

Choice Literature.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

BY HERBERT E. CLARKE.

(Concluded.)

The next morning, as he stood after breakfast gazing listlessly out of the window, a strange horseman went by, so well mounted and perfectly dressed as to awaken a certain languid curiosity in him; looking more closely, he recognized, with some surprise, Viscount Newmarket, the eldest son of the Earl of Epsom, whom he had seen once of twice before at cattle shows and county cricket matches. What was he doing in quiet little Elmhurst? Probably no good, for Lord Newmarket was not much given to doing good anywhere. He had the reputation of being a very rapid youth indeed, and he worked very hard to deserve it.

Wilson watched him out of sight, and then forgot him. Later on, his sisters, returning from a walk, related how Lord Newmarket was staying at the "White Hart," and it had stared at them very hard as they went by; and so chanced that Wilson meeting the head groom of the "White Hart" that evening, asked indifferently what brought Lord Newmarket to Elmhurst.

"Ah," said the groom with a knowing leer, "there's only one thing will bring him so far out of his way as this, you may depend on that, sir."

"What's that?" asked Wilson.

"A petticoat," said the man with a coarse laugh, which shook the delicate nerves of his hearer, who made some sage reflections to himself on the duties of the aristocracy, as he pursued his solitary way.

That evening he prolonged his walk beyond the usual limit, so that when he returned it was as dark as it ever is in June. Finding himself late, he took a short cut which led down a narrow lane and past the end of the rectory garden. As he approached this spot he beheld a sight that surprised him much—so much that he left the middle of the lane and crept along by the hedge, concealed in thick shadow, till he was within earshot. Lord Newmarket was sitting upon the rectory garden wall, dangling his legs into the lane in a careless and elegant manner, and he was talking to somebody in the garden just below him.

"But," said he, in a tone of remonstrance, "it was too bad to go off like that. You might have let me know at any rate."

"To give you the chance of stopping me!" exclaimed Miss Reydehl (he was quite sure of her voice, though his heart beat so fast he could scarcely hear). "No thank you. I have known you too long to do anything of that kind."

"I wish you would turn this up and come back with me to-morrow," said the viscount, coaxingly.

"I tell you it is quite impossible," replied the governess. "I must stay till my month is out. I promise you I will not stay longer. I am sick enough of my joke."

"Well, if you won't, you won't, and there's an end of it," remarked his lordship, "and so I may as well be off; but mind, I am awfully dull without you."

Miss Reydehl laughed the sceptical laugh Wilson knew so well; and then Lord Newmarket bent his lithe figure until his boots, shooting this way and that as he balanced himself, were all that was visible of him.

"What can be up to now?" asked Wilson, perplexed, as he watched. The sound of two more or less hearty kisses enlightened him on this point.

"Good-night, my dear," said the viscount cheerily.

"Good-night, goose," replied Miss Reydehl; and then his lordship leaped from his perch and rapidly disappeared in the darkness, whistling "Over the Garden Wall" very much out of tune.

Wilson waited till he heard the governess' steps die away down the garden, and then he too resumed his homeward journey full of exultation. His enemy had been delivered into his hands with a vengeance. It did not surprise him; it was much as he had expected, he told himself. It seemed to him in strict accordance with a wise ordering of things that any one who disapproved of him should turn out to be a disreputable character. It explained everything, much to his satisfaction, and for the first time since that unlucky garden party, Wilson felt his self-esteem whole and unimpaired once more.

Before he slept that night his course of action had been resolved on. It was his bounden duty at once to inform the rector what sort of a person he was harbouring in his house and introducing to respectable society. He took his father into confidence in the morning, and they strolled together to the rectory, Mr. Mainwaring quite agreeing with his son's ideas.

They found the rector in his study, checking his butcher's bills for the past month, and finding, to all appearance, little cause for gratification in his labour.

"But gracious me!" cried he, when Wilson had unfolded his tale. "But gracious me! The girl was highly recommended—most highly recommended—by friends of the Earl and Countess of Epsom, the Churchills, in point of fact. Are you quite certain there was no mistake?"

Wilson was very certain indeed.

"Then something must be done instantly," resumed the rector, with a very troubled face: "I must consult Mrs. Wallis at once. Of course you have spoken to no one else upon the subject before coming here? No—no—I was sure there was no need to ask—but I only wish to point out that in this very serious juncture, it behooves us all to be most careful as to what we do. For example—Lord Newmarket's name now—it might be exceedingly awkward for us all—I mean it would be very painful to the earl and countess—and—and of course we ought to spare them as much as we can; it is only Christian to do so. Perhaps, considering all things, it would be as well for the present to speak only of a stranger, naming no names, you perceive? Ah, yes, I thought you would agree with me. I will go and find Mrs. Wallis if you will excuse me;" and he disappeared.

"Ha," said Mr. Mainwaring with a nod, "a careful man the rector! But he's right enough, the earl could

make it confoundedly awkward for him if he chose. It doesn't seem exactly just, though, that the girl should bear the whole of the brunt, and that young blackguard escape because of his name."

Wilson had no interest in the abstract justice of the case; he felt his enemy was about to be crushed and that was enough for him. He gnawed the top of his walking stick, and made no reply.

After a short absence, the rector returned alone.

"Mrs. Wallis is naturally upset," he remarked, "but she is going to speak to Miss Reydehl at once, and let us know the result. If the girl admits the truth of the charge, there will be no more to be said, but if, as I almost fear she should deny it, or try to explain it away, it might be well for you to be at hand, if you can spare a few minutes."

Wilson would have declined at once, but his father took the matter into his own hands, saying: "Certainly, certainly, that is only right; and they remained talking awkwardly and disjointedly about the weather and harvest prospects.

In about ten minutes Mrs. Wallis appeared, looking flushed and disconcerted. She shook hands abstractedly with her visitors, and then burst out: "I can do nothing with her; she refuses to answer any questions till she knows who is her accuser."

Wilson's face fell, and he began to fumble nervously with his hat and stick.

"Tut, tut!" said the rector. "But what has that to do with it?"

"That is precisely the question I asked," replied his wife, "but, as I said, I can do nothing with her. She seemed neither surprised nor annoyed at the accusation. I think she is guilty, but her behaviour is quite beyond me."

"Let her come in," said Mr. Mainwaring; let her come in, and hear what Wilson has to say."

"Oh no, father! I would much rather not," exclaimed Wilson.

"What do you mean?" asked his parent, sharply. "Are you afraid to face her? If you are speaking the truth, what have you to be ashamed of? Let her come in, Mr. Wallis," he repeated in a stern voice; "we will probe this affair to the bottom at once." And the look he cast upon his son as he spoke was not devoid of something like suspicion.

Mrs. Wallis, amid a solemn silence, rang the bell. "Ask Miss Reydehl to be so good as to come into the study."

Miss Reydehl appeared with great promptitude. Decidedly she was the most unembarrassed person present. Her face wore a curious sort of suppressed smile, which broke into a quickly checked laugh as she saw the miserable Wilson, who was now in a state bordering on collapse. "I thought so," she exclaimed; "I was sure it could be no one else. Mr. Mainwaring, you are a spy as well as a poet, informer as well as spy! What an admirable Crichton you are, to be sure!"

"My spying was involuntary," replied Wilson.

"Indeed!" said Miss Reydehl: "and how quiet you must have been—was that involuntary too?"

"Miss Reydehl," interposed the rector, all this is not to the point. What we wish to know is, if you met a—a gentleman—somebody—a—a stranger to us, late last night at the bottom of the garden?"

"You may remember," remarked Mrs. Wallis, with concentrated venom, "that you accounted to me for your absence by saying you had been out to look for Sir John's sash."

"Oh yes, I quite remember, dear Mrs. Wallis," he turned the astonished young lady very sweetly, "but thank you, all the same for reminding me. You are mistaken, however, I met no stranger; I met Lord Newmarket."

"Dear, dear!" cried the rector in a peevish voice, "what does the name matter?"

"It may not matter to you," retorted Miss Reydehl, "but I consider that it matters a good deal to me."

"It would appear," said the rector, rising, "that we need not prolong this very painful interview. There is no need for any more to be said."

"Oh yes, there is," replied the governess, speaking with all the coolness imaginable, "much need. What has been said so far is of very trifling importance. What is to come will probably deeply interest you all, especially my friend the poet spy."

But at this moment a diversion occurred which created a total change in the aspect of affairs. The rector, glancing out of the window, suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, here comes Lord Newmarket himself!"

"No, no, it can't be!" cried Miss Reydehl. "He promised he would not. Oh, what a nuisance!" and she wrung her hands in uncontrollable vexation, as a loud double knock sounded through the house.

Then seeing she had gone too far she relapsed into a mortified silence, while her companions glared at each other with rising complacency, and Wilson felt himself much better. The change was not lost upon Miss Reydehl, and her brow grew very dark.

"It is just like him, he always makes a muddle of everything," she murmured; but it can't be helped."

The servant announced his lordship with a rather scared face. "Show him into the drawing-room," snapped Mrs. Wallis; but before anything could be done the governess opened the door, and said loudly: "I am here, Jack, come in!"

Consternation reigned as the audacious words were heard. What would this inscrutable and shameless woman do next? His lordship marched into the room, and looked around upon the company with excusable astonishment.

"Thought you were alone, you know," he protested.

But the rector and the rector's wife had seized him by the hands, and were pouring out inquiries about the "dear earl and the dear countess."

"Well, the earl is terribly annoyed about this affair, as well he may be," explained the viscount, when he could get a word in. "He's found out all about it, Honoria," he proceeded, speaking to Miss Reydehl. "That's why I've come now, instead of going away as I promised. Here's his letter, which I received this morning. He says he won't speak to the Churchills again. And I have to apologise

very fully and completely to you, Dr. Wallis, and to your wife for everything that has occurred."

A grim and ghastly silence fell upon the company. Mrs. Wallis' face was as a book wherein might be read the strangest matters. Wilson, while not seeing exactly how things were going, had an idea that on the whole the danger was passed so far as he was concerned. Only Miss Reydehl, with her sphinx-like smile, standing cool and unabashed, daunted him.

"This is a regular 'Comedy of Errors,'" she said, at length. "You have made a nice mess of it, as usual. I ought by rights to step forward now and throw off my disguise, and say, 'Behold your long lost So-and-so.' Perhaps, however, it will be best in the circumstances that you should tell these good people, Jack—tell that good person, especially, who has been carrying tales about us, Jack—tell them all who I am, for they don't happen to have any idea at present."

"What?" asked his lordship in a very high key, "I thought you had been explaining everything before I came."

The silence grew deeper, and with Lord Newmarket's eyes upon him, Wilson heard it boiling in his ears.

"Well, you know," remarked his lordship at last, in a conversational tone, looking around as he spoke, "of course she's my youngest sister, Honoria, you know—Lady Honoria Blachford."

Mrs. Wallis dropped into a chair with a dull thud, and remained exactly as she had dropped. Wilson repeated the name to himself once or twice with a vacant smile. He realized the fact that he would have plenty of time to think the matter out afterward.

The rector, rubbing his hands and smiling a watery smile, suggested in the humblest tones that a little explanation might possibly make things clearer.

"Ah yes," replied his lordship, "perhaps it would, but I am no good at an explanation. I only make things worse than they were before if I try to explain. Honoria can tell you everything."

"There is not much to explain," said his sister. "Mrs. Churchill and I are engaged in writing a realistic novel together, and we wanted to describe the daily life of the governess. So we drew lots who should take the situation for a month. If she had lost I should have highly recommended her—but she won, so she highly recommended me, and here I have been for more than three weeks, making notes for our book. The people at the Towers thought I was staying with Mrs. Churchill, as I often do. My brother went to see me—found I wasn't there—and wormed the secret out of her. How my father got to know I can't tell. After all, I don't see why anybody should complain or apologise or make a fuss. I have done my duty very well, and Mrs. Wallis' children are much better behaved than when I came. And I have found"—she glanced at the wretched Wilson with a smile—"I have found an entirely new character, that has been worth all my trouble, and more."

Mrs. Wallis rose, made a deep bow to Lord Newmarket, and went out of the room, without taking the least notice of anybody else. The words she was so particularly fond of, "A person in your position, Miss Reydehl," were ringing in her head like so many electric bells.

Mr. Mainwaring followed her with his eyes, and then turned to Wilson. "Our business is done, I think," said he calmly; "come along. Good morning to you all."

"I shall be ready to come with you in ten minutes," said Lady Honoria to her brother, when the Mainwaring were gone; and with these words she departed leaving the rector and Lord Newmarket alone together.

The latter felt that something more was required of him even yet, and burst out at once.

"My sister Honoria is a very nice girl when you come to know her, Dr. Wallis, awfully clever and literary and all that, but she always was and she always will be madder than the maddest hatter that ever existed. That's what is the matter with her. She has been no end of trouble both to her father and mother, and the earl is dreadfully sorry that this should have happened, and he bids me say that when his gout is better, he fully intends to come and apologise to you himself."

"Say no more, my dear Lord Newmarket," said the enraptured rector—"say no more! We consider it a favour to have had your charming sister with us. If the earl should deign to do us such an honour as you speak of—that is, to visit our humble abode, for I could not, of course, think of his apologizing to one so unworthy as myself—it would be the proudest and happiest moment of my life!"

"Wilson," said Mr. Mainwaring, as they walked home, "you need a complete change of air. A sea voyage is the thing for you. Try New Zealand—and go soon—you needn't wait for the Archery meeting at the Towers."

About a year after the novel appeared and took London by storm. The governess was so cleverly drawn for one thing, and for another, the character of the priggish, preaching, pretentious poet was pronounced both original and inimitable.

Wilson read the book in the Antipodes, and immediately wrote home that he had decided to stay another year at least.

THE END.

CARAVAN TRAVELLING.

A French friend of mine lives near one of those pretty shady avenues of trees that are common on the outskirts of French towns, and often in the morning he walks out in that direction. One day his curiosity was attracted by a caravan that sought the shade there. The horses were unharnessed by a servant, and the master came out of the vehicle, and looked around with the eye of a stranger to the locality. "There is something about that caravan," my friend thought, "that seemed unusual, and I should like to find out what it is." Impelled by this desire, he entered into conversation with the owner, who was immediately recognizable as a gentleman, and my friend being of the same class they soon became communicative, as French people will, when they have not made up their minds to be rigidly solemn and reserved. The owner of the caravan was