

AT REST.

A Story Written for the "True Witness."

I.

I have sent for my landlady, Mrs. Winter, in order to arrange for the reception and entertainment of my friend and guest who is shortly to arrive. You, who are snugly sheltered within the walls of Home—with all the liberty and comfort which the name implies—can have but little idea of the agitation and absurd tremor in which I await her advent.

My name is Thomas Strong, (perhaps this is assumed—but no matter), and I am the second son of a well-known county family in the Midland district.

As a youth my education followed the traditional lines observed by the sober, respectable classes whose thrift and strength of purpose, it is claimed, has evolved the wealth and greatness of the British people. I am likewise another not uncommon result of this order of things. I am the scapegrace of the family.

It would be interesting, perhaps, to give you a sketch of my earlier days. I will only say, just now, that the governess, the tutor and the Public School first tried to set my footsteps straight upon the path of life, and that the University attempted to complete the work. In due time, thereafter, I came to London intending to enter for study at the Bar. But just here, (to be brief) I broke right down. Some crook in my nature asserted itself and instead of pushing the fortunes of the future Justice Strong, fortune pushed poor Tom to a merciless degree. I was not dissolute or wild, as the saying goes; simply an exaggerated notion of personal freedom possessed me, and I could settle to nothing requiring steady application. Parental remonstrance assailed me in vain. Home correspondence, at first fierce and frequent, dwindled to a few formal letters and then ceased. Finally, gathering together what monetary possessions I could call my own since coming of age, I parted company with all old ties and for many years, up to this moment, I have known no home but these few rooms.

I could better tell you what I do not do for a living than what I do. I am truly a Bohemian of the second class. I am a Publishers' hack, a musical critic, a penny-a-liner for the cheap press. I know a little of Painting—I decorate china cups for the trade. Being tall and of athletic build, I have even served as a model for Sir Joseph Foreground's great masterpiece the "Brigand Chief." Sometimes I get up cheap Concerts for the benefit of the poor—myself. When times are good I speculate at races and at fairs. I have been assistant to a conjuror. I am everything—your humble servant—and nobody's enemy but my own.

II.

Mrs. Winter has arranged everything to her own satisfaction, if not entirely to mine. She has rented me this floor, *en suite*, while the occasion lasts, and assures me she can make things comfortable enough for any two gentlemen. She hints at a little further mural decoration and consents to withdraw the portrait of the late Mr. W. (he was an actor), as "Second Gravedigger," from our gaze as not quite suitable. Poor soul, she tripped a little over the money part of the matter, although I made a brave noise in my pocket with a bunch of keys, a brace buckle and two pennies. And so, this part being settled, I can sit down and wait until to-morrow.

This is the very first time I have received a visit from anyone belonging to my native place.

Paul and I were boys together and as far as I remember,—so old and jaded do I feel,—we were comrades good at school and college. But when the separation came, it was final and complete. I could never more, or so I thought, come betwixt the wind and his nobility. His noble father, in his only recorded reference to myself, was pleased to say, "not only had I disgraced my family, but the Church in which I was baptized." As the worthy man could never speak without a purely personal meaning, doubtless he implied the actual church and congregation of which he was the noble and reverend Rector. Let me see. I think I can quote an old Whittaker Clergy List from memory. It ran a trifle like this:—"Trueman—Right Hon. and Rev. Sampson, M. A., Baronet, Rector of Hartfield-cum-Bluften, Chaplain Bluften Yeomanry, Chairman Hartfield Quarter

Sessions, Hon. Pres. Bluften Ladies' Guild, &c., Eldest son of the late ——" and so on, through half a page of the book. Well, well, and now I am to entertain the son, who comes, too, upon a very interesting mission. But here, read his letter in full if you like:

The Rectory, Hatfield, Oct. 5, 189—.

"My dear old Friend,—Dare I hope that you have still some recollection of myself. Truly I am to blame that time has placed so long a separation upon us! But you, Tom, have hidden yourself so carefully away that I am surprised I was fortunately able, at last, to find you. You remember my father, and the course he took during that dreadful time which resulted in—yes, I will say it—which resulted in your being driven from home Tom, you never knew how, in your absence, I defended you. I shall never forget your mother when she came with streaming eyes, in spite of stern command, to thank and bless me. But, why stir up these bitter memories. Time is the Great Consoler, Tom. Surely, your father, with his weight of years, and your mother with her gentle faith, deserve, and will surely get, reward. But now to write in lighter mood, and the object of this letter.

You know the course of life which has been marked out for me. That I should follow the example of my father and become a clergyman of the Church and in due time, at his decease, a titled parson. Also, which perhaps you do not know, that in order to perpetuate so desirable a family affair I should marry early, and marry money. This latter has already found for me in the person of Miss Julia Dimer, a young lady of great beauty, whose father is immensely rich and something in the Calico Printing line. They reside in London, and I am given to understand not a hundred miles from your abode.

Well, to this fair lady I am engaged. Nay more, wedding preparations go on apace and I suppose a few weeks more will see the marriage day securely fixed. According, however, to strict Church Law the contracting parties must reside for a given period within the limits of the same parish. As my bride-to-be lives in London, to London I come, first writing, however, to my old friend Thomas Strong, begging his hospitality for the time.

Tom, lad, take me in. I am sick at heart, not in the way you think I mean,—but take me in, and over clasped hands we will tell our stories, and pray that good may follow.

Faithfully yours,

PAUL TRUEMAN."

A pretty letter you say? Yes. I telegraphed him, "come to-morrow."

III.

Paul has been with me for some weeks now, much longer than necessary for the object in view, and yet he makes no sign.

I know he spends nearly every evening with the Dimers, but, so far, I have received no invitation from them. Surely he would mention me and common courtesy would demand some recognition. He is strange too. Greatly altered from his former self. Different, even from the day he first came here. Perhaps I have offended him.

I never care to talk theology with anyone, but not very long ago he undertook to chide me for what he called my free thought views, and then we had a fair, square fight. I confess to you he nearly got the best of me. Once, however, I found a way to silence him. "You," I cried, "you the son of your father, destined to follow in his footsteps, look at that old hypocrite—do you call him a preacher of the Gospel, nay, do you call him a follower of the Man, Jesus, do you, do you?" He turned perfectly livid—I thought he would faint—shrinking as from a blow, he paused and then gasped out "I do not," and quietly walked away.

I followed him to his room, but the door was locked. Never do I wish to hear such bitter sobs come forth from heart of man again. "What had I done, what had I done?"

Next day, however, he greeted me cheerfully as usual.

IV.

The long looked for invitation has come at last. A formal evening reception at which I presume will be a fair proportion of fashion and commerce.

Paul does not seem at all elated at the prospect. Our cards came yesterday whilst we were seated at dinner. He had been absent all day, his usual cus-

tom for some time past. On one occasion I offered to company him, but he answered rather curtly, "I had better stay at home and mind my own business—if I had any," and he would take himself out of the way in order that I might the better do so. Since then, I have let him have his own way, although I cannot see what pleasure he can have sightseeing all alone. However, this party may shake him up a little.

"Quite a swell affair," I said, "apparently Miss Dimer wishes to close her days of maidenhood in a perfect whirl of splendor." And you, I suppose, will be the envied one of all."

"Oh, yes," he replied, "Dimer likes to spend money when there's anything to show for it. The affair will cost a small fortune."

"What sort of people shall we meet there?"

"That's what I'm curious about myself, because, you see, the occasion—to quote this miserable cross between a tradesman's circular and a dancing assembly permit—is 'to celebrate the coming nuptial of Miss Julia Dimer.' Now, as everyone knows, she is engaged to a future Apostle of the Church Militant, and as this Apostle is a representative of the titled aristocracy, and as Dimer simply represents Calico, the problem is how to harmonize this interesting and unique trinity with the rest. The compilation of the guest-list must have been a truly difficult task. But, as Mrs. Dimer would say—"You wait and see."

I laughed, although I could see he spoke more than half in earnest, in fact this little outburst confirmed my impression of some subtle alteration in him.

"By the way," he continued, "what date do they give, oh, yes, a week from to-night. That will just give me time to fulfil an appointment—business which cannot be further delayed. Tom, you won't mind my leaving you for a few days. I fear, lad, I have already overstayed my welcome."

Thinking, of course, that he intended to run home and give them all the news to date, receiving in return a hint as to what early day he should urge the fair one to fix the wedding, I smiled consent, adding that I supposed he might bring the Pater back to London with him in order to officiate at the great event.

"Time enough for that," he said, "the old gentleman don't like London since he missed the appointment of Canon of St. Paul's."

"When do you start?"

"Some time to-morrow, I think, and then after a few more words and a silent smoke, we separated for the night. Next morning, early, he was gone.

V.

The night of the reception was one of the finest I ever beheld. The moon and stars were out in all their splendor, and even the city atmosphere was, for once, swept clear by a gentle and persuasive breeze. We stood in the hall, waiting for Mrs. Winter, who had gone for our conveyance. In full dress Paul always looked well—true test—at least in outward seeming, of a gentleman. To-night he looked grand. Flushed, yet perfectly calm he stood, slightly stooped, apparently lost in thought. His eyes gazed steadily upon the palm of his gloved hand, as if he thought how soon it was to take, for better or for worse, one other—fair and fragile—within its grasp.

Suddenly, he said, "let us walk. We can throw our ulsters on, and the foot-path is quite dry. You know it isn't far and the style of our arrival will not be noticed in the crush." So we arranged with Mrs. Winter about the carriage, and stepped out into the cool night air. Just as our feet touched the last step there burst out a most beautiful chime of bells. "Some Catholic Saint Day," I said, "and now I think of it, there is a Church of some description near here, you must have noticed it. We shall pass it directly." "Yes, I know," he replied. And we marched along keeping time to their gentle cadence. As we turned the corner we came upon the Church, looming large and stately, casting fantastic outlines upon the open space. The moon shone high over the spire and cast the shadow of the Cross athwart our path. When we approached the main entrance, Paul said, very quietly, "Let us go in and rest." Silently we opened the door, and silently we passed in, I leading some few steps. I took him about half way up the centre aisle and then crept into a pew, he following.

Bolt upright I sat taking in the novelty of the situation. Truth to tell, I had never set foot in a church for years.

There were but few present, and the dead calm of the place was hateful even to me. We must have been there for some time, when all at once the altar seemed to gather light, and people rapidly filled in. I turned for the first time to look at Paul. He sat with his head bowed upon his arms, his hands were clasped together in advance, and, as I live, there, glinting between his fingers, creeping over and across his wrists, the little Cross swaying gently underneath, were a chaplet of beads, the silver flashing like tiny bracelets in the gloom. I put my hand upon his shoulder. "Come."

VI.

"Yes, Tom, the people thought me drunk, or a madman—and she thought me a fool—and told me so. Beauty can be very impolite at times. I'm sorry I spoilt your evening. The patronage of a man like Dimer would have been of use to you. But to this pass it had to come and all is over now.

You did not guess what took me out so much both day and night. Truly not Dimer or his daughter, as you thought. I have been most strangely led. And yet so simple is the story that I marvel at so great a result. What began it all? you ask. My father, from the very first. Surely you must see how doctrines taught by such as he react against themselves. But when experimental practice is tried upon an only son it is time indeed to test them. And this I did.

Obediently I followed out his plans, reserving to myself the right to judge them as a free and honest man. True to my pledge, I came to London. You know how faithfully I tried to carry out the scheme. But the more I tried the more I failed. I soon found out the hollow heartlessness of her I sought to be my wife. In this regard, thank God, there is no damage done on either side. As for Dimer and his money—my father and he, I suppose, are sworn foes now.

Well, in my great and sore perplexity, chance, (as you would say) brought to my aid a friend and counsellor who taught me the only true and manly way to end all doubt and difficulty. Lest you think, Tom, that I sermonize, let me tell you simply this: Into that Church I had been a dozen and a dozen times before, and that blessed night it was your own hand that led me into the self-same place where I had sat and fought and gained the victory.

And now, think you, what are my future plans. With my father I shall make my peace as best I may. As a son, I offer him all filial obedience except in matters of conscience and of right. From my mother I shall crave her blessing e'er I go. For to this end I am resolved. I purpose shortly to depart for Canada, where, free from all old influences, I may find that peace for which I search."

VII.

How strange it all turns out. Paul has not sailed alone, for in the language of the immortal jester, "here we are again." We are steaming up the St. Lawrence. At daybreak, they say, Montreal will be in sight. Yes, it is true, I see the city now rising up as through a mist. Paul, come here, it is a glorious sight. We are edging in closer and closer. A little knot of sailors gather around us and we stand silently watching. At length, as if by magic, sharply outlined against the reddening sky, a figure appears with open arms as if in blessing. All heads are bowed. Paul stands close by my side. I slip my hand in his. "Paul, my brother, I too, would be at rest."

ROBERT B. MAY.

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