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VOL. 9.—NO. 14.

SACKVILLE, N. B., THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 1878.

WHOLE NO. 430.

LITERATURE.

THE HAUNTED HOTEL.

Wilkie Collins's New Story.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XII.—PART SECOND.

"Do you think she is mad?"

Agnes asked.

"I think she is simply wicked.

False, superstitious, inveterately

crucel—but not mad. I believe her

main motive in coming here was to

enjoy the luxury of frightening you."

"She has frightened me. I am

ashamed to own it—but so it is."

Henry looked at her, hesitated for

a moment, and seated himself on the

sofa by her side.

"I am very anxious about you,

Agnes," he said. "But for the

fortunate chance which led me to call

here to-day—who knows what that

vile woman might have said or done,

if she had found you alone? My

dear, you are leading a sadly unpro-

TECTED, solitary life. I don't like to

think of it; I want to see it changed

—especially after what has happened

to-day. No! no! it is useless to tell

me that you have your old nurse.

She is too old; she is not in your

rank of life—there is no sufficient

protection in the companionship of

such a person for a lady in your

position. Don't mistake me, Agnes;

what I say, I say in the sincerity of

my devotion to you." He paused

and took her hand. She made a

feeble effort to withdraw it—and

yielded. "Will the day never come,"

he pleaded, "when the privilege of

protecting you may be mine? When

you will be the pride and joy of my

life, as long as my life lasts?" He

pressed her hand gently. She made

no reply. The color came and went

on her face, her eyes were turned

away from him. "Have I been so

unhappy as to offend you?" he

asked.

She answered that she said,

almost in a whisper, "No."

"Have I distressed you?"

"You have made me think of the

sad days that are gone." She said

no more; she only withdrew her

hand from his for the second

time. He still held it; he lifted it to

his lips.

"Can I never make you think of

other days than those—of the happier

days to come? Or, if you must

think of the time that is past, can

you not look back to the time when

I first loved you?"

She sighed as he put the question.

"Spare me, Henry," she answered

sadly. "Say no more!"

The color rose again in her cheeks;

her hand trembled in his. She

looked lovingly, with her eyes cast

down and her bosom heaving gently.

At that moment he would have given

everything he had in the world to

take her in his arms and kiss her.

Some mysterious sympathy, passing

from his hand to hers, seemed to tell

her what was in his mind. She

snatched her hand away and sud-

denly looked up at him. The tears were

in her eyes. She said nothing; she

let her eyes speak for her; they

warned him—without anger, with-

out unkindness—but still they

warned him to press her no further

that day.

"Only tell me that I am forgiven,"

he said, as he rose from the sofa.

"Yes," she answered quietly,

"you are forgiven."

"I have not lowered myself in

your estimation, Agnes?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you wish me to leave you?"

She rose in her turn from the sofa

and walked to the writing-table be-

fore her. The unfinished

letter which she had been writing

when Lady Montbarry opened her

book, lay open upon the blotting

paper. As she looked at the letter,

and then looked at Henry, that

smile that charmed everybody

showed itself in her face.

"You must not go just yet," she

said; "I have something to tell you.

I hardly know how to express it.

The shortest way perhaps will be to

let you find it out for yourself. You

have been speaking of my lonely, un-

protected life here. It is not a very

happy life, Henry—I own that."

She paused, observing the growing

anxiety of his expression as he looked

at her, with a shy satisfaction that

perplexed him. "Do you know that

I have anticipated your idea?" she

went on. "I am going to make a

great change in my life—if my

brother Stephen and his wife will

only consent to it." She opened her

desk of the writing-table while she

spoke, took a letter out and handed

it to Henry.

He received it from her mechanically.

Vague doubts, which he hardly

understood himself, kept him silent.

It was impossible that a change in

her life of which she had spoken

could mean that she was about to

be married—yet he was conscious

of opening the letter. Their eyes

met; she smiled again. "Look at

the address," she said. "But I dare

say you don't."

He looked at the address. It was

in the large and irregular, un-

certain writing of a child. He

opened the letter instantly.

"Dear Aunt Agnes: Our govern-

ment is going away. She has had

money lent to her and a house of her

own. We have had cake and wine

to drink her health. You promised

to be our governess if we wanted

another. We want you. Mamma

knows nothing about this. Please

come before mamma can get another

governess. Your loving Lucy who

writes this. Clara and Blanche

have tried to write too. But they

are too young to do it. They blot

the paper."

"Your eldest niece," Agnes ex-

plained, as Henry looked at her in

amazement. "The children used to

call me aunt when I was staying with

their mother in Ireland, in the

autumn. The three girls were my

inseparable companions—they are

the most charming children I know.

It is quite true that I offered to be

their governess, if they ever wanted

one, on the day when I left them to

return to London. I was writing to

propose it to their mother just be-

fore you came."

"Not seriously!" Henry exclaimed.

Agnes placed her unfinished letter

in his hand. Enough of it had been

written to show that she did seriously

propose to enter the household of

man for the place, and as to my ad-

vice, I must have been completely

forgotten it, indeed, if I am not fit to

teach three children the eldest of

whom is only eleven years old. You

say I am their equal. Are there no

other women who serve as gover-

nesses and who are the equals of the

persons whom they serve? Besides,

I don't know that I am their equal.

Have I not heard that your brother

Stephen was the next heir to the

title? Will he not be the new lord?

Never mind answering me! We

won't dispute whether I am right or

wrong in turning governess; we will

wait the event. I am weary of my

lonely, useless existence here and

eager to make my life more happy

and more useful in the household of

all others in which I should most like

to have a place. If you will look

at the time that I have spent in the

household of your mother, and take

personal considerations still to urge

before I finish my letter. You do not

know your brother and his wife as

well as I do if you doubt their an-

swer. I believe they have courage

enough and heart enough to say "Yes."

Henry submitted without being

convinced.

He was a man who disliked all

eccentric departures from custom and

routine, and he felt especially sus-

picious of the change proposed in

the life of Agnes. With new inter-

ests to occupy her, she might be

less favorably disposed to listen

to him on the next occasion when he

urged his suit. The influence of the

"lonely, useless existence" of which

she complained was distinctly an in-

fluence in his favor. While her

heart was empty her heart was ac-

ceptive. But with kindness to listen

to him on the next occasion when he

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