

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

BY REV. E. F. ROSE, AUTHOR OF "FROM JEST TO EARNEST."

## CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

He went off among the cottages looking for employment, but found little encouragement. The people were, as a general thing, in humble circumstances, and did their work among themselves. But at last he found, near the ravine, a small dwelling standing quite apart from any others, before which a load of wood had been thrown. The poor woman whose gateway it obstructed was anxious to have it sawed up and carried to her little wood-shed, but was disposed to haggle about the price.

"Give me what you please," said Haldane, throwing off his coat; "I take the job;" and in few moments the youth, who had meditated indefinite "heights of gloomy grandeur," appeared—save to the initiated—as if he had been born a wood-sawyer.

He was driving his saw in the usual strong, dogged manner in which he performed such tasks, when a light step caused him to look up suddenly, and he found himself almost face to face with Laura Romeyn. He started violently; the blood first receded from his face, and then rushed tumultuously back. She, too, seemed much surprised and startled, and stopped hesitatingly, as if she did not know what to do. But Haldane had no doubt as to his course. He felt that he had no right to speak to her, and that she might regard it as an insult if he did; therefore he bent down to his work again with a certain proud humility, which Laura, even in her perturbation, did not fail to notice.

In her diffidence and confusion she continued past him a few steps, and although he expected nothing less, the fact that she did not recognize or speak to him cut to his heart with a deeper pain than he had yet suffered. With a gesture similar to that which he made when she saw him on the way to prison, he dashed his hat down over his eyes, and drove his saw through the wood with savage energy.

She looked at him doubtfully for a moment, then, yielding to her impulse, came to his side. His first intimation of her presence was the scarcely heard tones of her voice mingling with the harsh rasping of the saw:

"Will you not speak to me, Mr. Haldane?" she asked.

He dropped his saw, stood erect, trembled slightly, but did not answer or even raise his eyes to her face. His pain was so great he was not sure of his self-control.

"Perhaps," she added, timidly, "you do not wish me to speak to you?"

"I now have no right to speak to you, Miss Romeyn," he answered, in a tone which his suppressed feelings rendered constrained and almost harsh.

"But I feel sorry for you," said she quickly, "and so does my aunt, and she greatly—"

"I have not asked for your pity," interrupted Haldane, growing more erect and almost haughty in his bearing, quite oblivious for a moment of his shirt sleeves and buck-saw. What is more, he made Laura forget them also, and his manner embarrassed her greatly. She was naturally gentle and timid, and she deferred so far to his mood that one would have thought that she was seeking to obtain kindness rather than to confer it.

"You misunderstand me," said she; "I do respect you for the brave effort you are making. I respect you for doing this work. You cannot think it strange, though, that I am sorry for all that has happened. But I did not intend to speak of myself at all—of Mrs. Arnot rather, and your mother. They do not know where to find you, and wish to see and hear from you very much. Mrs. Arnot has letters to you from your mother."

"The time shall come—it may not be so very far distant, Miss Romeyn—when it will be no condescension on your part to speak to me," said Haldane, loftily, ignoring all that related to Mrs. Arnot and his mother, even if he heard it.

"I do not feel it to be a condescension now," replied Laura, with almost the frank simplicity of a child; "I cannot help feeling sympathy for you even though you are too proud to receive it." Then she added, with a trace of dignity and maidenly pride, "Perhaps when you have realized your hopes, and have become rich or famous, I may not choose to speak to you. But it is not my nature to turn from anyone in misfortune, much less anyone whom I have known well."

He looked at her steadily for a moment, and his lip quivered slightly with his softening feeling.

"You do not scorn me, then, like the rest of the world?" said he in a low tone.

Tears stood in the young girl's eyes as she answered, "Mr. Haldane, I do feel deeply for you; I know you have done very wrong, but that only makes you suffer more."

"How can you overlook the wrong of my action? Others think I am not fit to be spoken to," he asked in a still lower tone.

"I do not overlook the wrong," said she gravely; "it seems strange and terrible to me; and yet I do feel sorry for you, from the depths of my heart, and I wish I could help you."

"You have helped me," said he, impetuously; "you have spoken the first truly kind word that has blessed me since I bade mother good-bye. I was beginning to hate the hard-hearted animals known as men and women. They trample me down like a herd of buffaloes."

"Won't you go with me and see Mrs. Arnot? She has letters for you, and she greatly wishes to see you."

He shook his head.

"Why not?"

"I have the same as made a vow that I will never approach anyone to whom I held my old relations until I regain at least as good a name and position as I lost. I little thought we should meet so soon again, if ever, and still less that you would speak to me as you have done."

"I had been taking some delicacies from auntie to a poor

sick woman, and was just returning," said Laura, blushing slightly; "I think your vow is very wrong. Your pride brings grief to your mother, and pain to your good friend, Mrs. Arnot."

"I cannot help it," said he, in a manner that was gloomy and almost sullen; "I got myself into this slough, and I intend to get myself out of it. I shall not take alms from anyone."

"A mother cannot give her son alms," said Laura simply.

"The first words my mother said to me when my heart was breaking were, 'You have disgraced me.' When I have accomplished that which will honour her, I will return."

"I know from what auntie said that your mother did not mean any unkindness, and you surely know that you have a friend in Mrs. Arnot."

"Mrs. Arnot has been a true friend, and no small part of my punishment is the thought of how I have requited her kindness. I reverence and honour her more than any other woman, and I did not know that you were so much like her. You both seem different from all the rest of the world. But I shall take no advantage of her kindness or yours."

"Mr. Haldane," said Laura gravely, but with rising colour, "I am not a woman. In years and feelings I am scarcely more than a child. It may not be proper or conventional for me to stop and talk so long to you, but I have acted from the natural impulse of a young girl brought up in a secluded country home. I shall return thither to-morrow, and I am glad I have seen you once more, for I wished you to know that I did feel sorry for you, and that I hoped you might succeed. I greatly wish you would see Mrs. Arnot, or let me tell her where she can see you, and send to you what she wishes. She has heard of you once or twice, but does not know where to find you. Will you not let me tell her?"

He shook his head decidedly.

"Well then, good-bye," said she kindly, and was about to depart.

"Wait," he said hastily; "will you do me one small favour?"

"Yes, if I ought."

"This is my father's watch and chain," he continued, taking them off. "They are not safe with me in my present life. I do not wish to have it in my power to take them to a pawnshop. I would rather starve first, and yet I would rather not be tempted. I can't explain. You cannot and should not know anything about the world in which I am living. Please give these to Mrs. Arnot, and ask her to keep them till I come for them; or she can send them, with the rest of my effects, to my mother. I have detained you too long already. Whatever may be my fate, I shall always remember you with the deepest gratitude and respect."

There was distress in Laura's face as he spoke, but she took the watch and chain without a word, for she saw that he was fully resolved upon his course.

"I know that Mrs. Arnot will respect my wish to remain in obscurity until I can come with a character differing from that which I now bear. Your life would be a very happy one, Miss Romeyn, if my wishes could make it so;" and the wood-sawyer bowed his farewell with the grace and dignity of a gentleman, in spite of his coarse labourer's garb. He then resumed his work, to the great relief of the woman, who had caught glimpses of the interview from her window, wondering and surmising why the "young taddy from the big house," should have so much to say to a wood-sawyer.

"If she had a-given him a tract upon leavin' it would a-seemed more natural like," she explained to a crony the latter part of the day.

Mrs. Arnot did respect Haldane's desire to be left to himself until he came in the manner that his pride dictated, but, after hearing Laura's story she cast many a wistful glance toward the one who, in spite of his grave faults and weaknesses, deeply interested her; and she sighed,

"He must learn by hard experience."

"Did I do wrong in speaking to him, auntie?" Laura asked.

"I do not think so. Your motive was natural and kindly; and yet I would not like you to meet him again until he is wholly different in character, if that time ever comes."

## CHAPTER XXI.—MAGNANIMOUS MR. SHRUMPF.

After the excitement caused by his unexpected interview with Laura subsided, and Haldane was able to think it over quietly, it seemed to him that he had burned his ships behind him. He must now make good his proud words, for to go "crawling back" after what he had said to-day, and, of all persons, to the one whose opinion he most valued—this would be a humiliation even the thought of which he could not endure.

Having finished his task, he scarcely glanced at the pitance which the woman reluctantly gave him, and went straight to the city post-office. He was so agitated with conflicting hopes and fears that his voice trembled as he asked if there were any letters addressed to E. H., and he was so deeply disappointed that he was scarcely willing to take the careless negative given. He even went to the express office in the vague hope that the way editors had remitted through them; and the leaden weight of despondency grew heavier at each brisk statement.

"Nothing for E. H."

He was so weary and low-spirited when he reached his dismal lodgings that he felt no disposition to either eat or drink, but sat down in the back part of the wretched, musty saloon, and, drawing his hat over his eyes, he gave himself up to bitter thoughts. With mental imprecations he cursed himself that he had not better understood the young girl who once had been his companion. Never before had she seemed so beautiful as to-day, and she had revealed a forming character as lovely as her person. She was like Mrs. Arnot—the woman who seemed to him per-

fect—and what more could he say in her praise? And yet his folly had placed between them an impassable gulf. He was not misled by her kindness, for he remembered her words, and now believed them, "If I ever love a man he will be one that I can look up to and respect." If he could have only recognized her noble tendencies he might have resolutely set about becoming such a man. If his character had been pleasing to her, his social position would have given him the right to have aspired to her hand. Why had he not had sufficient sense to have realized that she was young—much too young to understand his rash, hasty passion? Why could he not have learned from her pure delicate face that she might possibly be won by patient and manly devotion, but would be forever repelled from the man who wooed her like a Turk?

In the light of experience he saw his mistakes. From his present depth he looked up, and saw the inestimable vantage ground which he once possessed. In his deep despondency he feared he never would regain it, and that his hopes of literary success would prove delusive.

Regret, like a cold, fitful November wind, swept through all his thoughts and memories, and there seemed nothing before him but a chill winter of blight and failure that would have no spring.

But he was not left to indulge his miserable mood very long, for his mousing landlord—having finally learned who Haldane was, and all the unfavourable facts and comments with which the press had abounded—now concluded that he could pounce upon him in such a way that something would be left in his claws before the victim could escape.

That very morning Haldane had paid for his board to date, but had thoughtlessly neglected to have a witness or take a receipt. The grizzled grimalkin who kept the den, and thrived as much by his small filchings as from his small profits, had purred to himself, "Very good, very good," on learning that Haldane's word would not be worth much with the public or in court; and no yellow-eyed cat ever waited and watched for his prey with a quieter and cooler deliberation than did Weitzel Shrumpf, the host of the dingy little hotel.

After Haldane appeared, he delayed until a few cronies whom he could depend upon had dropped in, and then, in an off-hand way, stepped up to the despondent youth, and said—

"I say, mister, you have been here zwei week; I want you bay me now."

"What do you mean?" asked Haldane, looking up with an uncomprehending stare.

"Dis is vot I means; you bats me oft long 'nuff. I wants zwei weeks' bort."

"I paid you for everything up to this morning, and I have had nothing since."

"O, you have baid me—strange I did not know! Will you lays now ven I does know?"

"I tell you I have paid you!" said Haldane, starting up.

"Veil, veil, shew me der receipt, and I says not von vort against him."

"You did not give me a receipt."

"No, I tinks not—not my vay to give him till I gits de moneys."

"You are an unmitigated scoundrel. I won't pay you another cent."

"Lock dat door, Carl," said the landlord, coolly, to one of his satellites. "Now, Mr. Haldane, you bays, or you goes to gao! You has been dare vonce, an' I'll but you dare dis night if you no bays me."

"Gentlemen, I appeal to you to prevent this downright villany," cried Haldane.

"I sees no villany," said one of the lookers-on, stolidly.

"You shews your receipt and he no touch you."

"I neglected to take a receipt. I did not know I was dealing with a thief."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the landlord; "he tinks I vas honest like himself, who vas jus' out of gao!"

"I won't pay you twice," said Haldane, doggedly.

"Carl, call de policeman den."

Wait a moment; your rascality will do you no good, and may get you into trouble. I have very little money left."

"Den you can leave your vatch till you brings de money."

"Ah, thank Heaven! that is safe, and beyond your clutches."

"In a pawn shop? or vas he stolen, like de thousand dollar, and you been made give him up?"

Haldane had now recovered himself sufficiently to realize that he was in an ugly predicament. He was not sufficiently familiar with the law to know how much power his persecutor had, but feared, with good reason, that some kind of a charge could be trumped up which would lead to his being locked up for the night. Then would follow inevitably another series of paragraphs in the papers, deepening the dark hues in which they had already portrayed his character. He could not endure the thought that the last knowledge of him that Laura carried away with her from Hillaton should be that he was again in jail, charged with trying to steal his board and lodging from a poor and ignorant foreigner; for he foresaw that the astute Shrumpf, his German landlord, would appear in the police court in the character of an injured innocent. He pictured the disgust upon her face as she saw his name in the vile connection which this new arraignment would occasion, and he felt that he must escape it if possible. Although enraged at Shrumpf's false charge, he was cool enough to remember that he had nothing to oppose to it, save his own unsupported word; and what was that worth in Hillaton? The public would even be inclined to believe the opposite of what he affirmed. Therefore, by a great effort, he regained his self-control, and said, firmly and quietly,—

"Shrumpf, although you know I have paid you, I am yet in a certain sense within your power, since I did not take your receipt. I have not much money left, but after I have taken out fifty cents for my supper and bed, you can take all the rest. My watch is in the hands of a friend and you