

Christopher Abbot eagerly took the paper, tore off its wrapper and turned to the summary; then a deep groan escaped his lips, and he covered his face with his hands. The Squire sprang up and looked at the paper, which had fluttered from the old man's nerveless grasp.

"Outbreak in India."

"Mutiny and massacre at Meerut. Capture of Delhi by the mutineers. Massacre of Europeans."

The headings were sensational and startling enough. Details necessarily of the most meagre description. Nothing but the bare facts were stated, but they were suggestive of a thousand possibilities and horrors.

"Don't give way, Mr. Abbot," said the Squire, kindly, and he laid his hand on the old man's shoulder in sympathy. "Don't give up hope all at once. It is not at all likely that all the English have lost their lives. I am certain the next telegrams will be more reassuring. The first are always unnecessarily alarming."

"I confess I haven't much hope, Squire; and when I think of my little girl, I can't bear it. She never had a care at Pine Edge, no preparation for such things as these."

"When she became a soldier's wife she accepted all the hazards, Mr. Abbot," said the Squire. "We must not lose heart. See, I am not hopeless, though my brother is as dear to me as your daughter is to you. Our interests are equal, and we must strengthen each other."

A slight sigh escaped William Ayre's lips as he uttered the last words; and Abbot understood what that sigh implied. There were none within these walls save himself who took a kindly and real interest in the young soldier.

"I'm an old man, Mr. Ayre, and I have all an old man's impatience," said the farmer, impulsively. "Don't think I'm reflecting on anything, sir. It was a proud day for me when I gave Rachel to the Captain. He was worthy of her, and that's a deal for me to say; but you're a father yourself, and you know what a father's feelings are."

"Yes, yes. I am not less concerned than you about my poor, dear sister," said the Squire, in his delicate considerate way. "I have a great many cares, Abbot, and I confess they are weighing on me. Look at me. You have not seen me for some weeks. How do you think I am looking?"

"Not well, sir. It would be a sin for me to say aught else," said the farmer, with a catch in his voice.

"I am not well," answered the Squire languidly, and shaded his eyes for a moment with his hand. Then suddenly he looked straight at the old man, with a faint, melancholy smile. "In fact, Abbot, I am a dying man."

"Oh, I hope not. For God's sake don't say it's so bad as that!" exclaimed Christopher Abbot, with sudden passion. "It's impossible that we can lose you."

"It is inevitable, Abbot. I've had them all at me, and their verdict is unanimous. If I live through the summer, which is not likely, if the weather continues as it is, the autumn winds will cut me off. It has been a frightful struggle, old friend. Life is sweet to us all, and I wanted to live. But, through the mercy of God I have learned my lesson, and can say, 'It is well.'"

"Oh, Mr. Ayre, this is worse news than the Indian revolt," cried Christopher Abbot, and he was perfectly sincere in his words. "Can nothing be done?"

The Squire shook his head.

"Nothing. They wanted me to go abroad for the spring, and I believed it might have prolonged my life for a few weeks. But I had so much to do, and I was afraid I might never come back to Studleigh."

He turned his eyes towards the wide window which commanded a magnificent prospect; one of the loveliest in that lovely shire. Christopher Abbot understood, ay and shared the painful yearning expressed in that long look. William Ayre's hold in life, with its many sweet ties, had been difficult to lose. The struggle had cost him more than any dreamed.

"Does her ladyship know?"

"I think she does. I have not spoken directly

to her yet. There are things in this life, Abbot, which require all a strong man's strength, but I must gather up my courage soon. Well, we can only wait for further news, which I believe will be more reassuring. Try not to anticipate the worst."

"I will try. You are a lesson to me, sir, old as I am. I did not think I should have lived to see such a sorrow come upon Studleigh."

"Ay, the old place has seen many changes. There will be a long regency. My son, poor little chap, will not be able to fill my shoes for many years. But Gillot is a wise and faithful friend. The place will be safe in his care. Are you in a hurry this morning?"

"No, I have nothing to do at Pine Edge, but wander up and down watching the slow growth of the corn, and tormenting myself about Rachel," said the old man, with a dismal smile.

"Sit down, then. We may not have such an opportunity for long. I have other things to speak to you about. I've been setting my house in order—a man's duty in health, but doubly so when health leaves him. I have not forgotten little Clement Ayre."

"There was no need, sir. All I have will go to Rachel's boy," said the old man, with a quick touch of pride which made the Squire smile.

"I know that; but my brother's son required some recognition from his father's kindred," he said, pointedly. "I have left Stonecroft in trust for him. It will be his when he is one-and-twenty."

Christopher Abbot looked perplexed, and hesitated before he spoke.

"There was no need—though I cannot but say it is generous. But, but—" A sensitive flush mounted to the old man's brow; "Lady Emily might justly feel aggrieved. The Croft is too big a slice to take from one cousin to give to another."

"If my son gives a faithful account of his stewardship at Studleigh, he will do very well," replied the Squire. "You are a little hard on my wife, Abbot," he added with a smile. "She is not devoid of human feelings, though she did not approve of the marriage, which has doubly cemented the old friendship between you and me."

"No, no, sir, I did not mean to imply any such thing," said the old man hastily. "Lady Emily had a perfect right to her opinion, and I never thought the less of her for it."

"Well, I tell you those things so that you may know the confidence I have in you, and, Abbot, it is my desire that you shall take your place as a relative at my funeral, I—"

"Oh, Mr. Ayre, I can't listen," cried the old man, starting to his feet. "I won't listen, you can't leave us. You'll see me out yet. I'm seventy-two, and you are not half my age. I can't bear to hear you speak like that—"

"It is true though, Abbot," said the Squire with a sad sweet smile. "And that is my desire, which you will not forget. I shall leave my instructions in writing so that they will be carried out. Good-bye just now, and keep up your heart about the exiles in India. I shall write to a friend at the War Office this morning, and get him to send me the latest and fullest particulars. I hope I'll live to see them both in England yet, and to hold my Anglo-Indian nephew in my arms."

They shook hands in silence, but the old man's eyes were dim as he looked into the noble face of the Squire. He tried to utter something of what was in his heart, but words failed him, and with another fervent grip he hurriedly left the room. As he stepped from the stairs to the hall, the breakfast room door opened, and Lady Emily appeared leading her little boy by the hand. She looked very lovely in her white morning gown, and the flowers in her belt were not fresher than the delicate bloom on her face. She coloured slightly with surprise at the sight of the farmer; and, returning his bow with a slight inclination of her haughty head, withdrew into the room until he had passed out of the hall. Christopher Abbot, however, was too much engrossed with other thoughts to pay any heed to the scant courtesy shown to him by the Squire's wife. When she heard the hall door close, she took the child upstairs to his nurse, and promising that he should see his father in a little, went alone to the Squire's dressing-room.

"I see Abbot has been here, William," she said in her quiet, cool way. "I hope he did not interfere with your breakfast? Have you eaten anything?"

"No, but I have drunk all the coffee, and taken the half of an egg, so don't scold, Emily," he said, with the serenest of smiles. "How lovely you are! It is as good as a walk out of doors to see your freshness."

She smiled at the pretty compliment, and laid her fair hands with a caressing touch on his head. But her tender moods did not last long.

"What did Abbot want so early, William?" she asked, presently.

"News from India. There it is in the *Times*. I suspect the worst has hardly been told."

"Is there any disturbance?"

She took up the paper quickly, and ran her eyes over the paragraphs.

"Delhi in the hands of the mutineers! Why, Geoffrey must have come to grief."

"I confess I am more concerned for his wife and child than for him, Emily. We dare not try to imagine their circumstances."

"But, surely, a few mutineers can soon be conquered by British soldiers?"

"Yes; but where are the British soldiers, Emily? I don't suppose there are a hundred, all told, in Delhi at this moment."

"I hope for your sake, dear, that he will be safe," she said, with unusual gentleness.

"I hope so; but it will be an unequal strife. I was writing to Grantly when you came in, asking for more particulars. He will know the latest. Emily, I'm sorry for poor old Abbot. Geoffrey's wife was all he had."

"He need not have been so eager for her to go to India, then," she replied, with a perceptible hardening of her voice. "He must accept the consequences now."

A slight shadow flitted across the Squire's brow. "Emily, will you allow your prejudice to rule you all your life? Will you never give a sister's hand to Geoffrey's wife?"

"Never."

She answered calmly, and without hesitation, and with no change in face or voice.

"Not even for my sake?" he pleaded, looking at her with eyes which ought to have conquered.

"What is the good of opening up that vexed question to-day, William?" she asked, with a touch of petulance. "I thought it was buried, and that we should have no more of it. I have my duty to my kindred and my position, William. It must always be wrong to set a bad precedent."

"Emily, I shall not have many more favours to ask. Do not let the brief span of life which remains to me be embittered by this estrangement," he said, earnestly. "I ask you to write to my sister, as a dying request."

"Oh, you are cruel!" she cried, with heaving bosom and proudly quivering lip, and turning from him she left the room.

(To be Continued.)

The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire.

This assertion is literally true, as anyone who takes the trouble to trace the sun's course round the earth can see for himself. The possessions of Great Britain are scattered over so large an area of the world's surface that not only is it a fact that the sun never sets upon them, but it is always shining upon a very large extent of land which lies under the sway of the British flag. One-eighth of the habitable globe recognises Queen Victoria as its ruler, and one-sixth of the entire population of the world is under her dominion; while not less than a third of the entire trade of the globe is carried on by Great Britain and her possessions.

"MR. PENNY," said the editor, gently, but firmly, "I fear the time has come to sever the relations which have so long existed between us. I have allowed you to rhyme 'pain' with 'again' and 'door' with 'moor,' but when you go so far as to try to make a rhyme of 'peaches' and 'he aches' you go rather too far. You will find your cheque in the counting-house."