

A REPLY TO "MOLLIE DARLING."

BY T. H. W.

Yes, I love thee, Willie, darling,
I'll believe you ever true;
Constant as the star of morning
I will ever be to you.
Willie, never doubt I love thee,
Let your arms around me twine,
Let my head rest on thy bosom
While I promise to be thine.

Believe thou not, my Willie, darling,
That aught can turn my heart from thee
From the morning, at its dawning,
Till the eve, I'll think of thee.
In my dreams thou'rt ever present,
There thy manly form I see,
There thy countenance ever pleasant,
Appears so heavenly and serene.

Where'er you roam, my Willie, darling,
My thoughts will ever rest on thee;
Hoping that when far from Mollie,
You'll give some passing thought to me.
Take my hand, my Willie, darling,
While my heart beats loud for you;
Swear to me, my only darling,
That to me you'll ever be true.

THE GYPSY'S LEGACY.

"Oh! don't, don't! I didn't do it. I tell you it wasn't I!"—and the distressed cries of denial and entreaty increased in violence.

The scene was in a town in the Far West; and as Mr. Hastings approached the crowd assembled about the court-house, elbowing his way along, he came to where some of the rabble were holding a boy, while others were preparing to administer a flogging. The boy was dressed in the most picturesque costume; a scarlet flannel blouse, handsomely braided and belted with a broad leather girdle, a pair of zouave pantaloons of the same material, white stockings, and black cloth gaiters, a broad, white sailor-collar turned down in the neck, fastened with a broad blue ribbon. A scarlet cap, also braided with black, from which depended a long, swaying tassel, surmounted a handsome head of jet black hair, hanging in long, glossy curls. His features were small, his complexion dark and ruddy. His eyes were the large, black, luminous Italian. But he had been dragged and buffeted by the crowd until his picturesque attire was sadly disarranged.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Hastings, in a deep and commanding voice, and the large eyes were instantly turned in entreaty upon the speaker.

"Oh! he's one of them gipsies that have camped for the winter down at Melford Springs," was the answer.

"What of that? Why should he be abused because he happens to belong to that unfortunate race?" demanded Clarence Hastings.

"He belongs to the biggest set of thieves unhung. They have been stealing by wholesale already. The night before last I lost a lot of chickens, and we won't stand any more such nonsense."

"But how do you know that this boy was the thief? Did you catch him in the act?"

"No, Mr. Hastings. I defy you to catch one of the varnishes at any of their mischief."

"Then why not let this child go? Surely he ought not to suffer for the sins of the tribe, who are older and no doubt his teachers."

At this moment another of the crowd spoke. "I say, Mr. Hastings, you just go home if you're too tender-hearted. We're going to beat this fellow's red jacket for him, and send him back to the gang to tell what's in store for them, if they don't move their quarters."

Hastings stepped forward and placed his hand upon the boy's shoulder, scolded his cane ominously, and again addressed them.

"What do you call yourselves but cowards? A full score of men bent upon beating one small boy of scarcely twelve years! It is an outrage, and one I will not permit! So let me pass!"

The crowd fell back and slung off, while the boy was led away by his deliverer.

"I will see you safely to your people, my child," continued Hastings, "for I think they need a word of warning."

"Oh, sir, you are so kind. I did not steal," replied the boy with a grateful glance, which showed the fine lines of his face, and his eyes filled with tears.

"I hope you did not."

"I tell you I didn't. Don't you believe me?" returned the lad, impatiently.

"Certainly, and I am glad to do so," and he placed his hand caressingly upon his head.

"They, down there, thought that our people set me on to do such things; but I tell you nobody among them asks me to do anything."

"Why so?"

"Because I belong to old Zilla."

"Who is she?"

"My grandmother. She is very wise, and was once very beautiful. They all mind her."

"She is, then, the queen of your tribe?"

"Yes; but she is ill now, and I am afraid she will die some day."

The speaking face of the child assumed such a pathetic expression as to touch the heart of Mr. Hastings, and he followed him in silence for the rest of the way, which seemed interminable. Yet it was very much shortened by

the lad's taking a path through the woods which brought them to an overhanging cliff above the gipsy encampment, where the most picturesque sight presented itself.

In a deep, shaded glen, one protected by the high, pine-crowned bluffs from the fierce, cold, and rude blasts of winter, a band of wandering gipsies had pitched their tents. From out of the rocks leading down into this little valley bubbled a succession of springs which bore the owner's name—that of Melford. And so romantic and beautiful was the situation, that it had become a favorite place of resort during the summer months for pic-nic parties and seekers after rural pleasure.

As Clarence Hastings paused, he drank in at a glance the singularly beautiful scene beneath. Aumn had hung her gorgeous colors upon the L.A. tops and tinted the grass in the valley, where, in a half circle, were pitched a few white tents, which, with a couple of covered wagons, formed the homes of this strangely wandering people. A huge fire was burning beneath a great iron kettle, in which was bubbling a stew, with its savory odors spreading abroad, reaching even Mr. Hastings, who did not doubt it came from his neighbor's missing chickens.

By the entrances to the tents, or in groups about the grass, were scattered men, women and children, arrayed in dusty, faded garments, which revealed exposure to both the sun and rain. They all presented an appearance so unlike that of the gaily dressed, cleanly boy by his side, that he could not imagine him to belong to the strange company.

Farther up the valley were tethered several sleek, fat horses, testifying to the ample provision secured by their masters along the route. A couple of great, gaunt bloodhounds finished the inventory.

"Come," said the boy, after Hastings had contemplated the scene for a brief time, "follow me; I want old Zilla to see and thank you for saving me from those wretches."

He led the way down the rocky path into the astonished encampment. The dogs barked, the men howled, and the children flew like startled partridges to their weird-looking mothers, as Clarence Hastings followed his handsome young conductor through the dusky groups. At the entrance of one of the tents he paused. The opening of it was concealed by a thick, faded, scarlet curtain.

"Wait a moment," whispered the boy, and disappeared behind the screen.

A murmur of voices followed for a time, and then he returned and conducted Mr. Hastings into the presence of old Zilla.

Reclining upon a couch of straw, covered with a piece of gaudily-flowered drugget, and propped up with pillows, was the most singular being Hastings had ever beheld. She was tall and gaunt, with a pale face, deeply seamed, and the most remarkable coal-black eyes, which still bore the fulness and lustre of early youth. A profusion of hair, white as snow, lay drifted from her head. A long robe, with richly brocaded flowers upon a purple ground—once costly and gorgeous, but now tattered and faded—covered her wasted form. As soon as she spoke, Hastings noticed that her language like that of the lad he had rescued from the mob, was singularly free from bad grammar or vulgarity.

"Welcome, sir," she said, with a faint attempt to rise, but sinking back either from weakness or pain. "Paul tells me you saved him from the torture and indignity of a beating, and old Zilla thanks you."

"It is nothing," replied Hastings. "I but obeyed the dictates of common humanity. But I have intruded myself upon your people in order to give them some friendly advice."

"Your motive, sir, I doubt not, is a kind one; yet we do not like to listen to preaching. A kind act goes much further with us than words."

"I have only to say my good woman, that this poor boy was very near paying the penalty of some of the lawlessness of your people. I only wish to warn them of the resentment and bitterness such a course will bring upon them."

"Thank you kindly, sir. But we must live, and if I had my way, it would be honestly. Yet, as you know, there are some bad people in every community, and, of course, ours is no exception. And what wonder? We are without name or nation—wandering ever in hunger and cold—repelled by those who have homes and competence. Do you marvel, then, that they are not all saints?"

Her voice grew tremulous and sad as she pictured the condition of her race.

"I do not wonder," he replied, "for they are tempted beyond others. But as you have found so comfortable a place, I presume you intend to remain here for some months. Permit me to say that I am disposed to aid your people in being honest, especially as I have pledged my word to assist in prosecuting all found violating the laws of the land. My land joins the estate of Mr. Melford, whom I know to be a humane and kind man. In his name as well as my own, I pledge you every assistance and protection, upon the condition that our property and rights, with those of the entire town and neighborhood, are respected."

"Our people are proud, sir; are not beggars, and will not take alms," replied the gipsy, with a haughty glance and gesture. But it almost instantly softened, and she went on, "Yet, if you can show me a way of getting an honest living here, I pledge you the compact shall be kept to the letter."

"The streams upon this estate and my own are full of fish—the woods abound in game. Both will find a ready market in town and at our houses. You are welcome to all you can

obtain. At least I can answer for myself, and I will see Mr. Melford at once about it."

"You are indeed kind. I thank you,"—and she extended her long, thin hand. "Old Zilla will at least see that none trespass upon you. Farewell."

As Clarence Hastings bowed over the hand given him he felt as if indeed in the presence of a person in authority. Paul led him once more through the encampment and out into the highway, bidding him good morning, and refusing the money offered to him.

Clarence Hastings was an exceedingly handsome young man of about three-and-twenty, rich and independent. He lived in a fine old country mansion about a mile from the town, just far enough for seclusion. The surroundings revealed culture and refinement.

A maiden sister, some years older than himself, took charge of his house. They lived alone in the family homestead, as they had done from childhood.

A week after his visit to the gipsy encampment, his sister Mary called to him from the window of the little breakfast-room, as he sat over his newspaper and coffee, "Clarence, here comes the queerest creature! I am positive it is the little gipsy, Paul, with whom you had so romantic an adventure. Surely he looks like some species of monkey."

"Not at all, sister. He has a beautiful face."

And he arose, opened the door, and admitted his little friend. The boy's dark eyes were red with weeping, and he looked pale and very sad, and when questioned as to the reason, replied, "Old Zilla wishes to see you, sir. She is dying."

And the head drooped upon his clasped hands, while his little form trembled with suppressed sobs.

"I will go to her immediately. Do not cry. It may not be so bad as you think."

"She does not wish you to come until sunset, and told me to say she wished to see you at that hour."

"Say to her, then, my boy, that I will certainly be there at the appointed time."

"Surely, Clarence," interrupted his sister, "you will not think of going alone at such a time. Think of the isolated place, the lonely road, and the strange people you visit."

The form of the boy dilated, and his eyes flashed fire as he turned to answer her.

"You think, like all the rest, that we are murderers and dogs, but know that not so much as a hair of this kind gentleman's head will be injured. A gipsy knows how to return a kindness and protect a friend."

And, reining all offers of hospitality, he strode out of the house and away with the air of a prince.

"Well, well," said Mary Hastings, "if that isn't a specimen of humanity! The gipsy who came the other day with a string of fish for me to purchase was like a poor whipped cur compared to this boy. He hung his head and made known his wishes in a sort of broken English jargon—something like Italian."

"Yes, there is a mystery about the lad, and old Zilla, his grandmother. If I mistake not, they have known a different life in other days."

At the appointed time, Clarence Hastings was again in the gipsy encampment. Paul met him at the top of the crags, and led him as before through the now silent place. Not even the voice of a child or the barking of a dog broke the stillness. In the gloom of the early evening shadows, he distinguished the form of a number of men grouped about the dying embers of their camp-fires. Every one else seemed to have sought their tents or wagons. As they drew near the tent of old Zilla, a strange chanting sound fell upon their ears. Paul lifted the curtain, and they passed within.

Reclining, as upon the day he had first visited her, Hastings saw old Zilla. Her face was ashy pale, and showing marks of great recent suffering. Her hands were folded upon her breast, holding a crucifix; her eyes were closed. A lamp, suspended from the centre pole of the tent, gave a dim light. Paul placed his fingers upon his lips in token of silence, and they stood and listened to the following strain:—

"The spirit of my native land,
It visits me once more—though I must die
Far from the myrtle which thy breeze has
fanned,
My own bright Italy!

"The nightingale is there,
The sunbeam's glow, the citron flower's
perfume;
The south wind whispers in the scented
air—
It will not pierce the tomb!"

A sob broke in upon the last strain. It came from the overcharged heart of the boy, Paul, and aroused the old woman to the consciousness of their presence.

"Ah, you have come!" she said, lifting her head feebly to get a better view of the dim surroundings. "I have much to say to you, sir, and my voice is thin and weak. Come nearer. And you, my child, go without and wait until I call you. I must see this kind friend of yours alone."

The boy instantly obeyed, and Hastings seated himself at her bidding upon a stool close to her side.

"My story is long," she continued; but I must make it brief, for my hours are numbered. I was born in the lowly condition you find me, but my beauty won for me the love of an Italian noble, who educated and made me his happy wife. To us was born one child, a daughter; and the beauty which had proved my

greatest blessing was her greatest curse. She married in early life. The boy, Paul, was the fruit of that union. But fickle and spoiled by indulgence, his mother soon got tired of her bonds, and died with one of her many admirers, leaving husband and child. The latter I took charge of, while its father went in search of that which is very sweet to our race—revenge!"

The old woman paused from exhaustion and emotion, and feebly wiped the moisture from her brow. Then, gathering new strength, she went on:—"My husband had died before our daughter's disgrace; and, a widow, with the pride of a kingly race throbbing in my veins, I was left to bear my sorrow and shame alone. For two years my daughter enjoyed the postage for which she had bartered her birthright. Then justice and revenge overtook her. She was found dead in bed, poisoned by an unseen hand; and the author of her fall was pounced in the street by a masked figure, who hushed his crime into his ear even as his life-blood crimsoned the pavement. Having no male issue, I was driven by the next successor from the old chateau which sheltered my grey head and that of my grandchild. Bowed with grief, homeless and friendless, the old spirit of my people returned to me; and, taking Paul, I wandered forth in search of the tribe of my kindred. My aged father, the Gipsy King, still lived. He had governed his people for nearly half a century; there was no one to succeed him, and my return was hailed with joy. But poverty and want drove us at last to these golden shores."

"Now listen to the most important part of my revelation. The child of my daughter was, unfortunately for us all, a girl, whom we named Pauline, giving promise, like her mother, of rare beauty. I conceived the idea of disguising and passing her off as a boy, thus shielding her from the fiends that could beset her path as a woman; and so carefully have I guarded the secret that not even one of the tribe has ever discovered the deception. When I am gone, should I leave her with them it would certainly be found out, and she would pay the penalty of my lack of confidence. I have guarded and guided my people with an enlightened mind; but they will soon return to semi-barbarism, and the child is too tender a plant to be left in such soil. Receive her, then, as my dying legacy."

She drew from beneath her pillow a little ebony casket, and, touching a spring, displayed to the astonished gaze of Hastings a magnificent set of diamonds and pearls, with a necklace of the same costly gems.

"These," she resumed, "are her dowry. They were given to me by my noble husband upon my wedding day. Do you accept my gift?"

In a voice trembling with emotion, Hastings signified his assent. She placed a small whistle to her lips, blew a feeble note, and instantly the child stood before her, and the red and swollen eyes testified that she had been weeping. The old gipsy drew the delicate face down to her, and gazed at it as if she would carry the memory of it down to her grave.

"So like—so like my own. Pauline, my darling, I have given you to this gentleman, stranger though he is. I know his heart is kind, and I can trust him."

She placed the little hand of the child in that of Clarence Hastings, and murmured a blessing in her native tongue. Then glancing up with fast-glazing eyes, she whispered, "May Heaven deal with you as you do with her! Quick!" she gasped, with a strange pallor creeping over her face. "Draw aside the curtain, child."

Pauline obeyed; the dying gipsy gazed out upon the dark hills where the autumn winds sighed mournfully through the frost-touched leaves, and the calm white stars looked solemn and near.

"I give you all my parting blessing," murmured the white lips, as one after another stole out from the shadows, and gathered near. "I have given my Paul to this gentleman. Dispute not my act, and choose you one more fitted to guide you."

Her speech ceased suddenly, a gurgling sound was heard, and then she was dead. A mournful sound went up from all in the little encampment, and mingled with the wailing winds as Hastings bore the unconscious child up the rocky path. The strange people were mourning their queen.

In the grey of early morning Hastings reached his home, and gave into the arms of his sister the gipsy's legacy, who, as the years passed, ripened into a beautiful woman. Her rich southern nature, full of fire and impetuous impulses, had been toned down by judicious training, and careful culture had unfolded increased her charms. And when at last she stood beside her friend and benefactor in shining garments, her dusky hair covered with orange blossoms and rich creamy lace that fell like a white benediction about her tall and queenly form, she bore indeed the air of majesty.

"You are then worthy of your lineage, my darling," said Clarence Hastings, gazing enraptured upon her; producing the little casket given him by old Zilla, he opened it; and, drawing forth the costly gems, he clasped them about her regal neck and beautiful arms.

"Clarence, oh, Clarence!" she exclaimed, "what extravagance! I ought not to accept them. You have already filled my life with love and happiness, and these gems, ballete me, are worthless compared with your love. Take them back, I entreat you. They are too costly for so penniless a bride;" and her great luminous eyes grew misty with tears.

"They are your own, my love, only placed in my keeping for you. They are your dowry from