

Tales and Sketches

From HEARTH AND HOME.

The Mystery OF METROPOLISVILLE.

BY EDWARD EGLESTON,

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE RETURN.

As long as he could, Charlton kept Katy at Glenfield. He amused her by every means in his power; he devoted himself to her; he sought to win her away from Westcott, not by argument, to which she was invulnerable, but by feeling. He found that the only motive that moved her was an emotion of pity for him, so he contrived to make her estimate his misery on her account at its full value. But just when he thought he had produced some effect there would come one of Smith Westcott's letters, written not as he talked it is only real simple-heartedness or genuine literary gift that can make the personality of the writer felt in a letter, but in a round business hand with plenty of flourishes, and in sentences very carefully composed. But he managed in his precise and prim way to convey to Katy the notion that he was pining away for her company. And she, missing the giggle and the playfulness from the letter, thought his distress extreme indeed. For it would have required a deeper sorrow than Smith Westcott ever felt to make him talk in the stiff conventional fashion in which his letters were composed.

And besides Westcott's letters there were letters from her mother, in which that careful mother had never failed to tell how Mr. Westcott had come in, the evening before, to talk about Katy, and to tell her how lost and heart-broken he was. So that letters from home generally brought on a relapse of Katy's devotion to her lover. She was cruelly torn by alternate fits of loving pity for poor dear Brother Albert on the one hand, and poor dear Smith Westcott on the other. And the latter generally carried the day in her sympathies. He was such a poor dear fellow, you know, and hadn't anybody, not even a mother, to comfort him, and he had often said that if his charming and divine little Katy should ever prove false, he would go and drown himself in the lake. And that would be so awful, you know. And besides, Brother Albert had plenty to love him. There was mother, and there was that quiet kind of a lady at the City Hotel that Albert went to see so often, though how he could like anybody so cool she didn't know. And then cousin Isa would love Brother Albert maybe, if he'd asked her. But he had plenty, and poor Smith had often said that he needed somebody to help him to be good. And she would cleave to him forever and help him. Mother and father thought she was right, and she couldn't anyway let Smith drown himself. How could she? That would be the same as murdering him, you know.

During the fortnight that Charlton and his sister visited in Glenfield, Albert divided his time between trying to impress Katy with the general usefulness of Smith Westcott to be her husband, and the more congenial employment of writing long letters to Miss Helen Minorkey, and receiving long letters from that lady. His were fervent and enthusiastic; they explained in a rather vehement style all the schemes that filled his brain for working out his vocation and helping the world to its goal; while hers discussed everything in the most dispassionate temper. Charlton had brought himself to admire this dispassionate temper. A man of Charlton's temper who is really in love, can bring himself to admire any traits in the object of his love. Had Helen Minorkey shown some little enthusiasm, Charlton would have exaggerated it, admired it, and rejoiced in it as a priceless quality. As she showed none, he admired the lack of it in her, rejoiced in her superiority in her sex in this regard, and loved her more passionately every day. And Miss Minorkey was not wanting in a certain tenderness toward her adorer. She loved him in her way, it made her happy to be loved in that ideal fashion.

Charlton found himself in a strait betwixt two. He longed to worship again at the shrine of his Minerva. But he disliked to return with Katy until he had done something to break the hold of Smith Westcott upon her mind. So upon one pretext or another he staid until Westcott wrote to Katy that business would call him to Glenfield the next week, and he hoped she would conclude to return with him. Katy was so pleased with the prospect of a long ride with her lover, that she felt considerable disappointment when Albert determined to return at once. Brother Albert always did such curious things. Katy, who had given Albert a dozen reasons for an immediate return, now thought it very strange that he should be in such a hurry. Had he given up trying to find that new kind of grasshopper he spoke of the day before?

One effect of the unexpected arrival of Albert and Katy in Metropolisville, was to make Smith Westcott forget that he

ever had any business that was likely to call him to Glenfield. Delighted to see Katy back, would a died if she had staid away another week. By George! he! he! he! Wanted to jump into the lake, you know. Always felt that way when Katy was out of sight two days. Curious By George! Didn't think any woman could ever make such a fool of him. He! he! he! Felt like ole Dan Tucker when he came to supper and found the hot cakes all gone. He! he! he! By George. You know! Let's sing de forty-lebenth hymn! Ahem!

"If Diner was an apple. And I was one besideher. Oh I how happy we wou'd be. When we's kwushed into cider! And a little more cider too, a-hoo! And a little more cider too! And a little more cider too—ah—hoo! And a little more cider too."

How much? Pailful! By George! He! he! he! That's so! You know. Them's my sentiments. Suppress the 'motions of my heart, bredren! Yah! yah! By hokey! And here comes Mr. Albert Charlton. Brother Albert! Just as well learn to say it now as after a while. Eh, Katy? How do, Brother Albert? Glad to see you as if I'd stuck a nail in my foot. By George! he! he! You won't mind my carryin' on. Nobody minds me. I'm the privileged infant, you know. I am, by George! he! he! Come, Kate, let's take a boat-ride.

"Oh I come, love, come; My boat's by the shore; If yer don't ride now, I won't ax yer no more."

And so forth. Too hoarse to sing. But I am not too feeble to paddle my own Canoe. Come, Katy, darling. You needn't mind your shawl when you've got a Westcott to keep you warm. He! he! By George.

And then he went out singing that her lips were red as roses, or poppies, or something, and "wait for the row-boat and we'll all take a ride."

Albert endeavored to forget his vexation by seeking the society of Miss Minorkey, who was sincerely glad to see him back, and who was more demonstrative on this evening than he had ever known her to be. And Charlton was correspondingly happy. He lay in his unplastered room that night, and counted the laths in the moonlight, and built golden ladders out of them by which to climb up to the heaven of his desires. But he was a little troubled to find that in proportion as he came nearer to the possession of Miss Minorkey, his ardour in the matter of his great Educational Institution—his American Philanthropium as he called it—abated.

I ought here to mention a fact which occurred about this time, because it is a fact that has some bearing on the course of the story, and because it may help us to a more charitable judgment in regard to the character of Mr. Charlton's step-father. Soon after Albert's return from Glenfield, he received an appointment to the post-mastership of Metropolisville in such a way as to leave no doubt that it came through Squire Plausaby's influence. We are in the habit of thinking a mean man wholly mean. But we are wrong. Liberal Donor, Esq., for instance, has a great passion for keeping his left hand exceedingly well informed of the generous doings of his right. He gives money to found the Liberal Donor Female Collegiate and Academical Institute, and then he gives money to found the Liberal Donor Professorship of Systematic and Metaphysical Theology, and still other sums to establish the Liberal Donor Orthopedic Chirurgical Gratuitous Hospital for Cripples and Club-footed. Shall I say that the man is not generous, but only ostentatious? Not at all. He might gratify his vanity in other ways. His vanity dominates over his benevolence, and makes it pay tribute to his own glory. But his benevolence is genuine notwithstanding. Plausaby was mercenary, and he may have seen some advantage to himself in having the post-office in his own house, and in placing his step-son under obligation to himself. Doubtless these considerations weighed much, but besides, we must remember the injunction that includes even the Father of Evil in the number of those to whom a share of credit is due. Let us say for Plausaby that, land-shark as he was, he was not vindictive, he was not without generosity, and that it gave him sincere pleasure to do a kindness to his step-son, particularly when his generous impulse coincided so exactly with his own interest in the matter. I do not say that he would not have preferred to have taken the appointment himself, had it not been that he had once been a post-master in Pennsylvania and some old unpleasantness between him and the Post Office Department about an unsettled account stood in his way. But in all the tangled maze of motive that, by a resolution of force, produced the whole which men called Plausaby the Land shark, there was not wanting an element of generosity, and that element of generosity had much to do with Charlton's appointment. And Albert took it kindly. I am afraid that he was just a little less observant of the transactions in which Plausaby engaged after that.

I am sure that he was much less vehement than before in his denunciations of land-sharks. The post-office was set up in one of the unfinished rooms of Mr. Plausaby's house, and, except at mail-times, Charlton was not obliged to confine himself to it. Katy or Isa or Mrs. Plausaby was always glad to look over the

letters for any caller, to sell stamps to those who wanted them, and tell a Swede how much postage he must pay on a painfully-written letter to some relative in Christiana or Stockholm. And the three or four hundred dollars of income enabled Charlton to prosecute his studies. In his gratitude he lent the two hundred and twenty dollars—all that was left of his educational fund—to Mr. Plausaby, at two per cent. a month, on demand, secured by a mortgage on lots in Metropolisville.

Poor infatuated George Gray—the inhabitant of the Lone Cabin, the Trapper of Pleasant Brook, the Hoosier Poet from the Wawbosh country—poor infatuated George Gray found his cabin untenable after little Katy had come and gone. He came up to Metropolisville, improved his dress by buying some ready-made clothing, and haunted the streets where he could catch a glimpse now and then of Katy.

One night, Charlton, coming home from an evening with Miss Minorkey at the hotel, found a man standing in front of the fence.

"What do you want here?" he asked sharply.

"Didn't mean no harm, stranger to nobody."

"Oh! it's you!" exclaimed Charlton, recognizing his friend the Poet. "Come in, come in."

"Come in? Couldn't do it no way, stranger. Ef I was to go in thar amongst all them air ladies, my knees would gin out. I was jist a-lookin' at that purty creature. But I'druther die'n do her any harm. I mos' wish I was dead. But 'ta'n't no harm to look at her ef she don't know it. I shan't disturb her; and ef she marries a gentleman, I shan't disturb him nuther. On'y, ef he don't mind it, you know, I'll write po'try about her now and then. I got some verses now that I wish you'd show to her, ef you think they won't do her no harm, you know, and I don't 'low they will. Good-by, Mr. Charlton. Comin' down to sleep on your claim? Land's a-comin' into market down thar."

After the Poet left him, Albert took the verses into the house and read them, and gave them to Katy. The first stanza was, if I remember it rightly, something of this sort:

"A angel come inter the poor trapper's door. The purty feet tramped on the rough panchoon floor. Her lovely head slep on his prairie-grass pillow— The cabin is lonesome and the trapper is poor. He hears little shoes a-pattin' the floor; He can't sleep at night on that pillow no more; His Hoosier harp hangs on the wild water-weller!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SAWNEY AND HIS OLD LOVE.

Self-conceit is a great source of happiness, a buffer that softens all the jolts of life. After David Sawney's failure to capture Perritaut's half-bred Atlantis and her golden apples at one dash, one would have expected him to be a little modest in approaching his old love again; but forty-eight hours after her return from Glenfield, he was paying his "devours," as he called them, to little Kitty Charlton. He felt confident of winning—he was one of that class of men who believe themselves able to carry off anybody they choose. He inventoried his own attractions with great complacency; he had good health, a good claim, and as he often boasted, had been "raised rich," or, as he otherwise stated it, "cradled in the lap of luxury." His father was one of those rich Illinois farmers who are none the less coarse for all their money and farms. Owing to reverses of fortune, Dave had inherited none of the wealth, but all of the coarseness of gain. So he walked into Squire Plausaby's with his usual assurance, on the second evening after Katy's return.

"Howdy, Miss Charlton," he said, "howdy! I'm glad to see you lookin' so smart. Howdy, Mrs. Ferret!" to the widow, who was present. "Howdy do, Mr. Charlton—back again?" And then he took his seat alongside Katy, not without a little trepidation, for he felt a very slight anxiety lest his flirtation with Perritaut's ten thousand dollars "mout've made his chances juberous," as he stated it to his friends. But then, he reflected, "she'll think I'm wort; more'n ever when she knows I de-clined ten thousand dollars, in five annooal payments."

"Mr. Sawney," said the widow Ferret, beaming on him with one of her sudden, precise, pickled smiles, "Mr. Sawney, I'm delighted to hear that you made a brave stand against Romanism. It is the bane of this country. I re-spect you for the stand you made. It shows the influence of schripcheral training by a praying mother, I've no doubt, Mr. Sawney."

Dave was flattered and annoyed at this mention, and he looked at little Katy, but she didn't seem to feel any interest in the matter, and so he took heart.

"I felt it my dooty, Mrs. Ferret, indeed I did."

"I respect you for it, Mr. Sawney."

"For what?" said Albert irascibly. "For selling himself into a mercenary marriage, and then higging on a point of religious prejudice?"

Mrs. Ferret now focused her round eyes at Mr. Charlton, smiled her deprecating smile, and replied: "I do think, Mr. Charlton, that in this day of lax views on one side and priestcraft on the other, I respect a man who thinks enough of ec-

vangelical truth to make a stand against any enemy of the holy religion of—"

"Well," said Charlton rudely, "I must say that I respect Perritaut's prejudices just as much as I do Dave's. Both of them were engaged in a contemptible transaction, and both of them showed an utter lack of conscience, except in matters of opinion. Religion is—"

But the company did not get the benefit of Mr. Albert's views on the subject of religion, for at that moment entered Mr. Smith Westcott.

TO BE CONTINUED.

GIBBIE STE'ENSON THE MISER.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

I CANNOT begin my little sketch of Gibbie Ste'enson, till I say a few words of my grandfather, from whom I got it. He was a herd-boy in the year '45; and but for his mother, who imprisoned him in an out-house, he would have been off with the Highlanders to do what he could for Prince Charlie. Many were the stories he had about the "rising," and used to tell them with all the enthusiasm of youth. He was quite satisfied it was best for the country, in every respect, that the enterprise of the chevalier failed; but it was plain that all his feelings were enlisted on the side of the adventurer. I happened to be his favourite and his bed-fellow, and came in for my full share of his old-world stories, which were neither few nor uninteresting. It makes me smile yet, when I remember, how he used to run down the tales I met with in books; no matter of what kind, or by whom written, they were denounced as "trash and baggage, and lies from end to end." The philosophy of his criticism was hidden from me at the time; but there was one advantage I took of it even then. When indisposed to gratify me with a new story, or the recital of an old one, I usually obtained my wish, by asking leave to tell him a fine one I had read in such a book. He was wont to fire at this, and let off his customary volleys against the "book baggage," and begin one of his own, by drawing up his shoulders, and pulling down his nightcap a piece.

Gibbie Ste'enson the miser, who was a school-fellow of his own, afforded matter for many a sketch; and I came at last to think of Gibbie as a man whom I had actually known. Even yet, the picture I formed of him, is vivid and complete. None of Scott's or Shakespeare's characters stand out half so steadily or life-like before my imagination. My grandfather, I presume, had not given me a set and chronological history of him; for the order in which the materials are arranged in my mind, and in which they always occur to me, is anything but regular or sustained. I shall endeavour, however, to break the ill-assorted chain, and put its links in their proper places.

Gibbie Ste'enson was scarcely weaned when his father died. His mother contrived to make a livelihood from the bit of ground attached to her cottage, and by acting as kind of cow-doctor, and as an attendant upon lying-in women. She was a brisk bustling body, but honest and shrewd withal, and bent on amassing as much of the world as she could. A variety of prudential maxims was completely under her control, and generally in active service. Yet few beggars passed her door without their pittance; and she had the character of being an obliging neighbour and a steady friend. Gibbie was turned of seven when he came to the parish school. A new scholar is always an object of some interest, but Gibbie created quite a sensation. He had on a jacket of hodden gray, which reached to his huddies, and hung about him like a sack. His trousers were of the same material, and a world too wide for his long raw shanks; and, but for a broad lap at the bottom, his feet would have disappeared in them altogether. The entire structure of his dress spoke as plainly as cloth could speak, that an intention was formed against posterity; and that the future would be saddled with the old clothes of the past. He had a cap to match, but no neckerchief; and in short, was piece, from top to toe, with a drab complexion, and flaxen hair, and a knife-like expression of countenance. His mother entered the school with him on a Monday morning in February 1743, as far as my grandfather could recollect. The confused hum instantly ceased, and nothing was heard for a time, but the clump, clump, of Gibbie's heavily tacketed shoes, as his parent led him up to where the master stood.

"Here's Gibbie t'ye, 'sir," said Mrs. Stevenson, better known by the name of Cow Katy: "and I hope ye'll do your best wi' him. He's gayin' gleg; and I'm thinkin' he'll jist drink in the lair."

"Few come with sic a drowth," answered the master, ironically.

"Drowth or no drowth!" replied Katy, rather sharply, "haud the bowl weel to his head; and oup it down him, if he'll no tak it."

A roar of laughter from the whole school followed, and Katy turned about and soolded at them as "ill-bred nowt;"

but her words were swallowed up in the general uproar. The master, half angry, half pleased, tried to calm the tumult, but without effect. He took Gibbie out of her hand and set him down on a seat by himself; and partly coaxing, partly forcing, Mrs. Stevenson herself, conducted her out of the school into a little by-room he had, amidst the deafening and uncontrollable laughter of fifty pair of lungs. He remained fully ten minutes away—the time was not so precious then as it is now,—appeasing Mrs. Stevenson, and receiving her peremptory instructions about Gibbie. This was too precious an opportunity to be lost. Scarcely was the master's back turned, when a dozen faces, in every possible state of contortion, were grinning at poor Gibbie. Of course he could not feel quite at home, and in fact, was at an utter loss what to do with himself. The death-heads multiplied about him; and he sat like a condemned and sheepish criminal staring at the strange appearances around him. "Cow Gibbie," cries one; "Mealy-mou'd Gibbie," shouts another; "Samuel Side-pouches," cried a third; and one cried this, and another that term of reproach, till flesh and blood could stand it no longer, and Gibbie set up a grin, that took the field at once to itself. A terrible explosion of mirth ensued, but Gibbie kept twisting at them every variety of faces he was master of. A boy, who was the ringleader of the mischief, stole in behind Gibbie, and emptied his ink-horn on the victim's head. The deep colouring which was instantly given to Gibbie's sketches, was felt and answered by all. But Gibbie cut the exhibition short by springing to his feet, and rushing like an infuriated goat on his tormentor. Gibbie had him down in a moment, and would no doubt have slaked his vengeance on him, had not prompt assistance been rendered. Exasperated beyond all measure, he gave general battle to his persecutors, and both gave and received some hearty kicks and strokes. The master came in during the fray, and a general dispersion immediately followed. Gibbie was now staring and foaming like a raised bull; and, bolting past the master, made for the door and ran off. "After him!" shouted the head of the fierce democracy. Never was command more eagerly obeyed. A whole pack in full cry set out after the delinquent. Gibbie was evidently making it a life-and-death matter; for, heavy shoes and all, he kept the start he had got, till one of the boys cried to a man who was coming forward to "keep him." The man seeing at once how matters stood, laid hold of Gibbie, at the expense of some shin, till his pursuers came up. The truant, exhausted and breathless, made an ineffectual effort or two, and then permitted himself to be led back. As he gathered breath, however, and as they came near the house of correction, Gibbie began to wrestle and plunge furiously. Any ground he yielded now was locomotively given; and the bustle and clamour became tremendous, as they pulled and shoved him in at the school door. After some stern remonstrances and threatenings on the part of the master, a basin of water was brought, and Gibbie was ordered to wash his face, which, with sweat and rage, and ink, was scarcely human. He was then set on the middle of a form, with some of the strongest boys on either side of him as a guard. There he sat sulkily for some time, till the persecution began again in wry faces, and nick-names, and nips and scratches. The best temper would have broken under such annoyances, and how could Gibbie's stand? An unsparring thrust from a pin made him spring from his seat with a loud yell, that made everything stop. "Ye villains!" cried the molested boy, grinding his teeth like a hand-saw, and looking fiercely on his antagonists. Nobody, of course, was doing anything to him; and there being twenty witnesses to one against Gibbie, he could not expect any reparation. He was ordered to sit down and keep quiet; but Gibbie seeing all hope of peace or justice at an end, began the defensive, and left rainbows all around him. "Gibbie Ste'enson! master! O! Gibbie Ste'enson!" was shouted every now and then, as Gibbie added a new sufferer to his list, or favored an old one with a fresh demonstration. The master lost patience at last, and put Gibbie into a desk by himself. The school at length dismissed, and Gibbie had to fight and kick his way through a batch of boys, who had suffered from his bony fingers through the day. Sore and weary Gibbie got home, and neither scolds, nor strokes, nor bribes, could induce Gibbie to go back to the seat of learning. His mother managed, in her own way, to get the alphabet into him in the course of a year; and by another, he could hammer out some words in the "wee spell." About the close of the third, in the month of November 1746, Gibbie once more made his appearance at the parish school. He was now a tall boy of ten, with long sinewy arms, and a gaunt muscular frame, that bent slightly at the shoulders, arising probably from the domestic drudgery he was compelled to perform. The nature of his mother's avocations called her often out for whole days and nights; and Gibbie, in her absence, was cook, and dairymaid, and washerwoman, and everything. His dress remained unchanged, with the exception of a large letting-down of the lap