THE LIFE OF OTHERS.

For some cause Clara Chillington had resolved on meeting the pensioners on her bounty a few days before the ordinary time. This intelligence was communicated to them all, and they were invited to meet their benefactress at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was from reverence to the memory of her deceased mother Clara paid this annual visit of kindness to Folkstone. After her marriage with Sir Harry, Lady Chillington, a native of Folkstone, made it a religious duty annually to visit a cottage near to the church, and there dispense to age and wretchedness tokens of her benevolence. The poor of the town anticipated the coming of "My Lady," and on the first sign of approaching Christmas, the pensioners on her bounty smiled, with that apology for a cheerful laugh which is all that stern poverty will permit its victims to indulge in. When, therefore, the mistress of the Priory died, the recipients of her favour dreaded lest the kindness they had received should cease; but on her dying bed Clara was charged by her mother to sustain the practice.

On the morning on which Clara Chillington was to bestow her bounty on the poor, Dick Backstay by an unusual blunder made a mistake in the figures on the face of an old Dutch clock which for years had been ticking itself out of service in one corner of his little cottage. It was an hour later than the time appointed when he left his home, and on reaching the place he found that his benefactress had departed. But although she had gone, the gift intended for the old seaman was left behind. On hearing that "My Lady" had left the cottage, the heart of the old man became saddened; but ascertaining that in consequence of the fine weather it was her intention to walk home, without saying more than "Thankee," to the person who acted as her almoner, he pushed off with all speed that he might overtake her and offer his gratitude for her kindness.

The air was calm, and the sun was shining warm and bright for that season of the year, when the old sailor, suffused with perspiration from the haste he had made, and believing that by means of taking a short cut he was now in advance of Clara Chillington, seated himself on a dry bank, and shaded his eyes with his hat from the oblique rays of the sun, that his vision might not be retarded, and that he might the better see if she were approaching. Being thus occupied he did not see Charles Freeman who came upon him from behind.

Charles Freeman having finished his studies at Cambridge, was now spending his leisure in obtaining a collection of fossils of the ammonite and trilobite order found in the chalk cliffs of the district. Hitherto his life had not been marked by any event of interest save that of losing his father. The death of Capt. Freeman had not left his son wealthy, but with still enough to satisfy his moderate desires. This gave to him leisure; he made the goal of his ambition abstractly intellectual, and found a pleasure in the labour attending such a course. To him our globe seemed made for the study of mankind, and that in its furniture there lay concealed worlds of wisdom it was his duty, as it was his pleasure to find out. He made no pretensions to the voice of Fame; he was contented to remain unknown; and he employed his labours that he might gather to himself a greater fund of intelligence, and become more acquainted with the Creator through the medium of his works.

On the morning therefore that his humble friend, trusting his decaying energies to the control of gratitude, had been borne along at such unusual speed to offer the grateful feelings of his heart to the benefactress of his old age, Charles Freeman had been employed in adding to his collection, and had succeeded in obtaining an admirable specimen of the ammonite. Being engaged in admiring the natural treasure in his possession, himself had drawn near to Dick without seeing him; when therefore he caught sight of the old man, without being himself observed, he stood and looked on the friend of his dead father, the companion and playfellow of his childhood, and now the friend of his manhood, who would risk his enfeebled strength to save him from the power of reflection, and the feeling of genuine kindness filled his soul. Standing there in person somewhat tall, and slightly formed, with spirit flowing in a full current along every muscle, and with a countenance bearing the stamp of honest heartedness, he appeared the beau ideal of a gentleman, one whose candid aspect invited the weak and the oppressed to seek him for consolation and defence.

"Good morning, Dick," said Charles Freeman, as he drew nearer to the old sailor.

"Why, Mister Charles! I beg your pardon, but I didn't see you afore."

"I dare say not; but what brings you under the lee of this hedge this fine morning?"

"I have come here in the hope of overtaking 'My Lady Chillington,' that I may thank her for her goodness to the old woman and me."

"Has she extended her kindness to you?"

"Bless your heart! who is there she isn't kind to! I do believe that she is a very angel, and as beautiful as she is good."

"I have heard that she is ever ready to help such as are in trouble."

"Ah! she is her mother's girl, and she was too good to live."

"How is your wife, Dick?"

"Thankee, but she's dreadful bad, and when the wind is eastward her pains is scroo-deathin. I am afraid she'll never get better, I am indeed, Mister Charles." The thought of the probable protracted sufferings of his wife fetched a tear into the old man's eyes, and as he brushed it away with the sleeve of his jacket, he exclaimed, "Here she comes now! By Jingo she does."

Guided by the exclamation of the sailor, Charles Freeman saw the friend of the old man turning a corner on the road that had hitherto concealed her, and approaching the place where they were standing. Hurriedly therefore he took his departure, that he might be out of hearing when the thanks were offered. Clara was well known in the district, and when Charles Freeman met her he lifted his hat to her graceful inclination, and pursued his course.

The reason why Clara had not reached the place where Dick Backstay was waiting to receive her, arose from the fact of having remained to sketch the trunk of a decayed tree, whose curious appearance attracted her attention. Having finished her task she thought she had replaced her gold pencil case in her pocket, but by some means it had fallen to the ground. The lost article lay in the path of Charles Freeman, who on seeing it gutter in the sun, picked it up, and from the initials engraven on it quickly learnt to whom it belonged. To restore that trifle was his instant resolve; but as that delicate piece of artistic skill lay glittering in the palm of his hand, a new sensation entered his mind that neither philosophy nor any other power that he could command was capable of resisting. He felt himself to be exceedingly foolish thus to yield to an influence so sudden; but there appeared a magic in that pencil case representing Clara Chillington to him in a manner never thought of when but a few minutes before he passed her. The value of the trifle had now become multiplied a thousand fold in his estimation, and from the simple fact that it was her property. But there was no time to be lost in restoring it, and he retraced his steps just in time to see Dick Backstay with his hat under his left arm, and smoothing his forehead