

Concerning the Clockmaker and his Wife.

By BEATRICE HARRADEN.



It was late in the evening, and the rain, which had been pouring all the day long, was still pelt- ing against the win- dows of the clock- maker's kitchen. The clockmaker's wife put down her knitting, threw a few sticks on the fire, unfastened the bellows from their accustomed place on the right-hand side of the hearth, and by their aid fanned life into the dying embers. She glanced at the clockmaker, who sat at the table, and was busily engaged in repairing a watch.

"Thomas," she said, "I am sure you cannot see by that light. Let me trim another lamp."

"I have just done," he answered gruff- ly, without looking up from his work.

He went on working and she went on knitting; and, except for the sound of her needles, and the purring of the black cat which sat staring into the fire, there was silence in the room, until the clock- maker dropped one of his tools, and the black cat sprang after it, and chased it gaily on the floor.

"Not yet, I hope," said the little old lady, who quietly picked up the tool, replaced it on the table, and caressed the offending cat, which, after this vig- orous sally, had returned to its former task of contemplating the fire.

The little old lady leaned forward in her chair and nursed her face. She was an old-fashioned person, with sharp fea- tures and stiff grey ringlets falling over her sunken cheeks. Her eyes were piercingly bright; she had an intellec- tual forehead; her countenance was al- most distressing in its eagerness.

At last the clockmaker rose from his chair, and came and rested in the old carved oak settle which served the double purpose of keeping out the draught from the door and forming a comfortable though ancient seat.

He took off his spectacles and held them in his hand.

"Well, Volumnia," he said, "tomorrow you and I will part. Not a very pleas- ant prospect so far as the weather is concerned. Do you hear the rain?"

"I fear you will have a wet journey," said his wife. "Perhaps you remember that tomorrow is the anniversary of our wedding day. Tomorrow, thirty-five years ago, it poured in torrents, as it is pouring now. That was not a very cheerful omen for our wedding."

"No, Volumnia," the old man answer- ed, smiling grimly; "my friends tried to persuade me not to marry you."

"Precisely," said the old lady dryly, "and my friends tried to persuade me not to marry you."

"I wish you had listened to them, Volumnia," he sighed, as he leaned back in the settle. Volumnia Webster shrug- ged her shoulders.

"Because I did not listen to my friends and you did not listen to your friends' Thomas," she said, "we have each of us lost thirty-five years of life. That was a pity. Life is short, and we cannot afford to fritter it away. But in all human probability we have each of us about twenty more years to live: so we must make the most of that. There is plenty of time to do a good many things in twenty years."

"The curious part," said the clock- maker, as he stroked the black cat, "the curious part, Volumnia, is that we have never thought of all this before. Now, to be honest with me, do you recollect a single day's pleasure in my company?"

Volumnia Webster mused. "Nothing readily suggests itself to me," she said, after a pause. "Ah, yes: I can recall one very happy day in London, spent with books and pictures. Stay, I forgot that you did not spend that day with me. No, Thomas; to be candid with you, I can dwell on nothing pleasurable in the past, so far as you are concerned. The fact is, there has

always been such a gulf between us—I came from a world utterly different from your world, and not only our spheres, but our actual ways of looking at things were different. Then, too, I was of gentle birth; you know I have no wish to speak unkind words to you, Thomas, but I do not think the same adjective can qualify your birth."

"You have told me that several times before," he replied half sulkily. "You may have forgotten all your other duties, but you have never forgotten the duty of reminding me, either directly or indirectly, that your father was a naval captain and that my father was not a naval captain. But there, let that pass; everybody must have some kind of hobby, and I do not grudge you yours. We were speaking of enjoyment in the past, were we not? You said you could recollect nothing pleasant, so far as I was concerned. Well, I have the advantage of you, Volumnia; for I can recall a very happy day spent with you in Winchester Cathedral. Do you remember look- ing at the Crusaders, and noting which of them had been once, twice, or thrice to the Holy Land? I thought them fools because of their enthusiasm, and, as usual, you did not agree with me. And then we went into the town, and bought that clock yonder. That re- minds me: there is something wrong with the hands; I must see to them be- fore I go to bed tonight. Indeed, I will do so now."

"You are getting confused," said Vol- umnia Webster placidly, as her husband opened the glass of the clock's face; "I have never been in Winchester."

"Why, of course," he answered, turn- ing round, "you were not with me! That was the happiest day I ever spent. Ev- erything in Winchester interested me, and I made friends with that old clock- maker, who wanted me to buy his busi- ness. If I had had the money, nothing would have pleased me better, for I al-

ways felt buried in this stupid village. I have never had the chance of putting my talents to account. Well, that is of the past, too."

He had now set in order the hands of the clock; and, taking out his heavy gold watch, he corrected the time, and returned to the settle.

"I should tell you, Volumnia," he con- tinued, "that I leave my affairs in ex- cellent condition. I have wound them up just as if they were the affairs of a dead man. I owe nothing; indeed some few shillings are owing to me for repairs which I have finished this after- noon. The clock belongs to Farmer Garrett, and the watch is the property of Mr. Fane; be sure to return them tomorrow, and, as for the extra money, it will be useful to you at Christmas."

Volumnia Webster stirred uneasily in her chair.

"Christmas without you will seem strange, Thomas," she said.

"Perhaps," he answered, "but one soon gets accustomed to feeling strange."

He took from his pocket his heavy old-fashioned watch, and looked at it re- gretfully.

"You remember, this belonged to your brother, Volumnia?" he said sadly. "It has been my companion for many years. I suppose I must give it back to you, but I shall miss it terribly."

"No doubt you will feel strange at first," said Volumnia, "but, to quote your own words, one soon gets ac- customed to feeling strange, you know."

The old clockmaker shook his head. "No, Volumnia," he replied; "I shall miss that watch sadly. We can learn to do without people much more easily than without things. We become absurd- ly attached to our little personal pos- sessions." His voice faltered as he spoke.

"I give in," she said, after a pause, "you may keep the watch."

"Thank you," he said warmly; "that is generous of you. In fact, Volumnia, you have been kind to me in a great



"The stranger took up fiddle and bow and green bag, and crept to the door. The rain was still pelt- ing against the windows, and the wind was still howling its dismal story . . . the water was rushing down the village street. . . . The stranger paused just by the door, hoping against all hope that the little old lady would relent and say one word of kind dismissal."