

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)

HECTIC FLUSH.

Hegen rood,
Morgen tood.

FLMISH PROVERB.

Dear Mimi! the harbinger of doom is there,
The heated life-blood from thy cheek is flowing,
Thy seat reflected in thy vacant stare,
And in the scarlet on thy soft cheek glowing.
Alas! the brightness of the mantling blush,
The awful, fearful beauty of that hectic flush.

Confined a victim in this tepid room,
And kept by lassitude in hidden bowers,
Thou hearest no more the birdsong from the broom,
Nor breathest the fragrance of the beauteous flowers:
Thou feelest no more the Zephyrs as they play,
In unseemly gambols on this balmy day.

Frail blossom! loveliest of all blooms to me,
In sickly beauty from thy stemlet quivering,
The genial dews no longer rain on thee,
Thou standest in the autumn tempest shivering.
Dear bird! the dismal wintry days have come,
Thou art departing from thy summer home.

Thy little feet are languid on the floor,
Thy silver voice, of old so sweet, is muffled;
Thy smile is mournful, when at the open door
Thou comest to meet me with sweet face unmuffled.
Thou timidly shrinking from the cool night air
That fain would fan thy brow and wave thy damp brown hair.

And oh! the hacking cough that sudden heaves
Thy tender breast convulsively—filling
Thine eyes with tears, while the sharp fever cleaves
Thy wasted figure with a nervous thrilling;
And then the sense of faintness—the short, quick breath,
Sad herald of the fatal gasp of death.

Ah me! how like a phantom thou hast been
In evening lights before my senses glancing,
With thy white robes, pale face and thoughtful mien,
A fairy visitant my soul entrancing:
I see thee still, a stellar lambent gleam
Gliding athwart the shadows of my dream.

Sometimes at eve thine eyes were wondrous bright,
And in the sunset glossier flashed thy tresses,—
The hectic flush glowed with such ruby light
That oft I feared to meet thy fond caresses:
There was unearthly music in thy word
That thrilled and made me tremble as I heard.

But now the end has come and all is o'er.
Alas! the footsteps on the stairway rushing,
The fixed look—the shriek—the fall upon the floor—
The white dress tinged with blood from blue lips gushing:
And then the awful silence gathered round thy bed
With forms bent low and eyes that weep over my beautiful dead!

And as I gaze upon yon marble cross,
Where at this hour the moon-beams faintly quiver,
Gone, gone! I murmur, weeping o'er my loss,
Gone is my red-checked girl, alas! for ever.
My crimson rose has faded ere her time,
Our household's pride and joy is gathered in her prime.

JOHN LESPERANCE.

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TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

A NEW NOVEL.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XI.

SIR AUBREY IS INTERESTED.

The fancy fair had been a great success. Such a fund had been raised as justified Mr. Vancourt in bringing a Monkhampton architect to survey the existing school-house with a view to furnishing plans and specifications for a better one on the same site.

The Vicar and one of his daughters drove into the market town on the afternoon of that day in which Edmund Standen bade a reluctant farewell to Hedingham, and all that it contained; the Vicar intent on business, Miss Mary Vancourt intent on the shop windows, which offered the wealth of the new autumn fashions to the feminine gaze.

"Oh, look, papa, at those funny brown and yellow stripes," she exclaimed, as she walked the fat pony at a funeral pace past the showy windows of Mr. Ganzlein, the great Monkhampton draper. "Those are to be all the rage this year. Florence Toynbee told me so, and you know she has a cousin in Paris. They're ugly, but rather stylish. I think I shall have one."

Mr. Vancourt gazed with indifferent eye upon the splendours of Ganzlein's. The last importation of cuffs and collars—"sets" as they were called at Ganzlein's—from Paris or Spitalfields. The Ayrshire sewed work. The more costly industry of Madeira's convents. The lustrous silks. The dainty umbrellas. He was riding his own hobby, the gothic school-house, and had no sympathy with his daughter's aspirations, which always took the direction of millinery.

"Drive a little faster, my dear," he said briskly. "I want to catch Mr. Spilby before he leaves his office."

Mr. Spilby was the architect, who to the strictly professional and aesthetic pursuit of architecture conjoined the more perennially profitable business of an auctioneer and house-agent. He had a little office abutting on the High street of Monkhampton, at a sharp corner, over against a pump, and where two smaller streets branched off from the main thoroughfare, a situation, in fact, which was considered one of the best in Monkhampton.

"You can wait here for me, my dear," said Mr. Vancourt, as the pony drew up before Mr. Spilby's plate-glass door—a smart looking office was Mr. Spilby's, beautified with framed and glazed views of villas and country seats for sale or hire, houses whose architectural attractions were enhanced, or set off, by preternaturally vivid verdure, and a tropical sky. "You can wait, Mary, while I speak a word or two to Mr. Spilby. I shan't be five minutes."

Miss Vancourt gave a little sigh, knowing that under such circumstances the Vicar's five minutes meant half an hour. But she breathed no remonstrance, and settled herself in the comfortable little poney carriage, with her sun-umbrella held so that it should shade her sufficiently and yet not prevent her

seeing and being seen. Monkhampton, at four o'clock in the afternoon, was quite a lively place. Three or four carriages, of the barouche or landau tribe, might be seen in the High street, between four and five, while pony carriages and the lesser fry of vehicles were abundant.

As Miss Vancourt knew nearly every one who passed she was not without amusement. Now wafting a kiss from the tips of her gloved fingers to the occupants of a stylish landau—now nodding to a charioteer in a pony carriage—now exchanging a few words with pedestrians who stopped to shake hands, make a remark or two about the weather, and enquire with solicitude about the health of the Vancourt family, as if, when last heard of, they had been almost moribund.

Miss Vancourt stifled a little yawn after exchanging several such greetings, a yawn which may have been caused by the heat of the afternoon or the dullness of her acquaintance.

"I wish I could have stopped opposite Ganzlein's," she thought; "I could have had a good look at the new fashions. I might have bought a pair of gloves to keep me in countenance."

She looked at her watch, and discovered that the Vicar's five minutes had extended to twenty.

"He'll stop with Mr. Spilby an hour," she thought, "prolonging about that old school," by which she meant the new school. "I really wish we hadn't helped papa with the Faucy Fair. We shall never hear the last of that tiresome school-house; and I'm sure the present building does well enough. It keeps out wind and weather, and if the children are a little crowded it's no more than they're accustomed to in their homes. What's the use of disturbing the poor little creatures' ideas of life with fine architecture, when they must go home to their hovels after all?"

Miss Vancourt gave a second yawn, which she hardly took the trouble to conceal. She was surprised in the midst of it by the appearance of a gentleman upon a well-groomed chestnut horse, who drew rein on the off side of the little pony carriage.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken," said this gentleman; "it is Miss Vancourt."

The yawn was strangled untimely, and Miss Vancourt besides all smiles and brightness.

"How do you do, Sir Aubrey?" she said, shaking hands with the lord of the soil. "Papa is in the office, talking to Mr. Spilby about the new school-house."

"Indeed. Do you know I am very much interested in that new school-house. That little Arcadian festivity yesterday afternoon was charming. I was never more gratified."

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Vancourt, brightening. "It is so nice to be praised by a person of importance. It was a very humble attempt, of course, but for a charity bazaar it certainly went off amazingly well."

"The bazaar!" exclaimed Sir Aubrey. "I wasn't thinking of the bazaar just then, though it was very nice, and did you young ladies vast credit—all those pretty things worked by your own fair hands—delightful, I am sure. But what I spoke of just now was the children's tea-drinking—such a pretty rustic scene, in that nice old orchard—the happy children—arrah—that—arrah—pretty girl who helped to give them their tea—altogether a very sweet scene." The Baronet's languid tones stumbled curiously towards the end of this speech.

"I suppose you mean Mr. Carew's daughter," said Miss Vancourt, contemptuously. "Rather a bold young person. My sister and I used to be kind to her as long as we could afford to do so. But lately there have been some unpleasant reports."

"Unpleasant reports!" echoed Sir Aubrey; "what kind of reports?"

"I had rather not discuss the subject, if you please, Sir Aubrey," replied Miss Vancourt, drawing her lips together primly.

"I am sorry that village slander should touch so innocent a creature," said the Baronet, "for it needs no profound knowledge of the human countenance to see purity in that fair young face."

Miss Vancourt sighed gently, but made no reply. It was hardly worth disputing about Sylvia's character with this senile baronet, who evidently admired her pretty face. Nor could Miss Vancourt have said very much against the young woman had she been forced to speak plainly. She had only been informed by some one who had been informed by some one else, that Sylvia Carew had been seen walking with Mr. Standen in the shades of evening. And this Sir Aubrey Perriam might have considered insufficient evidence for the condemnation of a village beauty.

Mr. Vancourt emerged from Mr. Spilby's office and saved the necessity of further argument.

"How do you do, Sir Aubrey; nice weather for the crops. I'm happy to tell you that our little festival, which you were good enough to honour with your presence, was a positive triumph. The bazaar has produced us close upon eighty pounds. This, with previous collections, brings us up to three hundred. So in about two years more, if things go well, we may count upon something very near a thousand, and by that time may certainly begin our work. The old place will hold together very well for a couple of years longer."

"It will last half a century, I am sure, papa," said Miss Vancourt disdainfully. "I can't think why you are so anxious to build new schools. I daresay it will end in a debt which you will be obliged to pay."

"Let us hope that Mr. Vancourt's parishioners will be too generous to permit such an injustice," said Sir Aubrey, with an air that implied his own willingness to come to the rescue. Yet the voice of Rumour, in Hedingham, and Swanford, and neighbouring parishes, affirmed that Sir Aubrey Perriam was close, and that if there was one thing in this world he most cordially hated, that one thing was to discover himself from any portion of his wealth. Indeed there were some slanderers so base as to declare that, despite his elegant bearing and perfect dress and carefully appointed household, Sir Aubrey was something of a miser. He did not put money away in iron-bound chests, or bury it in the earth; but he invested it from time to time with studious care, and men found it very difficult to beguile him into the expenditure of it.

"It's rather premature, perhaps," said the Vicar, "with only three hundred in hand; but I've asked Spilby to come over this evening and look at the old place, and give his opinion about the kind of building adapted to the site—Gothic, of course, it must be."

Sir Aubrey was wonderfully interested.

"What, Spilby's coming to look at your school-house this evening?" said he. "I should like to hear what he says. Clever fellow, Spilby."

Sir Aubrey always praised people. It cost him nothing, and made things generally agreeable.

"If you will do us the honour of dining at the Vicarage, Sir Aubrey," said Mr. Vancourt heartily, but stopped abruptly, frozen by a frown from his daughter, a frown which meant that the Vicarage dinner was not good enough to be taken unaware by so great a man as Sir Aubrey. But men are so rash.

"The idea of papa asking Sir Aubrey to go home with us when we've nothing but soup, and the cold fore-quarter of lamb," thought Miss Vancourt indignantly.

Perhaps Sir Aubrey guessed the reason of that unfinished sentence, for he made haste to refuse the Vicar's invitation.

"You're too good," he said; "but my brother would wait dinner for me. I must ride back to the Place, but I'll come to Hedingham directly after dinner. What time do you expect Spilby?"

"About half-past seven."

"Keep him till half-past eight. I'll be with you by that time; good-bye, Miss Vancourt; au revoir Vicar," and the baronet touched his chestnut's velvet neck with the bridle, and rode off at a sharp trot.

CHAPTER XII.

HIS INTEREST DEEPENS.

The sun had left only a low line of crimson behind the cypress and yews in the churchyard, when Sir Aubrey Perriam opened the rustic gate of the school-house garden. He had left his horse at the inn, where the landlord and his underlings were not a little surprised to see the lord of the manor at so late an hour. There was something cheering in his appearance. It seemed as if he meant to take notice of Hedingham.

"It's like old times to see you among us again, Sir Aubrey," said the man vaguely, for those times were old indeed, older than this mortal life, in which Sir Aubrey had been wont to honour Hedingham with frequent visits.

"I've come to see the architect who is to draw the designs for the new school-house, Barford," said the baronet, graciously.

"Deary me. Yes, our Vicar's such an active gentleman, allus up to something," replied Mr. Barford, who would have preferred a more sleepy Vicar and less frequent calls upon his own purse.

Those improvements of Mr. Vancourt's imposed a tax upon Hedingham—yet it was something to live in a village that stood foremost in the march of civilization. Mr. Vancourt had even talked about restoring the church—doing away with the gallery in which generations of Hedingham folks had listened in slumbrous repose to drowsy afternoon sermons—and beautifying chancel and aisles in some wonderful manner. But the Hedingham people strenuously opposed any such new-fangled notions. They liked the church as their forefathers had sat in it, they said sentimentally; and they liked their money in their pockets; but this they did not say.

The architect and Mr. Vancourt had been pacing and measuring and planning for the last half-hour. Sir Aubrey heard their voices as he opened the little gate and went into the school-master's garden. But he was in no hurry to join them. He strolled slowly along the narrow path, admiring that homely mixture of flowers and vegetables, the entanglement of pinks and pansies protected by a border of thick box-wood that had been growing for the last forty years, the tall bolly-hocks that screened the cabbages and beans, the spreading rose bushes. To a man who lived half the year in Paris this village garden had charms.

"After all, there is no place like England," he said to himself, "and there were no women so pretty as Englishwomen. Where on the continent could one match the pink and white of that girl's complexion?"

He found Mr. Vancourt and the architect pacing the little grass plot before Mr. Carew's parlour. Sylvia sat just within the open door watching them while she worked, making as fair a picture in the twilight as a painter need care to see. Her father lounged against the door post, smoking his evening pipe.

Sir Aubrey gave a nod to the Vicar and Mr. Spilby, and went straight to the door, where he wished Miss Carew good evening, with bare head.

The girl gave a little start at first seeing him, and the fair face crimsoned. What could have brought him here to-night—to night of all nights, when poor Edmund was on his dismal way to Southampton.

Sir Aubrey saw the blush, and was gratified. There were ladies of his acquaintance who affected to consider him an old man. It was pleasant to find that he could flutter the pulse of this lovely young creature.

"I hope you are not very tired after your exertions yesterday," he said, courteously. The schoolmaster had laid aside his pipe, and was bringing out a chair.

"I am not at all tired, thank you, Sir Aubrey," replied the girl, smiling at his question, in the serene security of youth and health. "I really don't know what it is to be tired. I suppose that comes from never riding in carriages."

"I would lock-up my stables and dismiss my grooms to-morrow, if I could secure the same immunity," said Sir Aubrey, with a gentle sigh, sinking into the chair which James Carew had placed for him.

He acknowledged the schoolmaster's courtesy with a stately inclination of his head. "This gentleman is your father, I presume," he said to Sylvia inquiringly.

"Yes, Sir Aubrey."

"Charmed to know you, Mr. Carew," murmured the baronet, condescendingly. "I didn't see you in the orchard yesterday."

"No, Sir Aubrey. The children's feast-day is my one day of perfect rest. And as I am not particularly strong, I leave younger and gayer folks to make the little ones merry. My presence would set them gabbling their tables, I fancy, from mere force of habit."

"Very likely," said Sir Aubrey, laughing, with that easy mechanical laugh acquired in polite society. "Very good, Mr. Carew. And is this young lady your youngest daughter?"

"She is my only daughter, Sir Aubrey, my only child."

"Indeed. You must be very fond of her."

James Carew looked at his daughter with a puzzled expression, feeling that he was called upon to say something tender—to let loose some gush of emotion, such as might be expected to flow from the lips of an only child's father.

But those two had not cultivated the language of the affections, and Mr. Carew had no such words at his command.