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CHAPTER XVII.

One day as Fitz-James O'Brien and a valued friend of his, Sir Thomas Clinton, were walking together on Fitz-James's property, Sir Thomas slipped, and would have fallen, but for O'Brien's strong arm, which saved him from coming to the ground.

'Why, O'Brien, my boy, here is lead! Were you aware of there being any on your property? This is a freshly-ploughed field, and it seems to me as if this piece were turned up by the plough. You ought to investigate the matter as quickly as possible. You may make a fortune, and yet be able to marry that pretty English girl. You should employ some men immediately to dig down very deep to discover if any more pieces of this ore are to be found. I understand something of mining myself, and can perhaps be of use to you.'

This kindled a new hope in Fitz-James's bosom. What if these mines turned out profitably, and that he could present himself at Warrenstown as the wealthy Mr. O'Brien? No fear then of being rejected. He replied to Sir Thomas Clinton that he had never imagined any thing of the kind; but as it was well known that there was lead in the neighborhood, his possessing a mine was not an impossibility.

It was, however, now becoming late, and the two friends separated, fixing however an early hour in the morning for a rendezvous. Fitz-James slept not all night, his excitement was so great; visions of gold came before him—gold, the produce of his lead-mines. If he closed his eyes for a moment, he thought he saw a tower of lead before him, and that it gradually assumed Kate's figure, and she and the metal got mixed together, and she appeared clothed in a bright shining gold-and-lead garment; and he tried to grasp the gown, and then the vision faded away. In the evening, when he sat by the fire, he thought he saw heaps of money in it, and then the coals shifted their places, and the money disappeared. He became absorbed in the one idea. He had a chance of becoming rich. What if it should become a mockery? He seemed like a man who had a set firm purpose in life; his countenance assumed a look of energy and determination.

The ore was examined by an eminent geologist, and pronounced to be of good quality. He had however no capital; but some of his friends were very wealthy, and they agreed to join in the speculation. Fitz-James then raised money on the few remaining hundreds a year he had to spend. He was resolved to spare no pains, to encounter every risk and danger in this object; and as the mines prospered or failed, so would he become rich or lose everything. The very feeling of excitement pleased him, that his all was at stake in the enterprise. Mr. Merriman, Sir Thomas Clinton, Mr. McLoughlin, and Mr. O'Reilly were his co-partners; all these gentlemen, except Fitz-James, were men of capital. Fitz-James worked laboriously; his manner became at times nervous and restless; his all depended on the success of the mines, and no wonder he was uneasy. When the workmen's bell tolled in the morning, Fitz-James found himself at the mines, working as hard as many of his workmen. They only worked for their shilling a day, and if they succeeded in obtaining that, they were satisfied; while with Fitz-James the two pictures were ever before him; his love, riches, honor, happiness, on the one hand; and on the other, a lonely life, poverty, misery, and disappointment. He labored and worked as a modern Hercules; and as day after day he returned from his labors, and lay down to rest, he felt his hours of sleep were well earned. In the morning he rose before five o'clock, dressed, and after his frugal repast, walked to the scene of his labors; sometimes he was there long before the men, working in his shirt-sleeves, with the sweat pouring down his face. And his spirits revived by degrees, as the works progressed, and it seemed as if he now had a chance of happiness. Hope was uppermost, and he felt joyful and sanguine.

One day a very large piece of the ore was picked up; it was mixed with a good deal of silver, and it shone brightly. He took it up, and to his eyes it shone very brightly, and he thought Kate's image was reflected in it; and he worked harder that day than he had ever done before; the hours seemed to fly as he labored and worked on till sunset; and when it became quite dark he left it. But he thought then that his mines were inexhaustible, so he rejoiced, oh, so much! and he carried home the piece of metal, and he never let it be taken from him, and he feasted his eyes upon it. He could neither eat nor drink, such was his excitement; and when he knelt to pray, he had it beside him; it seemed to form a part of him. He thought of the gold it would bring; he dreamt of the gold, and he again saw the

heaps of money in the fire; but this time they remained; and he again saw Kate in his sleep as a shining figure; and gold, gold, gold rung in his ears—and he loved the wealth his mines would bring. But Kate, not the gold, was the real goal of his ambition; and visions of Kate seemed to rise before him, and he began to think of how nice a little child would look playing on the rug, and lovely little baby-faces seemed to smile upon him. But he looked up; the vision was gone, and in its place stood his old housekeeper, inquiring if he would wish a turkey killed, or his steward inquiring if the cows should not be turned into another field.

He wrote to Charles, telling him of the good fortune which had happened to him, of his bright and cheering hopes, of happiness, and his sanguine expectations that the day was not far distant when he might call Kate his wife. But we are not destined to have everything smooth here below; suffering is the lot of the children of Adam in this their mortal state, and when every thing seems to go well, sorrows arise unbidden to destroy the bright illusion. Not after the time when the lump of metal was found, he was working one morning early at the mines, when he fell. He remained insensible for some time; when he at last came to his senses, he found himself lying in a strange bed. The windows were closed, but by the light which found its way through them, he perceived that the room was unknown to him. He did not know how long he had been there; how he got there. He jumped up; but a feeling of intense pain caused him to fall back again.

'But soon by dull degrees came back His senses to their wonted track.'

The mines came to his recollection, and he remembered how he had fallen while laboring. Now he lay helpless; the anguish he felt was quite dreadful, when he contemplated his position. It might be a trivial hurt, but it might also be a more serious one. What if he were seriously injured? God grant it might not be so! But where was he! The room he was in was large and handsomely furnished. He tried again to raise himself, but found the exertion more than he could bear; he could not stir; it was impossible.

In a few moments he heard a step, and Lady Clinton approached the bedside.

'Now, Mr. O'Brien,' she said, 'you must compose yourself; you have hurt your foot; the hurt will be nothing serious if you do as you are desired; and I mean to nurse you and take care of you. Sir Thomas went over to the mines a few minutes after you fell; the men were going to carry you over to Shangannah, but he insisted on your being brought here; and I won't let you go home till you are quite well. How do you feel?'

'My foot is rather painful,' answered Fitz-James.

'It is a bad sprain,' returned Lady Clinton; 'but the doctor says quiet and occasional fomenting are the only requisites. Sarah's maid will prepare all the fomentations, and James will do every thing you require. Here are some amusing books and papers; and mind you ask for every thing you require; Sir Thomas and I always wish our friends to make themselves at home when with us, and have everything they wish for.'

'Lady Clinton,' answered Fitz-James, 'can I ever sufficiently thank you for your kindness? It exceeds every thing I ever met or heard of. But what about the mines? they won't do without me.'

'Sir Thomas has been there all day,' answered Lady Clinton; 'he will look after everything; you need not be afraid; but you must promise me you won't fret about them or anything else at present. Let me settle the pillow comfortably. There: now you are more easy. Sarah, make up that fomentation for Mr. O'Brien's foot.—Sarah does every thing so well,' continued Lady Clinton to Fitz-James; 'she is the kindest creature you can conceive. She sat up with me several nights last year when I was ill; quite wonderful of her, really; I never met her equal.—And now you are to stay in bed as long as I desire—no resistance, I am the lady-doctor, and must be obeyed.'

Here she occupied herself, making every thing comfortable in the room, stirring the fire; and finally she left the room.

Sir Thomas and Lady Clinton had no children; they were excessively kind-hearted, and lavished the affection they would have bestowed on their own offspring on all those who came within their reach.

O'Brien's days now passed calmly, if not happily. Sir Thomas went to the mines every day and brought home intelligence of the work done. Lady Clinton would sit with the invalid, and converse on every subject of interest; and she drew from him by degrees a confession of the whole love-affair between him and Kate. A week passed, and he was better. Lady Clinton's careful nursing was succeeding, and he was

able to move without feeling the intense agony he suffered when first he stirred his leg. One morning, however, he rang the bell for the ever-attentive James, who appeared shortly after, looking like the picture of woe and consternation.

'Oh, sir,' he exclaimed, 'did you hear the terrible news?—the water has poured in! the mines are flooded! The master is in a terrible way. He is not like himself at all.'

Fitz-James said nothing, but fell back in his arm-chair, moaning loudly. 'I am ruined,' he thought—'I am ruined! all my hopes are dashed to pieces, and all my toil and anxiety gone for nothing!'

The effect of this intelligence upon Fitz-James was to throw him into a state of feverish excitement, which, in his debilitated condition, operated most injuriously upon his constitution; and weeks passed over before he was again restored to the possession of even moderate strength.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We left Charles on his road to Shepstone in company with Miss Norton and her respected pa. Some hours' travelling brought them to their destination, which they reached without further adventure; and ere they parted Miss Norton mentally pronounced him not so very slow, and she had expressed a wish to be better acquainted with him in future. Charles did not at all reciprocate the feeling. The young lady's flippancy and forward manner had produced upon his mind an expression by no means favorable to her.

He proceeded at once to Warrenstown, which he found full of company. The different country-houses in the neighborhood had been crowded with visitors; and parties of pleasure, balls, &c., had been more numerous than usual. Kate had been much admired by several strangers; and hopes were entertained by her family that she might become sensible, and marry some one worth having. But Kate thought otherwise.

There were so many visitors at Warrenstown, that it was impossible to speak on the subject which lay next Charles's heart; so he was obliged to remain silent. People remarked that he was changed, that he was reserved; and wondered what could be the cause.

Miss Norton visited occasionally at Warrenstown, and also at the Hermitage; and Aunt Sarah would oftentimes raise her eyes to Heaven, and thank God that in her time such conversation as Miss Norton delighted in was not permitted for young ladies; and she fervently hoped her nieces would not be perverted by mixing in such company, &c. Scandals, jelopements, and such-like matters were with her constant themes.

Soon after Charles's return a ball took place at a Mrs. Stewart's, not far from Warrenstown. Miss Norton was of course there; and who should appear also on the scene but Sir George Fasten? He never ceased his attentions to Miss Norton, and danced her nearly the whole evening. He was evidently bent on matrimony; and what about Miss Brimfull—she with the requisite number of thousands—what had become of her? He had been introduced to her, had paid her attentions, and aroused old Brimfull's hopes in the first instance, but subsequently his fears.

The manner of the introduction was as follows:—

Sir George would not demean himself by becoming acquainted with the Brimfull family in the usual way that people come to know each other. He told his mother that the young lady was to be had; but he was puzzled what to do, not to compromise the honor of the family, which he considered would be the result if Lady Fasten were to call on Mrs. Brimfull.

Her ladyship thought for a long time, and the result of her reflections was to the effect that she would suppose an imaginary servant, who had come with an imaginary recommendation from Mrs. Brimfull; that she would, in her anxiety to know more particulars of this servant, drive to Mrs. Brimfull's residence; that on finding Mrs. Brimfull had never written the recommendation, she should declare herself very much astonished. He son should—dutiful child that he was—while attending on his mother, become smitten with Miss Brimfull, and prosecute the acquaintance; his rage of course not quite approving.

This piece of diplomacy, worthy the skill of a state-minister, had its effect so far as becoming acquainted with Brimfull was concerned. Sir George eventually proposed, and was accepted; the wedding-day was fixed; and Sir George was daily counting the money almost in his grasp, calculating how much would remain after satisfying the rapacity of Mr. Goodale and various other creditors, when an unforeseen difficulty arose.

Sir George had not pursued the career of a fast man for such a number of years without earning for himself the reputation which his acts

deserved. By one of these mysterious little accidents of which occasions like the one contemplated are ever so fruitful, Mr. Brimfull got an instructive glimpse into the worthy baronet's life, which was by no means calculated to impress him favorably in his regard. Mr. Brimfull was a wealthy man, and like most men of his class he was possessed of abundant ambition; but he was to sensible and too affectionate a father to allow the happiness of his child to be frittered away on a heartless mercenary, and so he determined not to allow the false glitter of an empty title to fascinate either himself or any of his family. Perhaps this required a greater amount of moral courage than one would suppose; for Mrs. Brimfull was revelling in the idea of calling her daughter Emily 'my lady,' and had even already in her own mind begun to disparage the dreadful plain manners of her better half. How ever could he go into society! which of course would now become a matter of imperative necessity. Fancy poor Mrs. Brimfull's feelings when Mr. Brimfull announced that for reasons which were unnecessary to mention, he had settled that the match could not go on. She was miserable that night, and shed bitter tears, and tried every means in her power to induce him to relent; but to no purpose; he was perfectly impervious to all her entreaties, and still calmly, but resolutely, insisted that it could not be. In order to bring the matter to a termination he had recourse to an expedient which he knew must prove eminently successful. He commissioned a friend his to go to Sir George and inform him that the sudden bankruptcy of a house of business in the City had so far affected his affairs, that he was no longer able to pay the £80,000.

Mr. Brown announced this fact in the most business-like serious manner, as if he was telling truth; and Sir George Fasten believed it.—'Do you think,' he answered, stamping the foot angrily; 'I would ever marry into that family but for the prospect of money? Do you imagine I would have connected myself with them, degraded myself by proposing for a salesmaster's daughter, but that I wanted her tin?'

He was becoming perfectly maddened, for he had kept several creditors quiet on the faith of Miss Brimfull's money. His vexation and rage were, to Mr. Brown, inexpressibly ludicrous.—He was furious; he applied every imaginable opprobrious term to the Brimfulls, and at last begged of Mr. Brown to keep the matter as quiet as possible, and told him he would leave London that night to stay for a while in the country; his intention being, if he found himself pursued, to fly to the Continent, for now the game was becoming desperate. He had relied on Miss Brimfull's sixty thousand pounds for settling matters with Mr. Goodale immediately, besides paying his other debts and leaving a handsome surplus. He was at his wit's end.

Miss Brimfull waited long and anxiously this very day for her intended; she was sitting by the drawing-room window looking out for her future; but no future arrived. The wedding cards lay on the table in pretty little bundles and true-lover's knots, and orange-blossoms; all in expectation of the ceremony to take place on the morrow. He had promised to take her out with him to buy her a ring. What could be the cause of the delay? She tired of looking out of the window, and commenced for the twentieth time, to try on her bridal wreath. She was thus engaged when her father rushed into the room.

'Well, child,' he said, 'put up the wreath.—Sir George won't come here, I'll be bound. You may put the orange-blossoms up also; they won't be wanted.'

'But, papa,' shrieked the young lady, 'what do you mean? what have you done? have you refused him? He promised to be so kind to me. He loved me so devotedly; he often told me so; and on the very eve of the completion of our happiness? Oh, my father, how could you do this?' Here she burst into a flood of tears.

'Come, Emily, don't be a fool,' said old Brimfull good-naturedly; 'sit down here on the sofa by your old father, and I'll tell you what Sir George told. I was anxious to put his affection to the test. I had my suspicions that he only wanted your money and not yourself.'

'Oh, papa, how could you think so. You don't know his generous disinterestedness; you don't believe in his affection for me.'

'Listen, Emily, to me,' said her father, 'while I explain to you my reasons for knowing he would have made you very unhappy. I commissioned Mr. Brown to go to Sir George and tell him that I had suffered heavy losses from a bankruptcy case, and that I was thereby unable to pay your fortune. This news was a terrible blow to Sir George, who, I have since heard, was in urgent want of your fortune to pay some debts. He was pressed by creditors on all sides but particularly by a Mr. Goodale, whom he had shamefully treated. He was in a desperate state for money; the other creditors, he said,

might hold over, but he feared Mr. Goodale might proceed to extreme measures. Sir George Fasten left London that very night to keep himself quiet for a while in the country. I suspect he will go pretty well laughed at when the truth comes out, which I suppose it will, some time or another.

This intelligence was indeed a terrible blow for Emily Brimfull. Where now was Sir George's affection, his devotion to her, his disinterestedness? It was a sad trial; but she consoled herself, very sensibly, with the reflection that she might, in due time, meet with some more eligible match; she also felt happy in the thought that the villain had been discovered before she was irrevocably bound to him. She quietly put up the wreath and orange-blossoms, as her father had desired her to do, and deposited the wedding-cards in the fire. Thus ended the matrimonial speculation between the houses of Fasten and Brimfull.

Having made this rather long digression to show how it was that Sir George felt himself at liberty to contract a new alliance, we must proceed with the story. Miss Norton was, as we have seen, staying with Mrs. Verner. Sir George had an old aunt who lived in Shepstone. It occurred to him when he found himself in rather an awkward predicament, that the very best thing he could was to pay this old aunt a visit.—He met Miss Norton at some of the parties in the neighborhood, and had become quiet intimate with her before Mrs. Stewart's ball took place. 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' thought Sir George; or a fair fortune, which was more to the point. Miss Norton possessed actually twenty thousand pounds in right of her mother, beside which she was to inherit her father's property, two thousand a year. Till the last few months she had lived in a very secluded manner. Her mother was religious even to austerity, and she dreaded the contamination of the world for her adored only child. She allowed her enjoyment of every luxury wealth could provide; but the society seen at Edendale was confined to her nearest relatives, to the parson and his wife, and a few extremely righteous young ladies.—Georgina Norton, thus confined within a very narrow atmosphere, knew nothing of the world outside, and never imagined that happiness consisted in anything beyond gardening, riding, working, and reading good books. Poor thing! well would it have been for her had she never sought it elsewhere, in things which cannot confer it. Her mother had been dead nearly two years at the time we first made Miss Norton's acquaintance. Georgina had earnestly solicited her father, less than a year after she lost her mother, to take her to see the world; and he, good, easy man, who always imagined his wife was too strict with his darling child, immediately yielded to her wishes. The girl was delighted, bewitched, fascinated; thought the world as she then saw it a paradise.

Miss Norton had been taken by her father to London and Paris, and to visit several friends in the country parts of England. Edendale was situated in the south of England; and at the time Charles met Miss Norton she had been paying a few visits in Ireland, and was on her way back to her native country, though she was not to return to her home for some time. She had been, ever since her 'entree' into the world growing more and more fond of it; and certainly never did a couple of years make a greater change in an individual than it did in Georgina Norton. She first was astonished when she learned how many girls flirt and coquet; but she was not long in becoming a complete adept in such arts. She soon learned to take delight in all many exercises—hunting, skating, &c.; and in fact became one of the most exaggerated specimens of the genus denominated 'fast young lady.'

Sir George was the first person who presented himself actually in the position of a lover, though she had had numerous flirtations already. Miss Norton was at first amused, then flattered and pleased, by his attention; finally captivated.

Poor old Mr. Norton was a heavy, stupid, kind-hearted, and good-natured man, and quite unaware that his daughter was becoming extremely 'fast.' His wife's sister, who remonstrated with him at different times on his over-indulgence, was always met by the reply, that the girl had high spirits, and it was a sin to check them. In the present instance he was totally blind to the fact of Sir George's attentions. He never, in fact, perceived these attentions on his part, nor the response to them on her side, till every one else was thoroughly convinced that he aimed at nothing less than a union with one of the greatest heiresses in the country. When once awakened to a perception of the truth, he became desperately alarmed, forbade his daughter to have any further acquaintance with Sir George Fasten, as he heard reports very disadvantageous to his character.—But the young lady had had her own way with her father, and indeed every one else, since he