

"Take him off," she said—"He is not dead. I demand justice."

Carmen was right. Though Oliver bled profusely, his wounds were not mortal, and Carmen ordered his removal to the *Breton Arms*.

(To be continued.)

"VANITAS VANITATUM?"

BY JOHN FRASER.

And is it true what this man writes,
That all is vanity and sin!
No hope there is—no higher life,
And men but end where they begin?

We ape the Gods, and prate about
Our pretty loves, our little jars;
And vainly talk of our estate,
Beneath the grandly pitying stars.

My heart was sad—I closed the book,
And pondered o'er the ways of men;
And wonder'd if these words were true,
Or but a trade trick of the pen.

There's Brown talks ill behind my back,
And Jones' bill falls due to-day;
Some fifty pounds—a trifle—but
Not fifty pence wherewith to pay.

My last book, too, was badly used,
And—(this is strictly *entre nous*)—
'Twas rather mean if Sling did write
That leader in the Hub Review.

And thus I grumbled, while above
Stretched the illimitable blue,
Spanned by an arch of hope, and God's
Own glorious sunshine breaking through.

And happy voices from the woods
Burden'd with joy the Summer breeze,
And all along the beach there rose
Low murmurs of world-kissing seas.

And visions of a bright fireside
And of a pleasant winning face,
And laughing children playing round
A cottage in a shady place.

O heart of man! if thou art fair,
And all is beautiful within,
To pierce the outer veil of things,
The outer crust of death and sin.

This world will be the same fair world,
As when, in all the prime of youth,
Fresh from the mint of God it came,
An offering to man and truth.

BOB'S REFORMATION.

I.

The Carrs—father, son, and daughter—lived in Wonderland-place, Baywater. Major Carr was on half-pay—a stern-looking, handsome man, with a grizzly moustache, and a bald place on the top of his head—a man who prided himself on being absolute ruler in his own house, and especially over his children.

May Carr was a pretty little blue-eyed girl, with a great relish for fun, and the most decided but innocent young flirt you could come across in a day's gallop, much less in a day's march.

Robert Carr, the son, (his sister always called him Bob), had been a "handful" to the major. He was handsome, careless, generous, and good-hearted; but up to the present time had distinguished himself chiefly by getting into debt, and by steadily sticking to nothing. He had been brought up for the civil service, but had failed to pass. He thought he should like the law, and read steadily for a couple of months in chambers, then flirted with his landlady's daughter, sold his books, and announced his intention of going abroad. He went, and returned in a year, with his luggage consisting of his tooth-brush. Then there was a desperate quarrel with his father, which resulted in his enlisting (he was only twenty then). He was bought off, of course, promised reformation, and thought he would try authorship; had one article accepted, got into debt on the speculation of making a fortune, had three articles "declined with thanks," and gave up authorship in disgust. Then the Major, in despair, got him into a merchant's office; he had eighty pounds a year there; stayed three months, during which period he had wild dreams of being made junior partner or Lord Mayor of London, and gave his orders to the Baywater tradespeople accordingly; then blotted the ledgers, declared figures were only invented to fill up almanacs, and accepted his dismissal with a philosophical air which excited the admiration of all who beheld it. This was Bob's last exploit. He had only arrived at the mature age of twenty-two in spite of his varied pursuits. He was anxious just now about his debts, concern-

ing the majority of which his father was in blissful ignorance; and he had made up his mind that, come what might, he would turn over a new leaf for the future.

"It was an awful bore, Christmas being pay-time," he said to May, as they put up the holly round the dining-room on Christmas Eve; "it so spoils the season to know that every dun a fellow has will soon be clamoring for his money."

"But, Bob dear," May said meekly, "you should not have dunn."

"I never thought that Clark & Co. would turn me up. I wish I could make a clean breast of it to the governor and get a fresh start. I really mean it, May. I'm going in for reformation."

"Yes, but, Bob, it is a pity you asked Grace Kenneth to have you till you had something to keep her on. I cannot think how you could be so foolish."

"We are not going to get married yet," he answered. "You see she has no sisters, and her mother has never been a companion for her; and I've been in and out so much that we've got to tell each other our troubles, and I told her about the bills, and how I feared there'd be a storm, and thought I'd better go abroad again; and then she began to cry, and it's awkward when a girl cries, unless you can tell her plainly not to be a little donkey, so I consoled her as well as I could, and told her I was very fond of her, and that cheered her up; and then somehow we agreed that we'd get married some day, and that I should reform and pay off everybody first, and that we would not tell anybody about it till then. I'm going to be a model in future" (he laughed at May's shake of the head), and she's a jolly little girl, and says she'll wait forever if I like. I say where's the mistletoe?"

"Oh, Bob!" said May, "I send it all downstairs for Aunt Mary looked so horrified last year, and said she was above it."

"Well, it wouldn't be the slightest use her being beneath it. Here, Jane," he called out, "bring up the mistletoe. There, that's right. Now, May, I'll drag you under it and kiss you, and you shall scream and run away."

"Oh, no, please don't!" she said, imploringly; "you'll rumple all my hair, and I couldn't scream naturally for my own brother."

"Anything going to happen, that you are so particular? I know! Kenneth is coming! We shall have a double event then, and wind up the matrimonial affairs for the whole family, eh, May?"

George Kenneth was a young doctor, whose only fault was that he had no patients. He was Bob's great friend, and had a year before been introduced in that capacity at Wonderland-place. He and May were just in that uncertain stage when neither is sure of the other, and yet each is eager for the crisis they fear. George was the only member of the Kenneth family May knew, for the Carrs were people who never visited or entertained as a rule.

"I believe you are spoony on George, Miss May."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Bob! I am sure I am not," she answered, celebrating that Christmas-tide with a very fine fib; "and as for Mr. Kenneth, I don't believe he cares a bit about me."

"I think he does," said Bob, thoughtfully. "Look here, shall I try and find out?" he added, a bright thought striking him.

"Yes, do," she answered eagerly, "I should like to know; not that I care."

"No, evidently you don't, that's why you are looking so stupid; girls always blush for the wrong man, don't they?"

"Reformation is very hard work," Bob Carr informed his sister a week later. "I have answered every advertisement, and walked into every merchant's office in London during the last week. I'm half a mind to go abroad again. George Kenneth is half a mind to get too; he'd lend me the passage money at a push. If it wasn't for the debts I'd go. George is spoony or he'd go to-morrow."

"Who is it?" asked May, quickly.

"I'll tell you presently; I want you to come up-stairs to my room. I've got in every bill I owe, and have arranged them in an artistic manner round the shelf. Come up and see them;" and they solemnly trudged up and looked at the interesting documents. "There they are," he said; "I stuck them up so that you might take them in at a glance—sum total, ninety-five pounds; balance in hand, nothing at all."

"Oh, Robert! you should not joke about it; and what can all these bills for provisions be for?"

"Oh, they are nothing," he answered carelessly; "some poor people I picked up, and managed to be of a little use to. Those bills prick my conscience least; they were incurred for a righteous end."

"Ah, Bob," answered May, "we may not do evil that good may come; that always seems to me one of the hardest temptations to resist. What is this in this tiny envelope—another bill?"

"No; that is only a note from Grace; I put it there as an antidote to the other things. Now come out and I'll turn the key, which means that no one is to enter." Then they went down-stairs, and Bob's face became grave and earnest. "I can't tell you how the debts worry me, May dear," he said; "for, in the light in which I see things now, I think that getting into debt without a certainty of being able to pay is only one way of being downright dishonest. I will work steadily in future, if I can get nothing but a crossing to sweep, and I'll pay every one up in time, if it takes till I'm ninety to do it."

"If I were you," said May, "I would tell papa. He might help you."

"Do you think you could feel the way and see how he takes it, May. It would be a grand thing if he would give me one more chance."

"I'll try; I think he might be coaxed over. And now, Bob dear," she went on softly, "tell me who George Kenneth is spoony on."

"You shouldn't use slang; it isn't lady-like," he answered solemnly and grandly, with a mischievous twinkle in his laughing eyes. "Why should I betray George's confidence and tell you about the girl? It is not as if you had cared about him; your feelings might then be an excuse."

"Oh, then, it isn't—"

"Ma," she was nearly saying, while her heart sank, for though George had not told her that he loved her, she had felt almost certain that he did, and had lost her own heart to the upright, manly young fellow who was her brother's friend, and who, on one excuse or another, had continued for nearly a year to run in and out of the house in Wonderland-place two or three times a week. She could scarcely believe her ears when Bob told her he was thinking of some one else. Besides, a proud woman always feels insulted as well as slighted when she hears that a man who has paid great attention to herself cares for another. So she indignantly checked her tears, and questioned Bob a little further. "Tell me who it is, Bob," she said.

"Well," he answered gravely, "it's evident that you are wildly jealous, and so I'm not sure that it would be safe. You might think it necessary to the upholding of your dignity to do her some bodily harm."

"Oh, how can you talk such nonsense?" she said hotly and indignantly. "Mr. Kenneth is nothing to me."

"Then we won't say any more about it."

"Yes, do Bob. Is she pretty?"

"Middling," he answered, making a wry face and taking care not to smile. "He thinks so; no doubt you will say she is frightful."

"Have you seen her?"

"Oh yes," he said, solemnly sighing, "I've seen her."

"Tell me her name. And does he care very much for her?" she asked almost pleadingly.

"Yes, I think he's very fond of her. As for her name, I am not sure that it would be safe under the circumstances to trust you with it, for her sake."

With a gesture of impatience May turned away, almost ready to cry. Girls of eighteen can cry as heartily over their sweethearts when no one sees them as girls of eight can over their biggest dolls.

"May," said her brother, suddenly changing his tone, "there's father coming in at the gate. Could you not tell him about the bills now, and see what can be done? Tell him that I won't disgrace him this time, whatever I have done formerly. I'll go out for half an hour, while you try what you can do. Mind, you must not say anything about Grace. Do your best, May, there's a little darling, and then perhaps I'll tell you the name of George Kenneth's sweetheart, provided you promise not to tear her eyes out. But look here, May, joking aside, I am very anxious about these bills, and if my father would only take me in hand again he should never repeat it."

May had no easy task. Major Carr had learnt to consider his son as a blank disappointment, and was getting hopeless of any reformation; not that they were bad friends; on the contrary, Bob, in spite of his faults, had one of those happy dispositions and pleasant tempers that, unless you were absolutely not on speaking terms, or, as he once expressed it, "at fighting pitch," you could not live in the same house with him and not be good friends. Still May had a difficult task; but she did her best, promising amendment and carefulness in the future, and begging her father to try and help him just once more, for the last time; not to pay his debts, he did not ask that, but to help him to quiet his creditors till he could do so himself, and to use any influence he had to put him once more in a position to redeem his character and his credit.

"But," said the Major, and there was a great deal of justice in his wrath, "I did not expect to hear of another set of bills."

Still, though it seemed hopeless, May went on and told him how some of the debts had been for provision to give away to poor people, so Bob must be good-hearted.

"No," answered her father, sternly. "What did that cost him? Nothing. He was generous at the expense of the tradespeople who trusted him. Real charity is that which involves some self-denial, incurred for the pleasure of doing others good."

Yet he softened in the end, and almost laughed at May's account of how Bob had stuck up the bills round his bedroom mantelshelf; and at last, stroking May's fair head, and thinking inwardly that just for her sake he would not be very harsh to Bob, he went up-stairs to his study, just as George Kenneth knocked at the street-door, and entering she drawing-room found May Carr alone.

If George Kenneth had expected a welcome that evening he was disappointed, for May remembering what Bob had said, was merely polite and dignified, and freezingly courteous. She had never supposed George Kenneth wished to marry her, nor had she had any idea of his asking her; matrimony was a question she had not troubled her head about; still, if he had not cared for her and still more if he cared for some one else, there were a hundred little words and deeds in the past which she felt would have been better unspoken

and undone, and which remembering now made her burn with shame and anger. She determined, however, that he should not flatter himself he had made any impression on her, and at the worst should but conclude she had like himself been only flirting. Still she could not help saying how disconcerted he looked when, half an hour later, he rose to go, and yet lingered as if to say some farewell words.

"I wanted to tell you something, Miss Carr," he said; "I came on purpose, and yet somehow this seems hardly the time to say it."

May's heart began to beat quickly, but she stood her ground. "You had better put it off till some other time," she said stiffly, "for I hear papa calling, and must say good-by."

She held out her hand, which he took and kept a moment. "Let me tell you now, May, for I fear Bob may do so else, and I want you to hear it from me—something which concerns my happiness very much."

She drew back her hand indignantly. It was insulting, she thought, to make her a *confidante*. "I have not time now, Mr. Kenneth, papa is calling me. Bob has already told me what you allude to, and while wishing you every happiness, you must pardon my adding I have nothing more to say on a subject which cannot concern me. Good-by;" and she escaped, thankful that she had made her speech so well, and that she had not met his eyes, or she felt that she must have broken down.

Twenty-four hours later May was sitting alone in the dining-room. Major Carr was in his study, Bob was out, and she was waiting for his return. She was very miserable that evening, for she had innocently brought down a terrible storm on Bob's head. While she had been giving George Kenneth his dismissal, her father had walked up-stairs, with his heart softening in favor of his son, and remembering May's account of how he had stuck up his bills for her edification, on a moment's impulse had entered his son's room—a thing he never did in a usual way. There were the bills still, and his wrath returned as he beheld them. He took them down, and was walking off with them, when suddenly he caught sight of Grace's little note, which Bob had forgotten to return to his pocket. He opened it, and read the sort of love-letter a girl of eighteen generally writes, assuring her own dear Bob that she would always be true to him, and wait as long as he liked, and hoped he would soon get something to do, and get out of debt, though she did not mind how poor they might be in the future, for, happy in his love, she would be quite content. Then the storm burst forth. He asked May if she knew anything about it, and May could not deny the knowledge, so shared in his displeasure. Bob came in, and stuck to his colors manfully. He very much regretted his past conduct, and he would try with all his might to redeem his past character, but he would not give up Grace Kenneth. If his father would forego his anger he would not ask for any help, and would fight his own way in the world, but to absolute control he would not submit. This only inflamed Major Carr the more, and refusing to speak to either of his children, all the next day he kept to his study, while Bob and May tried to make plans for the future. He should go round to his creditors he (Bob) said and tell them the truth, and ask them to wait, and then, if he failed to get anything in London, he should go abroad, George Kenneth had a couple of hundred, and had told him (Bob) he would lend him the passage money, and perhaps go with him for a year.

Bob went out in the evening, and May was left alone, and passed a dreary hour thinking over the past week, and was wondering whether it would be of any use to try and effect an entrance into her father's study, when suddenly Bob returned, flushed and excited.

"May!" he exclaimed, "look here; do you call that proper conduct in my father? He sent this letter to Mrs. Kenneth." And he dropped the unpaid bills, which the Major had not returned to Bob the day before, into her lap, and a note which he had sent with them to Mrs. Kenneth. It was as follows:

MADAM: I understand your daughter and my son intend to get married. With regard to my son, I beg to say that I shall do nothing for him; that he has never earned a fifty pound note in his life, and is never likely to do so; and what his prospects in general are, you can perhaps gather from the enclosed bills, which he has not the slightest chance of paying. Whether, therefore, the match is a desirable one, I leave you to decide. Your obedient servant,

F. CARR.

May's face turned white as she read it, but before she could make any reply Bob (he had a hot temper when once aroused, and it was roused now) snatched the letter from her, and rushed up-stairs to his father's study. Then there came the sound of loud and angry words. "A parcel of beggars marring without even cheese to eat," she heard her father say. She would not hear more, but stopped her ears and waited in fear and trembling for the result. It came soon: she heard Bob descending the stairs, and her father speaking.

"I forbid you to stay in my house any longer; you may go and do the best you can. I never dared to use such words to my father!" and then Bob entered, and hurriedly kissing her, seized his hat, and went out of the street-door, not to return again for many and many a long day.

"DEAR MAY: Send every thing of mine to the