

THE CURSE OF EMPTY HANDS.

At dawn the call was heard,
And busy reapers stirred
Along the highway leading to the wheat.
"Will thou reap with us?" they said.
I smiled and shook my head.
"Disturb me not," said I, "my dreams are sweet."

I sat with folded hands,
And saw across the lands
The waiting harvest shining on the hill:
I heard the reapers sing
Their song of harvesting,
And thought to go, but dreamed and waited still.

The day at last was done,
And homeward, one by one,
The reapers went, well laden as they passed.
There was no mispent day,
Not long hours dreamed away
In sloth that turns to sting the soul at last.

A reaper lingered near.
"What?" cried he, "idle here?"
Where are the sheaves your hands have bound to-day?"
"Alas!" I made reply,
"I let the day pass by
Until too late to work I dreamed the hours away."

"O foolish one!" he said,
And sadly shook his head.
"The dreaming soul is in the way of death.
The harvest soon is o'er.
Rouse up and dream no more!
Act! for the summer faileth like a breath."

"What if the Master came
To-night and called your name,
Asking how many sheaves your hands had made?"
If at the Lord's command
You showed but empty hands,
Condemned, your dreaming soul would stand dis-
mayed."

Filled with strange terror then,
Lest change come not again,
I sought the wheat-fields while the others slept.
"Perhaps ere break of day
The Lord will come this way,"
A voice kept saying, till, with fear, I wept.

Through all the long, still night,
Among the wheat-fields white,
I reaped and bound the sheaves of yellow grain.
I dared not pause to rest,
Such fear possessed my breast,
So for my dream I paid the price in pain.

But when the morning broke
And rested reapers woke
My heart leaped up as sunrise kissed the lands,
For came He soon or late
The Lord of the estate
Would find me bearing not the curse of empty
hands.

CHILDIE.

"Good-by, dear. In a little while I shall
come back to you." Childie had stayed long
below; the night was damp, and she was a fool-
ish child, indeed, to stand, in her thin dress,
wasting words upon the porch. What need of
it! Surely it could take but a moment to deliv-
er my brief message, and—

Why did he not stride away quickly, as I had
expected? Twenty minutes had passed, and
still he staid, and she—for what?

So surprisedly, vexedly, I was musing when
these words floated up to me. They turned my
thoughts entirely; caused me simply to stare
out in honest wonder whence the voice had
come. Surely one had spoken to me; one, my
own lover, as on the yesterday, ere this trouble
came between us!

No sight, no sound save the steps dying away
on the winding path. They were sharp remind-
ers. That was only a fancy, then—this only—
Ralph Hare walking away from me for ever. I
fought, as best I could, the fresh pang my pride
had brought me. It grew apace, as I had not
dreamed; it grew insupportable; suddenly my
fingers clinched, and the nails pressed ruthlessly—

ly—

"Clare!"

A sweet voice broke the spell. I turned con-
fusedly to see Childie gazing at me.

"I—I have something to tell you, Clare.
Guess what I have been doing down on the
porch to-night?"

"Flirting with the roses, making love to the
honeysuckles, dear?"

We talked this foolish way to Childie. But
the question was mechanical; I was too ab-
sorbed even to note her shamed, blushing face.

"I—I have been getting engaged, Clare."

"Engaged, Childie?"

"Yes. I don't wonder you are surprised;
I can't quite think how it came about myself.
Of course I hadn't an idea of it when I went
out there, but, somehow, all in a little minute,
I was in—in his arms, and he was asking me to
marry him, and telling me what a dear little
wife I would make; and I—I was—"

"Do you mean to say that you are engaged
to Ralph Hare?"

A scornful laugh broke with the question
from my lips. Whatever of soul lit my face was
evidently spared her, for she only regarded me
a bit more shamedly, while the flush deepened
on her cheek.

"You do not believe me, and I do not wan-
der, Clare. Only to have seen him twice, and
things to come to such a pass! It is dreadful.
I know, but I guess love comes to a girl—don't
it?—just when some man asks her to marry
him. I know I am loving him, loving him—it
seems as though I have been loving him all
my lifetime, since that one little minute."

Her blue eyes wandered dreamily off in the
direction he had taken, while I stared at her,
dumb in the crushing presence of a truth de-
fying disbelief. Suddenly she turned back
again.

"So strange, Clare dear! He is not at all the
man I have dreamed that I should marry; not

handsome, nor brown-eyed, nor tall. But—my
precious flowers are already wilting; I must—
oh! I forgot, Clarrie; he was sorry for your
headache."

She hurried away, unnoting the cry with
which, at the first realization of the roses on her
bosom, I had started to my feet. The flowers
he had brought; the tale of love; to—to—

To give to Childie, to whisper in her ear!
I had contained myself till now, but now—

For the moment I could only sink back in
my chair bewildered from the weight of pain.
And then I saw things clearly. He had asked
her to marry him—this girl from boarding-
school whom, until two days ago, he had never
seen. And out of his very trouble, his very love
for me, he had done this thing. Truth the
more maddening! What if it were my fault?
What that she was the sole innocent in this
little farce of hearts? It was all naught to me
that moment. I did not blame myself. I did
not blame Ralph Hare; my heart swelled only
with a sudden hatred towards Childie—little
Childie I had loved so long.

She was to me, that moment, only the girl
who wore my roses; the girl who, outwardly
at least, had usurped my right in Ralph Hare's
heart. Staying in the same house with her
grew suddenly insupportable; I trembled lest
she should come again, and with an impulse,
most of terror, I started up and went down the
stairs.

I paused in the hall for one of those common-
places the greatest griefs sometimes do not ig-
nore—to take my hat and shawl from the rack—
and hurried out the door. I had no thought,
no plan, only to get away from Childie. I
turned into the pretty woodland path where we
had walked together so many times; where our
tender vows were pledged, and where we had
quarreled, too, two days ago. Some trifle, it
matters not; but I was right and he was wrong,
of course, and I was angry with him; I would
never see him again, I said.

I had kept my word. Even this night, when
he had come for his good-by kisses, little fear-
ing my proud words. It came to me with fresh
force as I walked on down the path. All my
own fault—my pride. What would pride avail
me now? What comfort in the long, dreary
days I saw ahead? But I must dwell with it,
perforce; feed on it; tack my all to its empti-
ness, this monster I had wooed to me.

A hard punishment, but I had deserved it.
I grew suddenly humble; a strange impulse
moved me; a conceived power, even, to endure
my fate. Just as fate brought one around the
curbing roadway, face to face with me.

"Clarrie!"

Ralph Hare, traveling-bag in hand, going
away—away from me. It was more than I
could endure. I turned cowardly to flee, but
the one word held me spellbound.

"Yes, Clarrie," I answered, faintly, scarce
knowing what I said. "I—I wanted to bid you
good-by, and to—congratulate you on your en-
gagement, Mr. Hare."

A laugh broke from his lips.

"Then, in return, I suppose I should thank
you for my happiness?"

So very sweet the bitter in his words! He
was my own lover still; the flowers were mine;
the tender tale for me, for me. A moment of
exaltation to meet a pang the deeper.

"How could you do it?" Pride was little,
now; the words burst passionately from my
lips, and I looked up at him with my full heart
in my face. "How could you do such a foolish
thing? And how will you ever marry Childie
when you love only me?"

I saw the light flash in his eyes, but he laid
his hand even fiercely on my shoulder.

"Why did you send that pretty child to me
with such a message? That was what maddened
me. I looked in her sweet face, and I vowed I
would not go away without a woman's love, a
woman's kiss to cheer me, if I could get them
from her. How will I ever marry her, you say?
I swear to you I never will!"

"You will not marry Childie?"

She was yet only the girl who wore my roses;
nevertheless, I shivered a bit at his words.

"No; never after the face you show me. But
I see there, 'What of Childie?' What of
Childie, indeed! What should matter such an
engagement to any one? She will forget it in
a week's time, and be ready to love another
man. And—and I do not care, this moment,
whether she does or not. For once I am mean,
dishonourable, contemptible—all, so that I gain
my ends. I will marry only you, Clarrie,
and—"

Involuntarily his hand tightened on my
shoulder.

"I am going to marry you—to-night!"

"To-night?" I could only echo the startling
word and stare at him.

"Yes; come with me now, Clarrie."

His tone softened; he took me in his arms
and kissed me the old tender way.

"I am a little strange, you think, my dar-
ling, but I am desperate; I cannot go and leave
you with your foolish pride. It would surely
work mischief again between us. Come, dear,
or we shall lose the train."

Pride had risen a little beneath his poremp-
tory manner, but it sank under his tenderness.
One thought, one mastering impulse that mo-
ment ruled me—the preciousness of the love I
was so near losing, the great joy to win it for
ever now. Without a word I put my arm in
his and walked towards the station.

Those blissful moments—the first I sat in the
car, clasping my lover's hand while we jour-
neyed towards the nearest town. I could but

smile as I realized the shabby shawl and bonnet
—odd wedding garments, truly, for so proud a
maid as Clarrie Vane. But I did not care;
pride and I had had a falling out, and I could
well afford to laugh at it. What matters aught
now, so near the great joy—

How strangely they flashed in amid my bliss-
ful dreaming, the shamed, blushing face of little
Childie, the tender rhythm of the words:
"Loving him, loving him, loving him my life-
time, since that one little minute."

It was all foolishness, I told myself. Such an
engagement could not matter to any one, would
not matter at all to Childie. But, try as I
might, I could not shut out the pretty vision,
nor cease from hearing the tender words. I
began to feel a guilty thing; to shrink each
moment the more from being mean, dishonor-
able, contemptible to gain this happy end.
Involuntarily my lips parted to urge to Ralph
Hare a better way in this mad business when—

The train came to a sudden stop, and he left
me to inquire into the detention. The charm
loosed a little; I lived one moment with honest
self. I saw it vain to argue; passion ruled
Ralph Hare this night, and he would not listen
to me. I was helpless to withstand him, and
yet—how could I stand up to marry him in
presence of the shamed face of little Childie, and
her simple haunting words!

Some way I must escape it!

The whistle of a return-train broke in upon
my reverie. One moment I sat trembling,
breathless; then, with a sudden overpowering
impulse, I arose and went swiftly down the aisle
into the darkness, away from him.

I never knew just how Ralph Hare met the
mystery of that night. A keen regret followed
my impulse as I sped backwards on the other
train. It died a bit at the sight of little Childie
asleep, with a smile upon her face, and a spray
of her lover's roses clasped tight within her
hand; but this did not dissuade me from writ-
ing that same hour the explanation which
would surely make all right again between us.

My answer was the single line:

"Since you could treat me thus, it is better I
fulfill my last engagement."

The same mail brought a letter for Childie.
So it was all over, he was thoroughly angry
with me now; the face I had shown was noth-
ing to him, never would be again. I was
dumb beneath the blow; I resolved to take up
life as best I could, quietly, uncomplainingly.
For it was all my own fault again, all now
through a foolish sentimentality for Childie.
It was not strange, perhaps, that I hated her
afresh in the coming days.

The coming days so bright with love and hope
for her! Letter after letter came to Childie,
always to light her eyes and paint her fair
young face. Till one day, to my astonishment,
she met one with a frown, and, after a scant
perusal, tore it impatiently to bits.

An hour later she came to me with a quiet,
smiling countenance.

"I have just done what I ought to have done
long ago," she said. "Broken my engagement
with Ralph Hare."

"Child—"

"Rather, undone what never ought to have
been at all. What a ridiculous affair it was!
To engage one's self to a man one has never seen
but twice; how could a girl love a lover all so
quickly? Besides, you know he never was my
ideal. Not handsome, nor brown-eyed, nor tall.
I have been thinking, Clarrie, and all these
must my lover be."

She was openly in earnest. But, strange as
it all was, I never questioned her; I never said
more to her. What was it to me anyway!
What, since all the same, my love was nothing
to him, never would be again? I lived my life
still dumbly, though a bit sometimes I paused
to wonder if the knowledge of two such women
did not trouble Ralph Hare a little.

I was ill-prepared for the letter that came
that Summer evening that mad burst of love,
regret, entreaty, which he had sent to me. But
from such shocks one rallies lightly; it was not
many minutes before, with glowing eyes and
burning cheeks, I was reveling in love and the
blissful future as wildly as any day in life. For
pride was quite dead in me.

It seemed only embarrassing the thought of
telling it to Childie. But it must be over with;
and that very night I told her all that was
essential of this matter.

"Why, I see it all now, Clare," she answered,
quietly, as I finished. "This is the very, the
only, reason Ralph Hare proposed to me."

The words, the manner, would have eternally
banished any doubt one might have hedged of
Childie. But I had none, and I only smiled at
her. The next days were perfect days. Busily
I sewed, for we were to be married, it was
decided, as soon as Ralph came home. And
Childie helped—oh! so industriously, and so
sweetly,—on the wedding-dress; and, at last,
all was ready within two days of the wedding
day.

He was coming to night—coming home to
me. How sweet it all was, how much sweet-
er even for the troubles we had had! I sat in the
little upper room with Childie, waiting, watch-
ing. I never can quite recall—

Some one came in, I know. There were some
words about an accident on the railroad just
below. There were other words, at which
Childie shrieked, but which I could not remem-
ber. And then I sat and looked dully out at
this strange thing coming up the path.

It was—my lover. Up the path, up the stairs

he came, but his feet did not turn to seek me;
without a word or look for his plighted wife, he
passed on to that other room.

So he came home to me! Yet in time for his
wedding-day. This was the fancy in my seeth-
ing brain as when at last I found myself alone,
I stole away to that death-chamber.

I paused involuntarily on the sill. One was
there before me—a little figure with blue eyes
and golden hair, talking, not unto herself.

"It was foolish, I know, dear, but I guess
love often comes that way. I know I have been
loving you, loving you, oh, so tenderly! since
that little minute! And you thought, she
thought, I did not care! For, I remember now,
I lied to you both. You see the neighbors
talked, and Clarrie talked a little in her sleep,
dear, and things I heard made me fancy you
did not love me, and so I lied for yours and
Clarrie's sake. How could I fancy, how could
I do such a thing! Oh, forgive me! forgive
me! But—but I am remembering. You can-
not speak, you cannot hear! If you could you
would be sorry to hear me talking so. Oh,
then, forgive me! forgive me! But, for all, I
cannot help feeling glad, this little minute, that
you came this way."

"For all—"

The words sank lower, and I could not catch
them. But somehow, as I stood there and
watched her—somehow it seemed not quite so
so hard to bear.

ECHOES FROM PARIS.

PARIS, June 23.

THE *France* states that the Deceased Wife's
Sister Bill having been opposed first by the
House of Commons was then submitted to the
Lords, who rejected, despite the part played by
the Prince of Wales.

ONE of two journalists committed the most
horrid pun of recent times the other day, when
he met a *confère* who had, like himself, recent-
ly been in Moscow. "He said," extending his
hand, "we saw one another last in *cette rue-ci*."

A CONTRACT has been entered into by M.
Henri Corvex and M. Carrier Belleuse, to pro-
duce within two years a panorama representing
incidents in the lives of the most celebrated
men of the age. It is expected to cost £20,000.

THERE is an Anglo-American church build-
ing in the Avenue d'Alma. At least the dual
nationality must be suspected from the munifi-
cence of the English towards the edifice, which
has been else said to be a purely American con-
venience. An English gentleman, for instance,
gave no less than £13,000 in one lump towards
the building fund.

AMONGST the attractions in connection with
the national festival of July 14 will be the visit
of 100 Hungarian literary men and several ladies
belonging to the guild of letters. They will
arrive here on July 1st, and will be met by a
committee, the president of honor of which is
Victor Hugo.

FOR some time a project for a railway—simi-
lar to the one on the Right—running from
Monte Carlo to La Turbie, has been under con-
sideration. The project is about to be carried
out. The works will begin in July and it is ex-
pected that the railway will be ready in February
next. This is the first instance of a mountain
railway being built in France.

A SPANISH Napoleon IV. has lately deceived
a good many people at Turin. He was a young
Italian weaver of very good address, and decid-
edly handsome, and for some time succeeded
in keeping up his pretended position as the late
Prince Imperial, who he declared had not been
killed in Zululand. His money having come to
an end, the pretender took to highway robbery,
and when caught so loudly declared his Napo-
leonic pretensions that he was treated as a mad-
man and sent to an asylum, from which he
escaped and practised his old tricks. Being
caught again, the jury were less lenient, and the
false Napoleon has been sent to the galleys for
twenty-one years.

THE devotion to sport and the pigskin has
seized upon the Parisian belles to such extent
that many of the fair Amazons of the Bois de
Boulogne have agreed to travel to their country
châteaux either by boat, nor railway, nor yet
en poste, but to ride thither on horseback, limit-
ing the feat to a certain number of miles a day.
The most conspicuous of these daring horse-
women is the Comtesse de Cambrun, who pro-
poses to ride all the way from Nice to Luchon
mounted on the little white Arab which she has
ridden during the whole season in the Bois. The
Comtesse will be accompanied by a joyous escort
of gay bachelors—and return to Nice in due
season.

DON'T BE ALARMED

at Bright's Disease, Diabetes, or any disease of
the kidneys, liver or urinary organs, as Hop
Bitters will certainly and lastingly cure you, and
it is the only thing that will.