

"ECHOES of the Past;

The Recompense of Love!"

CHAPTER II.
"Come away, Mina!"
Annoyed and distressed by the dwarf's evident distrust of him, Clive walked on. He had nearly reached the end of the street, when he came upon four young men linked arm in arm, and walking, or, rather dancing, unsteadily across the pavement. They were uproariously tipsy, and were obviously ready for anything in the way of a lark. Of course, Clive made way for them, and went into the road; one of the youths ungratefully acknowledging his polite consideration for their condition, called out truculently:

"Wot, ho, 'Arry! Here's an adjective swell; let's knock 'is 'at off."
Clive did not wait for the adoption of this playful suggestion; but before he had gone many yards, he stopped and looked round thoughtfully. The hunchback and the girl would meet these vulgar votaries of Bacchus; it was just on the cards that they would be molested by them; the poor little dwarf was anything but an adequate protector for his companion; there might be trouble for them. Clive went back—and just in time. The tipsy hooligans had formed a ring round the dwarf and the girl, and, probably without meaning any serious harm, were dancing and howling round the victims of their hilarity.

The girl, with the shawl closely drawn round her face, was clinging affrightedly to the dwarf, while he, half dazed by the noise and imphish movements of their tormentors, was threatening and imploring them by turns.

As Clive came up, one of the young men, more daring than the others, was expressing a desire, with sundry oaths, that the girl should show her face, and he made a clutch at her shawl, and tore it from her head. The girl screamed, and clung still more tightly to her companion. Clive caught the youth by the back of the collar and swung him onto the pavement; the others, startled by Clive's onslaught, drew back; but only for a moment. After all, they were three to one and Englishmen. Their drunken hilarity gave way to angry resentment at what they no doubt considered an unprovoked attack on their friend, and an impertinent interference with the rights of the citizen by a perfect stranger, and, what was worse, a 'owling swell.

So they were unwise enough to set upon Clive with fist and hoof. At first Clive took the onslaught goodnaturedly, and, keeping them at arm's length, earnestly advised them to be off before the police came; but suddenly one of them, the most sober of the party, and therefore the most capable of mischief, whipped off a heavy belt from his delectable person, and struck out viciously. It just caught Clive on the cheek; but unfortunately it fell on the girl's shoulder, buckle end. Clive heard her moan, and saw her sink to the ground; and, of course he grew angry and lost his temper.

The gentleman with the belt suddenly struck the pavement with the back of his foolish head, another of his joyous companions, was hurled with considerable force against the wall, and the third, in avoiding a blow straight from Clive's shoulder, tripped up and sprawled over his fallen friend. The incident had now developed into that form of row which the reporters are fond of describing as a "fracas"; and Clive, as he caught sight of a policeman tramping with

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orderly hurry toward them, saw himself figuring next morning, in company with a party of hooligans and a pair of street musicians, at the nearest police court.

By this time, however, the troublesome young ruffians had become sober enough to notice the approach of their natural foe, and, gathering themselves to their feet, they made off with the unobtrusive speed and silence of the proverbial Arabs.

To the demand of the policeman that he should be informed of the nature of the trouble, Clive, who was bending beside the hunchback over the still prostrate form of the girl, replied that they had been attacked by a party of youths, and, assuring him that "it" was all over, begged him to follow them, and see that they did no more mischief. The policeman might have hesitated in complying with the request and accepting this easy solution of the matter; but Clive very improperly backed it up with half a sovereign, and the policeman, murmuring that, yes; he'd better keep his eye on them, hurried in their direction.

By this time the girl had recovered consciousness, if, indeed, she had altogether lost it, and, rising unsteadily with Clive's aid, stood trembling, and swaying to and fro. She was as yet scarcely able to stand, and Clive put his arm round her to support her; for the hunchback seemed for the moment helpless and overwhelmed. Quite unconsciously she leaned against Clive, and hid her face on his breast, as if to shut out the sounds and the sights that had so terrified her; and almost as unconsciously Clive soothed her and tried to reassure her.

"It's all over," he said. "They have gone; quite gone. You're all right! Oh, my poor child!" The exclamation was wrung from him by the sensation of something warm that was trickling over his hand. The cruel belt had struck her badly, and she was bleeding. "I am afraid you are hurt! How far from home? Have you far to go?" he asked the hunchback. "If we could get a cab!"

The dwarf drew his hand across his brow confusedly.

"It's not far," he said quakingly. "In Benson's Rents—three streets off—there's no cabs in these parts—isn't she well enough to walk? Are you much hurt, Mina? I'm—I'm so upset— Is she hurt, badly hurt, do you think, sir? Oh, I'm afraid she is! She's half fainting now. I'll never get her home. I'm not strong—you see what I am, sir—with pathetic bitterness—"and I'm all of a shake still. God knows what would have happened to her if you hadn't come back and helped us! I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir! And you're hurt yourself! That young devil has cut your cheek. Oh, if we were only home!"

"Pull yourself together," said Clive, encouragingly. "I don't think she is much hurt; at least, I hope not. You must let me help her home. I can carry her quite easily, of course."

The girl must have heard him; for she seemed to become suddenly aware that she was clinging to him; a vivid blush rose to her pale face, and, with a murmur of refusal, she shrank away from him, and looked round for her shawl. Clive picked it up and gently put it round her head.

"You are better now?" he said. "That's right, you must let me help you home?"

Her lips moved, and Clive caught a "No, no!" and an appealing glance at the hunchback; but it was impossible that Clive could leave the pair until he had seen them sheltered safely. He drew the girl's arm

IF I HAD STUCK TO THE STAGE I'D HAVE BEEN FAMOUS NOW—WHY, THE ONLY TIME I APPEARED AT THE OLD MAIN STREET THEATRE I BROUGHT DOWN THE HOUSE!

BUT THIS IS HOW HE DID IT

through his, she yielding reluctantly, and the three went slowly down the now quiet streets. Benson's Rents proved to be a block of small houses up an alley, approached under an archway. It was a poor place enough; but it was neither so villainous, so dilapidated, nor so dirty as some of the slums with which Clive was acquainted. The dwarf stopped at the last house of the buildings and knocked at the door.

Almost before the sound had ceased, the door opened, and an extraordinarily quaint figure appeared. For a moment Clive could not tell whether it was a woman or a girl in her teens, or a mere child; for, though the figure was girlish, it was clad in a woman's dress; the face had something of a look of a child, but its juvenility was counteracted by an expression of shrewdness, self-reliance, and worldly wisdom which would have befitted a woman of forty; and the quaint figure was rendered still more weird by the elfish, sharp little face being surrounded by rows of crackers surmounted by a night-cap, the like of which Clive had seen in pictures of the early Victorian era.

This extraordinary mixture of childhood, girlhood, womanhood, and elf was flickeringly illuminated by a tall candle in a ginger-beer bottle which she held aloft, and by the light of which she surveyed the group with wrath and indignation darting from her black, bird-like eyes.

"Why, where on earth have you been, father?" she demanded. "You ought to have been back from your beat an hour ago! And what's happened to Mina? She's all of a shake—and bleedin' too! What is it, a bean feast, or a prize-fight? I thought you'd get

into mischief and trouble, when I let yer go out to-night. Might as well trust a couple of babies out of yer sight! An' why on earth don't yer come in; wot do yer stand gawking there for?"

She clutched at the still trembling Mina and drew her in; but the hunchback hesitated, and, looking from the truculent figure to Clive deprecatingly, began nervously:

"This gentleman, Tibby—"
The weird little creature gave a melodramatic start, and stared at Clive as if she saw him for the first time, and, with her arm round Mina, eyed him up and down with an aggressive air, as if she resented his presence and was quite determined to accept no excuse for it.

"So it is a gentleman!" she said, as if he might easily have been mistaken for a lamp-post. "An' wot may Mr. Gentleman want?"

"He's been very kind to—Mina," explained the dwarf, apologetically. "You see, there was a row, Tibby—"

"Oh, was there!" retorted the girl, with a deceptive suavity. "Well, there'll be another, and a precious big one, if this gentleman don't take his self off and mind 'is own business."
As she uttered this disconcerting threat, she shot out a hand, clutched hold of the dwarf, jerked him stumblingly over the threshold, and slammed the door in Clive's face.

Clive stood staring at the door for a moment or two with pardonable confusion; then he turned away and set off homeward with the cry of the street-singer as she went down under the blow of the belt mingling strangely with the cheers and shouts which had acclaimed his triumph in the House; and with the faces of the two girls, that of Lady Edith, Lord Chesterleigh's daughter and Mina, the poor little nightingale of London streets, chasing each other like dissolving views before his mind's eye.

(To be Continued.)

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