

THE THIRD TIME.

CHAPTER VIII.

Facing the falling snow and the bitter blast, with the sturdy defiance of strong, young manhood, Dr. John Sterling plunged his homeward way through the drifts, whistling cheerily, a Christmas anthem. The red light from the curtained windows of his home flared out brightly athwart the fluttering flakes.

"No place like home," thought Dr. John, "particularly on a stormy winter night, and after a hard day's work. I hope none of my patients will be so unreasonable as to call me out again in this tempest. My good mother has about given me up for lost I dare say."

He opened the door with his latch-key, and stamped the snow off his boots and overcoat. The parlor door opened, and his mother's pale and anxious face looked out.

"You, John? How late you are! You must be nearly frozen and famished."

"Both, mother; and ready to do wonders among your Christmas dainties. But, what's the matter? Have you seen a ghost, that you wear that scared face?"

"Something very much like it, John," his mother said gravely; "come in. Oh, you will do as you are! Sit down here and get warm. Did you meet any one on your way coming home?"

"Did I meet any one? And this Christmas eve! There's a question! Did I meet whom, mother?"

"Amy Earle."

"Mrs. Latour? My dear mother, what would bring an invalid out on such a night?"

"Misery—madness, perhaps. She has been here."

"Mother!"

"It is quite true; she left not a quarter of an hour ago. She came like a ghost, and vanished like one."

"Alone?"

"Alone, and on foot. Was ever such madness heard of! The tyrant was away, for a wonder, dining at Major Mallory's, and the imprisoned slave broke her bars and came here."

"Good Heavens! on such a night! It is enough, with her constitution, to give her death!"

"I don't think that we need to lament that, if it be so. Death is sometimes a merciful relief. I would rather see her at rest in her coffin than that villain's wife."

"Mother, you exaggerate, I think. What brought her here? What did she say?"

"Nothing that I can repeat—all was incoherent and wild. She wished she was dead; it was too late for mutual help; she was not his wife; she had sworn to keep his secret, and dare not break her oath. And then she broke out with a wild storm of hysterical sobbing and said she would betray herself if she lingered longer, but she was already out of sight. John, I think misery is turning her brain."

"Heaven forbid!" said her son. He had turned very pale, and sat looking into the glowing coals.

"Mother, I must go over to Blackwood Grange to-night."

"Impossible, John, in this storm."

"The storm will not hurt me, mother; and I would brave ten thousand such storms for poor Amy's sake. How do we know what may have befallen her on such a night. I will go now at once."

"Not until after supper," said his mother, resolutely. "I will not hear of it, John. Here, draw up your chair; it is quite ready, and quite spoiled by waiting."

Dr. Sterling obeyed. He had been hungry enough a moment before, but now he munched his toast and drank his tea mechanically. Pale and moody he sat. What if that little, frail creature had never reached home? What if she should find her white and cold among the pitiless snowdrifts? He pushed away his cup and plate, and arose.

"Already?" said Mrs. Sterling, reproachfully, "and you said you were hungry."

"I cannot eat, mother. Good Heaven! she may be lying frozen to death by the wayside while I loiter here. Poor child! Poor Amy! I wish Victor Latour had frozen to an icicle in the winter's storm the night I first brought him to Blackwood Grange."

He seized his overcoat savagely, and put it on. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, in search of his fur glove, he brought forth a letter.

"Hello! I quite forgot this. A letter for you, mother."

He threw the letter in her lap. Mrs. Sterling eyed the superscription in somewhat great surprise.

He stopped and stared. The picture was not a gentleman's. It was a vignette; the dark face of a young girl of more than common beauty. Two great, dark eyes lit up a handsome gypsy face—a bold, bright, dauntless face that could not fail to impress.

But it was not the beauty of that pictured face that held Dr. John spellbound. It was its unaccountable familiarity. It was as familiar to him, that gypsy face, as his own in the glass and yet he could not place it.

"Where have I seen this woman?" he thought. "It is a face not easily forgotten. Those big black eyes; that determined chin; that square, bold brow; that compressed mouth. Great Heaven! it is the face of Victor Latour."

John Sterling absolutely recoiled from the picture and his own discovery. But in an instant he had recovered.

"It cannot be Victor, Latour, of course. But if Victor Latour had a twin sister on earth, this is her portrait."

He turned the picture over. On the back was written, in a bold, decided hand: "Truly yours, Isabel Vance, Framlingham, May 4, 18—"

"Isabel Vance! Isabel Vance!" repeated the young doctor. "I have heard that name before, too. Ah! I recollect. Isabel Vance was the young lady Miss Hardenbrook disinherited. What does she mean by sending her picture here; and what does she mean also, by being the living image of Amy Earle's villainous husband?"

He was interrupted by his mother. Mrs. Sterling rose up, very pale, and placed the letter in his hands.

"Read that, John. It is a dying woman's warning; but I fear it comes to you too late."

John took the letter and looked just at the signature. It was not "Isabel Vance," but "Ellen Rossiter," and the letter ran thus:

Mrs. Sterling—Madam: Although personally a stranger to you, I know that you are the guardian and nearest female friend of Miss Amy Earle, of Blackwood Grange, the young lady to whom Dorothy Hardenbrook left her fortune. It is on Amy Earle's account that I write this letter.

I am a woman lying on my death-bed, and before you receive this I shall be in my grave. Except it as a voice from the grave—a voice raised to warn your ward. Pray Heaven it come not too late.

Dorothy Hardenbrook had adopted a young relative, a Miss Isabel Vance, with the resolution of making her her heiress some years before she died. She took this Isabel Vance off the stage, for she was a play actor, and shut her up in the house at Framlingham. She was very severe with her, and the girl needed it, for she was bold, and bad and headstrong and unscrupulous. She was engaged to a young man she had known in the city, Mr. George Wildair, and he used to follow her secretly and meet her in the village. Miss Hardenbrook hated him, and forbade Isabel seeing him on the pain of disinheriting. Isabel promised and disobeyed—lying came natural to her. She met him again and again, by night and by stealth. Miss Hardenbrook discovered it, and the result was she disinherited Isabel, and left her fortune to Amy Earle.

Isabel's troubles came all at once, as troubles do come. Mr. Wildair jilted her immediately—he was her fortune he wanted, not herself. He jilted her, and she left the village and disappeared. If ever woman looked possessed of a demon, Isabel Vance did the last time I saw her. I knew then she would do something desperate, and I know she has done it.

The next I heard of Mr. George Wildair, he was engaged to Miss Earle; the next I heard he had been foully murdered the night before his wedding. Madam, Isabel Vance did that deed! I am dying and I say it—Isabel Vance shot her false lover just as surely as I shall be judged.

I have not seen her since. I don't know what has become of her; but I do know that that is not likely to be her first and last crime. She will wreak her vengeance on Miss Earle, too, if you do not take care. She is subtle as a serpent, cunning as a fox, and unscrupulous enough and daring enough for any deed under heaven. I send you her picture, that you may recognize her if you ever meet, and there is a specimen of her handwriting on the reverse. Beware of her! I say it solemnly and warningly—a dying woman—beware of Isabel Vance.

Ellen Rossiter.

Abruptly and startlingly the letter closed. Dr. John looked up from it to see his mother staring at the picture, much as he had stared.

"Who is it?" she asked with a bewildered look. "Surely I have seen that face before! John, who is it?"

"Try again, mother—think over the people you know in this vicinity. Imagine that splendid crop of hair, cut short; imagine a mustache on that dainty upper lip, and I think you will have it."

Mrs. Sterling dropped the picture, as if it burnt her, and staggered backward with a loud cry.

"It is Victor Latour. Isabel Vance is Victor Latour!"

"Good gracious, mother!" exclaimed the doctor, startled by a supposition that had never struck him, "what a preposterous idea! For Victor Latour and Isabel Vance to be one and the same person is the wildest of wild impossibilities!"

"I don't care!" cried Mrs. Sterling, hysterically. "It may be impossible, but it is true. Oh, my poor little dove! in the clasp of that hawk! I understand all now; she said she was not his wife. That is the secret he made her swear to keep; he had to tell her, and made

her swear not to betray him. Oh, John, he will murder that child!"

Dr. John stood gazing at his mother with an awful blank face. It seemed such a mad supposition, such an utterly incredible idea—and yet—

"I don't know what to do, mother," he said; "I never thought of this."

"Go up to Blackwood Grange, at once!" exclaimed his mother, frantically, "and tear the mask of that horrible wretch's face. Have Isabel Vance, alias Victor Latour, lodged in jail before morning, for the wilful murderer of Mr. George Wildair. Go!"

"No, no, no," said Dr. John, "not so fast! There is no hurry—we will do nothing rash. I couldn't get Victor Latour arrested for murder on the baseless supposition of an old dead woman. We will be slow—we will match strategy with strategy, cunning with cunning. Trust me, mother, I will save Amy yet."

"What do you mean to do?" said Mrs. Sterling.

"Give me this picture. I will go at once to Blackwood and endeavor to see Amy. Heaven grant she may have reached home in safety. Once there, I will know what to do. Don't sit up for me, mother, I may return late."

"As if I could sleep. And John, for Heaven's sake, take care of that wretch. If Victor Latour or Isabel Vance suspects that you know the secret of her life, your life will not be worth an hour's purchase. You will be found like poor George Wildair."

"I am not afraid of Victor Latour," said Dr. John, coolly; "forewarned is forearmed; good-by, mother; I beg you will not sit up for me."

Dr. Sterling mounted his nag and set off. As may be imagined, the young doctor's reflections were not of the most lively description as he rode along through the night air. He could not help feeling that he had twice lost the heiress through his own over-scrupulous sense of honor; and he was not at all certain that he would be able to win and wear her after all.

He had a sort of misgiving within himself that, even should he be successful in rescuing Amy from the thrall-dom in which she was held by the tyranny of Victor Latour, after all the romance with which her life had been invested, she would consider a union with him too prosaic and commonplace.

His was one of those strong, deep, and self-sacrificing natures which will do what conscience dictates as the right, even at the sacrifice of the dearest wishes of the heart, and he was now more than ever determined to do what he considered his duty both to Amy and to himself.

His love for her was all-absorbing, and would last his whole life long, but it was unromantic and in perfect accord with the rest of his character. Until he could see that she returned it, he had made up his mind that not one word of passion should escape his lips.

But there was one thing he had resolved with all his heart and all his soul. She should no longer be subjected to the vile tyranny of the scoundrel to whom in a moment of infatuation, she had linked her fate forever. Mr. Victor Latour would, no doubt, be as relentless a foe as he had proved himself a worthless husband; but, come what may, the truth should be dragged from him, and the whole mystery of his life be rendered as clear as the noonday sun. Dr. Sterling compressed his lips firmly as he thought of the daily—nay, hourly—torment his darling was suffering, and involuntarily put spurs to his horse, as he action would quicken her release.

He had fully determined on the morrow to make his way over to Framlingham and probe the affair of the letter to the bottom; but first he must try what could be done at Blackwood Grange. He reached his destination after about an hour's disagreeable riding. A footman answered his thundering knock.

"Is your mistress at home, Hunter?"

"Yes, sir; just arrived out of the storm. Come in, Dr. Sterling, Missus is in the drawing-room."

He threw open the door of the cosy, crimson-draped room—an unutterably cosy after the wild tempest without. Carpet, curtains, sofas, chairs, all were of rich, glowing crimson, upon which the firelight glowed with flashing brightness.

Seated on a low footstool, crouched over the fire, in a strange, distorted attitude of misery, was the little mistress of all this splendor. Her hood had fallen back, her pale yellow hair hung loose and disheveled, and the face turned to the fire was colorless as the winter snow.

She started up at sight of her visitor with a cry.

"Dr. Sterling! I thought it was Mr. Latour."

She laid her hand on her heart, as if to still its tumultuous beating. Dr. John advanced, and took both her hands in his, and looked down with infinite tenderness and compassion on that poor, thin face.

"My pale little Amy! You are whiter than the drifts outside this stormy night. Thank Heaven, I find you here safe! What madness for you, Amy, to face this bitter storm!"

She covered her face with her hands, and tearful sobs shook her from head to foot.

"I was so miserable, so lonely, so desolate, so forsaken, so heart-broken! Oh, John! You don't know. You can't know! I am the most wretched creature in all this wide earth."

"Victor Latour is a villain, a cold-blooded tyrant and villain; but it is not too late to save you from him yet. Amy, I think I know the secret of his life—the secret he made you swear to keep."

She looked up at him in a blank, speechless terror.

"It is impossible," she said slowly. "No creature on this earth knows it but himself and me, and I have not broken my oath."

"We will see," said Dr. John. "You would be glad to have your chains brok-

en, would you not? To be freed from this horrible union?"

"Glad!" Her whole face lit up at the thought. "It would be new life—it would be heaven on earth. But it is impossible; I am his wife; I cannot desert him for what is his misfortune, not his fault. No human law would give me a divorce for an infirmity he cannot help."

Dr. John stared at her bewildered. What did she mean? "His wife!" Infirmly he could not help! Surely, they were at cross purposes. The secret he knew, or thought he knew, was not the secret she had sworn to keep. Was his wild supposition only a wild delusion after all?

"Where is Mr. Latour?" he asked presently.

"At Major Mallory's; he has not yet returned. I expect him every moment; and, John, don't be angry, please—but I had rather he did not find you here."

"I shall not remain long," replied the doctor, quietly; "but before I go, Amy, have you any letters or notes of Mr. Latour's in the house? I have a particular reason for wishing to identify his writing."

Amy looked at him in surprise.

"Victor's writing? Why, John?"

"I will tell you presently. Oblige me in this matter, if you can."

"I can easily wait a moment," she said.

She opened a volume on a table near, and produced a copy of manuscript verses. It was Tennyson's "Break, Break," beautifully written; and Dr. John, started at sight of the faultless chirography, as if it had been a death-head. It was the handwriting of Isabel Vance.

"You will permit me to retain this, Amy? Thank Heaven! Your freedom is near at hand!"

He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. Amy gazed at him in wonder—he was pale even to the lips. He started up to go, holding out his hand.

"Good-by, Amy, and good night. Keep up a good heart, I think your troubles are almost over."

Amy's answer was a low cry of terror. Her eyes were fixed upon the doorway in a wild, dilated stare. Dr. John wheeled round and confronted Victor Latour.

(Continued.)

MOST VALUABLE GEM.

"To the question, 'Which is the most valuable precious stone?' nine people out of every ten, at least, will, without the slightest hesitation, reply 'The diamond.'" said a dealer in gems. "But the value of a good-sized diamond cannot approach that of a ruby of the correct color and similar dimensions."

"The worth of small rubies—stones that are less than a carat—is, if anything, rather less than that of diamonds of a like description; but the rare occurrence of large specimens of that dark carmine tint which is looked upon as the signum non of a perfect ruby causes these gems to increase in a far greater proportion than in the case of diamonds. Rubies weighing more than four carats are so exceptional that when a perfect one of five carats is brought to the market, it will command ten times as high a sum as a diamond of the same weight, while rubies of six carats, without crack or flaw, and of the proper color, would, in all probability, bring as high a price as \$5,000 per carat, or 15 times as much as a diamond of like size and faultlessness."

All over the East rubies are regarded with the greatest possible favor, and so it has been from the earliest times of which we have any record. The finest specimens are found in Burma, and from time immemorial it has been a law of that country that all rubies of above a certain size are the property of the King, whoever may have been fortunate enough to find them. It is thought to this day there are concealed in Burma among the treasures which the British invasion caused to be hidden away rubies of far greater size and value than any which have up to now been seen either in Europe or this country."

NAGGING.

There are some people who are constantly nagging, and, sad to say, the majority are women. Nothing is ever done which pleases them, and every thing calls forth some heartless remark. If the nagging woman is a mother she uses her children as a target for her ill-nature. As a rule, they dare not "talk back," but they finally come to expect nothing but disfavor no matter what they do. The little child comes running to its mother with a glad smile to tell her some news or of some discovery it has made, but she immediately quells its happiness by finding some fault with it. Instead of taking an interest in her daughter's questions or ambitions she shows in her scornful glance that she wants nothing to do with such things.

The nagging mother does not have the confidence of her sons because they never can expect any encouragement from her. Her husband's life is made a burden by the continual complaint and fault-finding of the wife. Unless he is a man of extraordinary patience he has ceased long since in trying to please her. The members of a family may love her, but they find much relief in getting away sometimes where they are better understood.

Nagging is a form of selfishness that is most disagreeable, especially in a person with whom one is compelled to live. One husband was heard to complain once that he had never, in his wife's estimation, done anything right since his marriage to her. He tries to please and his wife knows it, but she has developed that pernicious habit of fault-finding. Either his hair is not properly combed or his necktie is in such poor taste, or he sits down in such a clumsy manner, etc. How long will he take all this fault-finding quietly? And it is often so unnecessary, too.

A PICTURE OF WAR.

The Little Drummer's Last Call on the Field of Battle.

A pathetic story of the Civil War was related by the corporal of an Illinois regiment who was captured by the Confederates at the Battle of Wilson's Creek.

The day before this regiment was ordered by General Lyons to march toward Springfield, the drummer of the company fell ill. There was no one to take his place, and while the captain was wondering how he should supply the lack, a pale, sorrow-stricken woman appeared at his tent door, begging an interview. She brought with her a little boy of twelve or thirteen years, whom she wished to place in the regiment as drummer-boy. Her husband had been killed in the service, and she thought that the boy, who was eager to "join the army," might earn something toward the support of the family.

"Captain," she said, after the boy had been accepted, "he won't be in much danger, will he?"

"No, I think not," replied the officers. "We shall be disbanded in a few weeks I am confident."

The new drummer soon became a favorite, and there was never a feast of fruit or other hardly procured dainties that "Eddie" did not get his share first. The soldiers were stirred by the child's enthusiastic devotion, and declared that his drumming was different from that of all the other drummers in the army!

After the engagement at Wilson's Creek, where the Federals were defeated, Corporal B, who had been thrown from his horse, found himself lying concealed from view near a clump of trees. As he lay there with his ear to the ground, he heard the sound of a drum, distinct, rather faint. In a moment he recognized the stroke of Eddie, the boy drummer, and hastened toward the spot whence the sound proceeded. In a clump of bushes propped against a tree, he found the boy. His drum was hanging from a shrub within reach, and his face was deadly pale.

"O corporal," said he, "I am so glad you came! Won't you give me a drink of water, please?"

The corporal ran to a little stream close by and brought the child a draught. Just at this moment there came an order for the retreat, and the corporal turned to go.

"Don't leave me," said the little drummer, "I can't walk. See!" and he pointed to his feet.

The corporal saw with horror that both feet had been shot off by a cannon-ball.

"He said the doctors could cure them," continued the boy, pointing to the dead body of a Confederate soldier who lay beside him. "He was shot all to pieces, but he crawled over here and tied—my legs above the knees!—wouldn't bleed so!" And Eddie closed his eyes wearily.

The corporal's eyes were blinded by a mist of tears as he looked down. The Confederate soldier, shot to death, and in the agonies of the last struggle, had managed to take off his suspenders, and bind the boy's legs above the knees!

As the corporal bent down to raise the child a body of Confederate troops came up and he was a prisoner. With a sob in his voice, he told the story, and the Southern officer tenderly lifted the wounded drummer on to his own horse, swinging the drum before him. When the little cavalcade reached camp "Eddie" was dead, but the little drummer's last call had aroused the noblest feeling in the heart of one who was his foe, one whose last act was an effort to save and comfort the boy enemy who was faithful to his duty.

GREAT BRITAIN'S NAVY.

What the Colonies Pay Toward This Branch of Maritime Insurance.

The Financial Times in discussing the navy as part of a system of maritime insurance, says:—

The smallness of the amount contributed by Greater Britain towards this end is also remarkable. The Australian colonies provide about £180,000 a year, and India £313,000; but Canada, Natal, the Cape and the rest of our colonies contribute nothing, and all we have got up to date is the dubious promise of a battleship from the Cape. To put it another way, the foreign trade of our colonies and dependencies is nearly £500,000,000 a year, but they only expend say, half a million, or about one-tenth per cent, in protecting it, leaving the great bulk of the charge to fall upon the United Kingdom. As we have seen, the Cape has to some extent, awakened to a sense of its obligation, and has promised us a warship, although that promise has yet to be carried out; but our other South African colonies, and above all, Canada, the most important, and one of the most loyal of the whole, has not stirred a hand to assist us in a matter so vital, not only to our own, but to her interests also. It is to be hoped that the enthusiasm of the Jubilee will not be allowed to subside without an effort being made to obtain some more substantial support from our colonies in the matter of the first line of Imperial defence.

AS TO TAKING THINGS.

The easiest way to get along in this world is to take things as you find them.

That's all right, until you get caught.