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OUR SERIAL STORY

JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN

By MRS. GRAIK

CHAPTER VII.

(Continued)

It was the year 1800, long known in English households as "the dear year." The present generation can have no conception of what a terrible time that was—War, Famine, and Tumult, stalking hand-in-hand, and no one to stay them. For between the upper and lower classes there was a great gulf fixed; the rich ground the faces of the poor, the poor hated, yet meanly succumbed, to the rich. Neither had Christianity enough boldly to cross the line of demarcation, and prove, the humbler, that they were men—the higher and wiser, that they were gentlemen.

These troubles, which were everywhere abroad, reached us even in our quiet town of Norton Bury. For myself, personally, they touched me not, or, at least, only kept fluttering like evil birds outside the dear home-tabernacle, where I and Patience sat, keeping our solemn counsel together for these two years had with me been very hard.

Though I had to bear so much bodily suffering that I was seldom told of any worldly cares, still I often fancied things were going ill both within and without our doors. Jael complained in an under-key of stunted housekeeping, or boasted aloud of her own ingenuity in making ends meet; and my father's brow grew continually heavier, graver, sterner; sometimes so stern that I dared not wage, what was; openly or secretly, the quiet but incessant crusade of my existence—the bringing back of John Halifax.

He still remained my father's clerk—nay, I sometimes thought he was advancing in duties and trusts, for I heard of his being sent long journeys up and down England to buy grain—Abel Fletcher having added to his tanning business the flour-mill hard by, whose lazy whir was so familiar to John and me in our boyhood. But of these journeys my father never spoke; indeed, he rarely mentioned John at all. However he might employ and even trust him in business relations, I knew that in every other way he was inexorable.

And John Halifax was as inexorable as he. No underground or clandestine friendship would he admit—no, not even for my sake. I knew quite well, that unlike he could walk in openly, honourably, proudly, he never would re-enter my father's doors. Twice only he had written to me—on my two birthdays—my father himself giving me in silence the unsealed letters. They told me what I already was sure of—that I held, and always should hold, my steadfast place in his friendship. Nothing more.

One other fact I noticed; that a little lad, afterward discovered to be Jem Watkins, to whom had fallen the hard-working lot of the lost Bill, had somehow crept into our household as errand boy, or gardener's boy; and being "cute," and a "scolar," was greatly patronized by Jael. I noticed, too, that the said Jem, whenever he came in my way, in house or garden, was the most capital "little foot-page" that ever invalid had; knowing intuitively all my needs, and serving me with an unflinching devotion which quite surprised and puzzled me, at the time. I did not afterwards.

Summer was passing. People began to watch with anxious looks the thin harvest fields—as Jael often told me, when she came home from her afternoon walks. "It is piteous to see them," she said; "only July, and the quarter loaf nearly three shillings, and meal four shillings a peck."

And then she would glance at our flour-mill, where for several days a week the water-wheel was as quiet as on Sundays; for my father kept his grain locked up, waiting for what he wisely judged might be a worse harvest than the last. But Jael, though she said nothing, often looked at the flour-mill and shook her head. And after one market day—when she came in rather "flustered," saying there had been a mob outside the mill, until "that young man Halifax" had gone out and spoken to them—she never once allowed me to take my rare walk under the trees in the Abbey yard; nor if she could help it, would

she even let me sit watching the lazy Avon from the garden wall. One Sunday—it was the first of August, for my father had just come back from the meeting, very much later than usual, and Jael said he had gone, as was his annual custom on that his wedding day, to the Friends' burial-ground in St. Mary's Lane, where, far away from her own kindred and people, my poor young mother had been laid—on this one Sunday I began to see that things were going wrong. Abel Fletcher sat at dinner wearing the heavy, hard look which had grown upon his face not unmingled with the wrinkles planted by physical pain. For, with all his temperance, he could not quite keep down his hereditary enemy, gout; and this week it had clutched him pretty hard.

Dr. Jessop came in, and I stole away gladly enough, and sat, for an hour, in my old place in the garden, idly watching the stretch of meadow, pasture, and harvest land. Noticing, too, more as a pretty bit in the landscape than as a fact of vital importance, in how many places the half-ripe corn was already cut, and piled in thinly-scattered sheaves over the fields.

After the doctor left, my father sent for me and all his household, in the which, creeping humbly after the womankind, was now numbered the lad Jem. That Abel Fletcher was not quite himself was proved, by the fact that his unlighted pipe lay on the table, and his afternoon tankard of ale also sank from foam to flatness untouched.

He first addressed Jael. "Woman, was it thee who cooked the dinner to-day?"

She gave a dignified affirmative. "Thee must give us no more such dinners. No cakes, no pastries, kickshaws, and only wheat bread enough for absolute necessity. Our neighbours shall not say that Abel Fletcher has flour in his mill, and plenty in his house, while there is famine in the land. So take heed!"

"I do take heed," answered Jael staunchly. "Thee canst not say I waste a penny of thine. And for myself, do I not pity the poor? On First-day a woman cried after me about wasting flour in starch to-day, behold."

And with a spasmodic bridling up, she pointed to the bouillabaisse which used to stand up stiffly round her, withered, old threat, and stick out in front like a pouter-pigeon. Alas! its glory and starch were alike departed; it now appeared nothing but a heap of crumpled and yellowish muslin. Poor Jael! I knew this was the most heroic personal sacrifice she could have made, yet I could not help smiling; even my father did the same.

"Dost thee mock me, Abel Fletcher?" cried she angrily. "Preach not to others while the sin lies on thy own head."

And I am sure poor Jael was innocent of any jocular intention, as, advancing sternly, she pointed to her master's pate, where his long worn powder was scarcely distinguishable from the snows of age. He bore the assault gravely and unshrinkingly, merely saying, "Woman, peace!"

"Nor while," pursued Jael, driven, apparently, to the last, and most poisoned arrow in her quiver of wrath—"while the poor folk be starving in scores about Norton Bury, and the rich folk there will not sell their wheat under famine price. Take heed to thyself, Abel Fletcher."

My father winced, either from a twinge of gout or conscience; and then Jael suddenly ceased the attack, sent the other servants out of the room, and tended her master as carefully as if she had not insulted him. In his fits of gout my father, unlike most men, became the quieter and easier to manage the more he suffered. He had a long fit of pain, which left him considerably exhausted. When, being at last relieved, he and I were sitting in the room alone, he said to me—

"Phineas, the tanyard has thriven ill of late, and I thought the mill would make up for it. But if it will not it will not. Wouldst thee mind, my son, being left a little poor when I am gone?"

"Father!"

"Well, then, in a few days I will begin selling my wheat, as that

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency
SIR WALTER
EDWARD DAY-
IDSON, Knight
Commander of
the Most Distinguished
Order of
St. Michael and
St. George, Governor
and Commander in Chief,
in and over the
Island of Newfoundland and its
Dependencies.

W. E. DAVIDSON,
Governor.
[L.S.]

WHEREAS It is provided by Section 8 of the Act 6 George V., Chapter 18, entitled "An Act respecting the Administration of Local Affairs," that:

"The election of members of all Boards in each Electoral District of this Colony shall be held on a day to be fixed for that District by the Governor in Council, and published in the 'Royal Gazette' at least two months before the day on which the election is to be held."

And Whereas, by and with the advice of my Council, I deem it expedient that a day for the holding of such Elections should be fixed, as provided by the said Act;

I do, therefore, by and with the advice aforesaid, direct and appoint that the said Elections shall be held in the several Electoral Districts and divisions of Districts on Thursday, the Fifteenth day of November next.

And I do further order and direct that such Elections shall be conducted in accordance with the Rules and regulations respecting the same, approved by the Governor in Council under the provisions of the said Act; of which all persons concerned are hereby required to take due notice and govern themselves accordingly.

Given under my Hand and Seal at the Government House, St. John's, this 20th day of August, A. D. 1917.

By His Excellency's Command,
R. A. SQUIRES,
Colonial Secretary

sep14,41,4w



Public Notice. Transfer of Monies To Members of the 1st Nfld. Regiment

Arrangements have been made with the Pay and Record Office, London, whereby persons wishing to transfer money by telegraph to relatives or friends in the 1st Nfld Regiment, may do so through the Pay and Record Office, St. John's. Full particulars may be obtained at the Department of Militia, Colonial Building.

J. R. BENNETT,
Minister of Militia
sep6,tu,th,sat,1m

lad, had advised and begged me to do these weeks past. He is a sharp lad, and I am getting old. Perhaps he is right."

"Who, father?" I asked, rather hypocritically.

"Thee knowest well enough—John Halifax."

I thought it best to say no more; but I never let go one thread of hope which could draw me nearer to my heart's desire.

On the Monday morning my father went to the tanyard as usual. I spent the day in my bedroom, which looked over the garden, where I saw nothing but the waving of the trees and the birds hopping over the smooth grass; heard nothing but the soft chime, hour after hour, of the Abbey bells. What was passing in the world, in the town, or even in the next street, was to me faint as dreams.

At dinner-time I rose, went downstairs, and waited for my father; waited one, two, three hours. It was very strange. He never by any chance overstayed his time without sending a message home. So after some consideration as to whether I dared encroach upon his formal habits so much, and after much advice from Jael, who betrayed more anxiety than was at all warranted by the cause she assigned—namely, the spoiled dinner—I dispatched Jem Watkins to the tanyard; to see after his master.

(To be continued)

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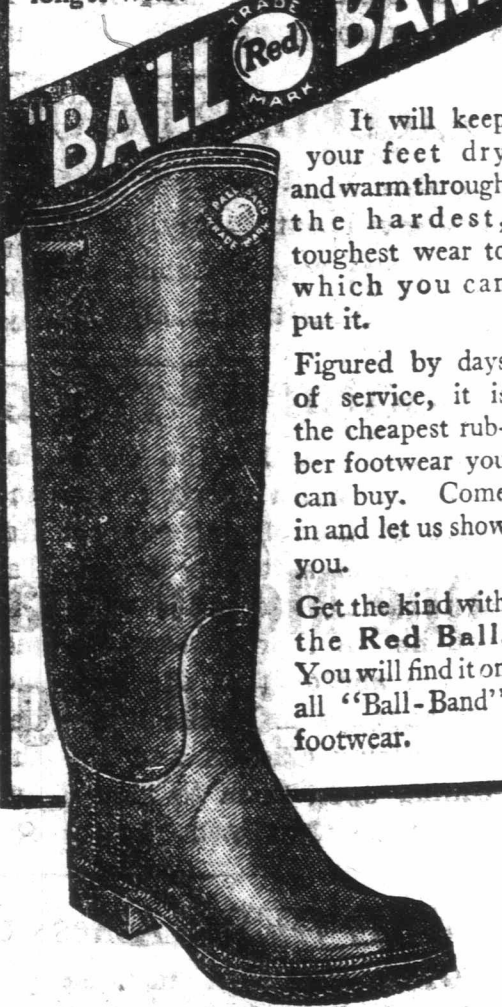
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