

HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")

CHAPTER XLIII.—"YOU DON'T WANT MONEY!"

Sandy Wilson having again very carefully read Mr. Harman's will, felt much puzzled how to act. He was an honest, upright, practical man himself. The greatness of the crime committed quite startled him. He had no sympathy for the wicked men who had done the deed, and he had the very keenest sympathy for those against whom the deed was done. His little orphan and widowed sister and her baby child were the wronged ones. The men who had wronged her he had never seen. He said to himself that he had no sympathy, no sympathy whatever for Mr. Harman. What if he was a dying man, was that fact to screen him? Was he to be allowed to go down to his grave in peace, his grey head appearing to be to him a crown of glory, honored by the world, cheered for his great success in life? Was all this to be allowed to continue, when he was worthy not of applause but of hisses, of the world's most bitter opprobrium?

And yet Sandy felt that, little or indeed no pity as he had for this most wicked man, even if Charlotte had not come to him and pleaded with eyes, voice, and manner, he could scarcely have exposed Mr. Harman. He could scarcely, after hearing that great doctor's verdict, have gone up to the old man and said that which would hurry him, without an instant's time for repentance, to judgment.

Alexander Wilson believed most fully in a judgment to come. When he thought of it now, a certain sense of relief came over him. He need not trouble so sorely; he might leave this sinner to his God. It is to be feared that he thought more of God's justice than of His loving mercy and forgiveness, as he decided to leave John Harman in His hands.

That evening at six o'clock he was to be again with Charlotte Home. For Charlotte Harman's sake, he had denied himself that pleasure the night before; but this evening the solitary man might enjoy the keen pleasure of being with his very own. Mrs. Home was his nearest living relation—the child of his own loved sister. He did not know yet whether he could love her at all as he had loved his little Daisy; but he felt quite sure that her children would twine themselves round his heart; for already the remembrance of Daisy Home was causing it to beat high with pleasure.

As the hour approached for his visit, he loaded himself with presents not only for the children, but for the whole family. He said to himself with much delight, that however much Mr. Harman's will might be tied up for the present, yet Sandy Wilson's purse was open. He had far less idea than Charlotte Harman what children really liked, but he loaded himself with toys, cakes and sweets; and for his special pet Daisy over and above the other two he bought the very largest doll that a Regent Street shop could furnish him with. This doll was as heavy as a baby, and by no means so beautiful to look at as its smaller companions. But Sandy was no judge in such matters.

With his presents for the adults of the party he was more fortunate. For his niece he purchased a black silk, which in softness, lustre, and quality could not be surpassed; for Anne, a bright blue merino dress.

These goods were packed into a four-wheeler, and, punctually at six o'clock, that well-laden cab drew up at P's Tremains Road. Three eager pairs of eyes watched the unpacking, for the three pretty children, dressed in their best, were in the dining-room; Mr. Home was also present and Charlotte had laid her tea-table with several unwonted dainties in honor of her uncle's visit. Anne, the little maid, was fluttering about; that well-laden cab had raised her spirits and her hopes. She flew in an out, helping the cobby to bring the numerous parcels in to the hall.

"Ah! Annie, my girl, here's something for you," said Uncle Sandy, tossing her dress to her. After which, it is to be feared, Anne went quite off her head for a little bit.

The children, headed by their mother, came into the little hall to meet and welcome their uncle. He entered the dining-room with Daisy riding on his shoulder. Then before tea could even be thought of,

the presents must be discussed. The cakes, the sweets, the toys were opened out; the children scampered about, laughed, shouted, and kissed the old Australian. Never in all his life had Uncle Sandy felt so happy.

Over an hour passed in this way, then the mother's firm voice was heard. The little heads were raised obediently. Good-night kisses were given, and Harold, Daisy, and little Angus were led off to their nursery by the highly flushed and excited Anne.

The tea which followed and the quiet talk were nearly as pleasant, and Uncle Sandy so enjoyed himself, that for a time he completely forgot old Mr. Harman's will, his own half promise, Charlotte Harman's despair.

It was all brought back to him, however, and by the Homes themselves. The tea-things had been removed, the gas was lit, the curtains drawn, and Charlotte Home had insisted on her old uncle seating himself in the one easy-chair which the room possessed. She herself stood on the hearth-rug, and glancing for a moment at her husband she spoke.

"Uncle Sandy, it is so good to have you back again, and Angus and I are so truly glad to welcome my dear mother's brother to our home, that we think it hard to have to touch on anything the least gloomy to-night. Just a word or two will be sufficient, and then we must drop the subject for ever."

Uncle Sandy raised his wrinkled old face.

"Ay," he said. "If there's anything unpleasant, have it out by all means—out and over—that's my own motto."

"We spoke the other night," continued Charlotte, "about my dear mother. I told you that she was poor—that she had to do with poverty from the hour of my father's death until the end of her own life. It is all over for her now, she is at rest. If plenty of money could be found for her she would not need it. When I told you the story you expressed a doubt that all was not right; you said it was absolutely impossible that my father could have left my mother nothing; you said that either the will was tampered with or not acted on. Well, Uncle Sandy, I agree with you. I had long felt that something was not right."

"Ay, ay, my girl; I said before, you had a brain in your head and a head on your shoulders. Trust Uncle Sandy not to know a clever woman when he sees her."

"Well, uncle, I can say all the rest in a very few words. You said you could investigate the matter; that you could discover whether any foul play had been committed. I asked you not to do so until I saw you again; I now ask you not to do so at all; to let the whole matter rest always. In this I have my husband's sanction and wish."

"Yes, Lottie has my full approval in this matter," said Mr. Home, coming forward and laying his hand on his wife's shoulder. "We don't want money, we would rather let the matter rest."

"You don't want money!" said Uncle Sandy, gazing hard from the ethereal, worn-looking man, to the woman, tall and thin, in her rusty dress, with every mark of poverty showing in thin cheek, in careworn eyes, in labor-stained hands. "You don't want money!" he repeated. "Niece Charlotte, I retract what I said of you—I thought you were not quite a fool. As to you, Home, I don't pretend to understand you. You don't want money?"

Mr. Home smiled. Charlotte bent down and kissed her old uncle's brow.

"Nevertheless, you will do what we wish, even though you don't understand," she said.

Uncle Sandy took her hand.

"Sit down near me, Niece Charlotte," he said. "And as to you, Home, you have a long story to hear. After you have heard it, it will be time enough to discuss your proposition. The fact is, Charlotte, I disobeyed you in part. You asked me to do nothing in this matter until we met again. I did nothing to compromise you; but, nevertheless, I was not idle, I wanted to set my own mind at rest. There was an easy way of doing this which I knew of, and which I wondered had not occurred to you. Charlotte, I went yesterday to Somerset House; doubtless, you know nothing of what took me there. I can soon enlighten you. In a certain part of that vast pile, all

wills are obliged to be kept. Any one who likes may go there, and, by paying the sum of one shilling, read any will they desire. I did so. I went to Somerset House and I saw your father's will."

"Yes," said Charlotte. Whatever her previous resolution, she no doubt felt keenly excited now. "Yes," she repeated, "you read my father's will."

"I read it. I read it in a hurry yesterday; to-day I saw it again and read it carefully. There is no flaw in it; it is a will that must stand, that cannot be disputed. Charlotte, you were right in your forebodings. Niece Charlotte, you and your mother, before you were basely robbed, cruelly wronged; your dear father was just and upright; your living brothers are villains; your father left, left absolutely to your mother first, and to you at her death, the sum of twelve hundred a year. He left to you both a large enough sum of money to realize that large yearly income. You were robbed of it. Do you know how?"

"No," said Charlotte. She said that one little word almost in a whisper. Her face was deadly pale.

"That money was left in your father's will in trust; it was confided to the care of three men, whose solemn duty it was to realize it for your mother first, afterwards for you and your children. These men were called trustees; two of them, Charlotte, were your half brothers, John and Jasper Harman; the other was your mother's only living brother, Sandy Wilson. These trustees were false to you; two of them by simply ignoring the trust and taking the money to themselves; the other, by pretending to be dead when he ought to have been in England attending to his duty. The Harman's, the other trustees, so fully believed me to be dead that they thought their sin would never be found out. But they reckoned without their host, for Sandy has returned, and the missing trustee can act now. Better late than never—eh, Niece Charlotte?"

"My poor mother!" said Charlotte, "my poor, poor mother!"

She covered her face with her hands. The suddenness and greatness of the crime done had agitated her. She was very much upset. Her husband came again very near and put his hand on her shoulder. His face, too, was troubled.

"It was a terrible sin," he said, "a terrible sin to lie on these men's breasts for three-and-twenty years. God help these sinners to repentance!"

"Yes, God help them," repeated Uncle Sandy, "and also those they have wronged. But now look up, Charlotte, for I have not told you all. A man never sins for himself alone; if he did it would not so greatly matter, for God and the pangs of an evil conscience would make it impossible for him to get off scot free; but—I found it out in the bush, where, I can tell you, I met rough folks enough—the innocent are dragged down with the guilty. Now this is the case here.

In exposing the guilty the innocent must suffer. I don't mean you, my dear, nor my little wronged Daisy. In both your cases the time for suffering, I trust, is quite at an end, but there is another victim." Here Uncle Sandy paused, and Charlotte, having recovered her composure, stood upright on the hearth-rug ready to listen. "When I went to Somerset House yesterday, I had, in order to obtain a sight of Mr. Harman's will, to go through a little ceremony. It is not necessary to go into it. I had to get certain papers, and take orders to certain rooms. All this was the little form imposed on me by the Government for my curiosity. At last I was told to go to a room, called the reading-room, and asked to wait there until the will was brought to me. It was a small room, and I sat down prepared to wait patiently enough. There were about half-a-dozen people in the room besides myself, some reading wills, others waiting until they were brought. One woman sat at the table exactly opposite to me. She was the only woman in the room at the time, and perhaps that fact made me first notice her; but when I looked once, I could not have been old Sandy Wilson without wanting to look again. I have a weakness for fine women, and this woman was fine, in the sense that makes you feel that she is lovable. She was young, eager looking. I have no doubt her features were handsome, but it was her open, almost child-like expression which attracted most. She was essentially a fine creature, and yet there was a peculiar childish innocence about her, that made old Sandy long to protect

her on the spot. I was looking at her, and hoping she would not notice it and think old Sandy Wilson a bore, when a man came into the room and said something to the clerk at the desk. The clerk turned to me and said, 'The will of the name of Harman is being read at this moment by some one else in the room.' Instantly this girl looked up, her eyes met mine, her face grew all one blaze of color, though she was a pale enough lass the moment before, and a frightened expression came into her eyes. She looked down again at once, and went on reading in a hurried puzzled way as if she was scarcely taking in much. Of course I knew she had the will, and I did not want to hurry or confuse her, so I pretended to turn my attention to something else. It must have been quite a couple of minutes before I looked again, and then—I confess that I am not easily startled, but I did have to smother an exclamation—the poor girl must have discovered the baseness and the fraud in these two minutes. Had she been any other but the plucky lass she is, she would have been in a dead faint on the floor, for I never, never in all my pretty vast experience, saw a living face so white. I could not help looking at her then, for I was completely fascinated. She went on reading for half a minute longer, then she raised her eyes and gazed straight and full at me. She had big, open grey eyes, and a moment before, they were full of innocence and trust like a child's now there was a wild anger and despair in them. She was quite quiet, however, and no one else in the room noticed her. She pushed the will across the table, to me and said, 'That is Mr. Harman's will,' then she put on her gloves quite slowly and drew down her veil, and left the room as silently and quietly as you please. I just glanced my eye over the will. I took in the right place and saw the shameful truth. I was horrified enough, but I could not wait to read it all. I gave the will back, intending to go to it another time, for I felt I must follow that girl at any cost. I came up to her in Somerset House square. I did not care what she thought; I must speak to her; I did. Poor lass! I think she was quite stunned, she did not resent the liberty old Sandy had taken. When I asked her to wait and let me talk to her she turned at once—I have not lived in the bush so long without being, I pride myself, sharp enough in reading character. I saw the girl, proud girl enough at ordinary times, was in that state of despair which makes people do desperate things. She was defiant, and told more than I expected. She was Miss Harman—Charlotte Harman, by the way, she said.

Yes; her father had stolen that money; would I like to see him? He lived in such a place; his name was so-and-so. Yes; she was his only child. Her manner was so reckless, so defiant, and yet so full of just absolute misery, that I could do nothing but pity her from my very heart. I forgot you, Niece Lottie, and your rights, and everything but this fine creature struck so low through another's sins. I said, 'Hush, you shall say no more to-day. You are stunned, you are shocked, you must have time to think; I won't remember a thing you say about your father now. Go home and come back again to-morrow,' I said; 'sleep and I will meet you here to-morrow, over it and I will sleep over it, when you are more calm.' She agreed to this and went away. I felt a little compunction for my own softness during that evening and night, Niece Charlotte, I felt that I was not quite true to you; but then you had not seen her face, poor brave young thing, poor young thing!"

Here Uncle Sandy paused and looked hard from his niece to her husband. Charlotte's eyes were full of tears, Mr. Home was smiling at him. There was something peculiar in this man's rare smiles which turned them into blessings. They were far more eloquent than words, for they were fed from some illumination of strong approval within. Uncle Sandy, without understanding, felt a warm glow instantly kindling in his heart.

Charlotte said, "Go on," in a broken voice.

"To-day, at the appointed hour, I met her again," proceeded the Australian. "She was changed, she was composed enough now, she was on her guard, she did not win my sympathy so much as in her despair. She was quite open, however, as to the nature of the crime committed, and told me she knew well what a sin her father had been guilty of. Suddenly she startled me