



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 1868.

No. 25.

THE HOPE OF LEASCOMBE;

OR,

THE CONSTANT ONE.

A TALE OF THE SEA.

(From the N. Y. Metropolitan Record)

CHAPTER VII.

'My name, my dear sir,' he began, 'is Edward Lester, once a captain of an East Indiaman—'

'What name did you say?' gasped William. 'Edward Lester!' repeated the other quite startled.

'Do you know that signature?' asked William, hurriedly opening a letter, and showing the following words: 'Yours ever, my dear William, Sophy Lester.'

'Speak, man!' cried the other, grasping his hand convulsively—'can it be my child; and she, my wife?—He could say no more.'

'You must be that long lost Edward Lester. Merciful God! thy ways are inscrutable. Your wife is well, still mourning ever for you.'

'God be for ever blessed!' said the poor man weakly. 'And you?'

'I am, with your permission, the affianced husband of Sophy Lester!'

'Whom God has sent to deliver me from bondage. But tell me all—how you met them—what they are doing?'

William briefly told all he knew. 'Heaven bless them! And now, my dear friend, I owe you my story. I sailed from Calcutta seventeen years ago, to come home by order round Cape Horn, and was wrecked with fifteen men there where you see the carcass of my brig. One life was only lost; and we saved cargo, and everything but the ship. We found the island inhabited by an inoffensive race of beings, whom we soon made our friends. We became, in fact, one family. Most of our crew married native women; and, save our poignant regrets for home, were comparatively happy. But we all have longed, and still long for England—that has been the hope of every hour; and now I dare look forward to a chance of its being realized. Three of our crew perished in a wild attempt to gain another island at a great distance; of the remainder, two I know will not quit the spot. They were very young, and married, and have children whom they love beyond home. There are nine, then, in all, who desire a passage. I know your position is difficult, but I answer for my crew. At first turbulent enough, they are now steady fellows, who will obey you as they should, grateful enough to be taken home at any price. Could you not leave your prisoners?'

'I could wish to do so; but where are my proofs of innocence save in the bringing forward of the guilty? My dear sir, if I let these men go, I and my crew proclaim ourselves pirates and murderers. Besides, they deserve punishment; and to leave them here would be to punish your colonists.'

'True, true. But now, from this moment, command us all. The island and its contents are at your disposal.'

'Thank you. In the first place, I wish the prisoners to be taken ashore, and placed under strict guard; you answer for your subjects.'

'As certainly as any other despot. But my tyranny, founded on their own choice, and capable of being overthrown in an instant, is far more powerful.'

'Let us go on shore, then, at once,' said William, leading the way.

The prisoners, well secured, were put into the schooner's boat; then all the crew followed with Harvey and the still wondering Lester, and in a few minutes stood upon terra firma. They were surrounded at once by about fifty men, as many women, and a number of children, all speaking English or attempting to do so. They were wholly unarmed, arms being prohibited except for hunting, the natives being as yet so far uncivilized as to be ignorant of the art of war. A grand banquet was given to the new comers, and then plans were entered into for the future. The nine men signed articles at once as portion of the crew, while the other two offered to do the same if their wives and children could accompany them. This Harvey could not consent to from the size of the schooner, but promised to indicate their position so publicly, that some vessel must soon visit them.

Next day all set to work. English and natives, although the latter labored sadly enough, every one wishing their white friends to remain. But they only shook their heads, and still did their best to assist. The schooner was refitted, its masts set up firmly; it was provisioned amply for the home journey, and at the end of a month she was ready. Harvey, however, now consented to remain a few days, that his men might rest and survey the island, which was small, but rich in fruits, fish, trees, and different kinds of wild fowl according to the season. It was full, too, of

sleep—a circumstance that was once a source of delight to the natives, who owed this great blessing, as well as domestic ducks, to the brig being well stocked.

Captain Lester had, after a few years, allowed his men and the natives to treat the brig as a complete wreck, and to take such goods as they thought fit. So they had an ample supply of tea and sugar, wore silks, rich shawls, and became wild dandies. Every man had a neat house, and many comforts; so that nearly the whole had a half inclination to stop after all, and even talked of returning, if they found no friends alive in England, as did indeed two some years later.

At last the schooner set forth on its long journey, in proper trim, well provisioned, splendidly manned, and by a willing crew, with two experienced officers at their head.

The prisoners begged earnestly to be left behind; but not only did Harvey give the reasons already mentioned for not leaving them, but the islanders refused to receive them on any condition. Murder was a thing unknown there, and excited such horror, in the simple minds of the natives that on their departure, the cabin in which they had lived was burned to the ground and a post erected to mark the spot where two men slayers had once dwelt.

The voyage was rapid and prosperous. The old captain was perhaps even more impatient than William to get home. The letters of his child spoke doubtfully of her mother's health, and the long-exiled sailor wished once more to see his wife, whom he had never forgotten, any more than the dear babe he had left with her. Harvey, too, was deeply anxious for his reunion; and his daily dream was the joy that his Sophy would feel when he brought back her father to bless their union. There were thoughts in his heart, too, of his own father, but these he kept down, unwilling to acknowledge his errors even to himself.

At last, to the delight of all, they arrived at the mouth of the Ganges—to the delight of all save the murderers, who now were the cowardly most criminals of their nature are when the deed is done, found out, or even suspected. Just as they were about to enter the Ganges, an armed government schooner hailed them.

'What schooner is that?' asked the commander in a loud voice, sliding right up to them.

'The Ganges,' replied William in a calm voice.

'Where from?' said the other in shriller tones.

'From the South Seas, bound for Calcutta,' continued William.

'Lie to then, and let the captain come on board,' said the other in ironical tones that William well understood.

He, however instantly obeyed, and in a few moments stood on the deck of the Devastation in a firm but respectful attitude.

'And pray who are you, sir?' asked a naval officer in a severe tone, while officers and crew of the armed schooner crowded round.

'William Harvey, captain of the Ganges, with the assassins of Matthew Finlayson on board.'

'Who are you then?' said the officer somewhat staggered, and starting at our adventurer.

'I declare, sir, that I embarked as second mate of this schooner, under mysterious circumstances that suited my age and disposition. But during a storm, learning from a terrified lad the manner in which my officer came into possession of the schooner, I mutinied and took the command. I came home as fast as I could; but, providentially, putting into an island to refit, I have been able to bring away the captain and crew of the Three Presidencies, wrecked seventeen years ago.'

'I believe you, young man. Your manner is sufficient. But I may tell you that Finlayson is not dead. You have acted, however, like a man, and may expect the gratitude of the government and of the owner of your schooner.—What you say of the Three Presidencies is really wonderful. But go back to your ship, Captain Harvey; we will sail up in company.'

Next day, William Harvey was the lion of Calcutta. The prisoners were given up, tried on the evidence of Finlayson himself and the boy, and sentenced to severe terms of imprisonment. The consignees of the Three Presidencies gave Harvey a handsome letter to the owner in London, and the command of a vessel bound thither, with the consent of the authorities; and so Harvey and Lester sailed for England.

CHAPTER VII.

More than a year had passed without news of the wanderer, and the inhabitants of Leascombe began to lose all hope. The father was half inclined to think that his son might have taken offence at some word or expression in Sophy's letters; or that, as changeable as he was violent, he had again sought other affections. None would allow that it could be possible for any evil to have happened to him. The mind of man is not easily disposed to look at the worst side of events. Some natures there may be so consti-

tuted as to paint everything in black; but such were none at Leascombe. Sir Edward himself always thought that Harry had sailed on some fresh voyage, or that he had gone up the country, or entered into some foreign service. He never supposed for one moment that tempest or battle had deprived him his son. Lady Templeton grieved in silence, said little, but hoped on ever. Sophy, though anxious and sometimes terrified lived still in hope, and pursued her studies with avidity.

The society of Mrs. Desmond, her reading, and her own natural character, had made of the humble Sophy a thorough gentlewoman. In thought and feelings she had always been so; but there is a certain refinement and polish never acquired but by constant association with the high-bred and highly educated.

Sophy in her secret heart had many painful misgivings about the prodigal son. She set too little store by her own powers of fascination, to believe herself capable of enchanting permanently the affections of any man. She believed that William Harvey had taken more than a fancy to her—a very sincere affection; but she thought it quite possible he might change. At others times she had more hope on this point, but more firm hope on another. She traced a strange similarity in the fortunes of her father and her lover, and at length allowed herself to believe, that perhaps some fate similar to that of her dear parent had befallen the young man. His last letter had been so cheerful, so hopeful, so affectionate, it was scarcely possible to think that in so short a time he had forgotten one he had entertained any real affection for.

It was early in May, and the breakfast-parlor was laid out, awaiting its several guests. Mrs. Desmond and Sophy came down first, then Mrs. Lester, and a few minutes later Sir Edward and Lady Templeton. It was a charming morning, the trees were all in bud, many flowers were in bloom, and the sun shone serenely on the lawn and park. The window was open, and the perfumed fragrance of morning came in, with still an odor of the sea-breeze, though the sea was five miles distant. The breakfast was instantly brought in, and Mrs. Desmond, as usual, took the place of honor to pour out the tea.

'How long is it now, Miss Lester,' said Sir Edward, 'since you heard from my dear boy? This was the same question generally asked about twice a week.'

'It is now, Sir Edward, nearly fourteen months,' replied Sophy gently. He was scarcely conscious how often the same question had been so rarely replied to.

'It is a long, long time,' he continued. 'Would we could have some news!'

'I would we could!' echoed the mother with a deep sigh. There was a slight rustling at the door.

'Come in,' said Sir Edward simultaneously with the hurried entrance of the butler. 'What is it, Markman?' asked Sir Edward.

'A foreign letter, sir, for Miss Lester,' replied the butler in a low voice, and with some emotion. He was a servant who had been fifteen years in the family when Master Henry was born. All rose with one accord, and Sophy took the letter with a trembling hand.

'From Mr. Henry, sir?' said the butler respectfully.

'I believe so, Markman,' replied Sir Edward in a trembling voice.

'Yes, Markman,' said Miss Lester.

'Thank you, sir—thank you, miss,' replied the butler, quite proud of the confidence; and then he retired.

'It is a very long letter,' said Sophy, blushing at the first words: 'May I just glance over it?'

'Of course, my dear girl. I am too happy to see his handwriting—God bless him!'

'Am coming home?' said Sophy, attempted to read aloud; but her voice trembled, and at length she said nervously: 'I cannot read it.—Mrs. Desmond will be kind enough.'

'Certainly, my dear,' replied the sister; and began carefully and slowly to read the long letter. It told all that had happened, save the name of the rescued sailor. It finished thus:—

'I am coming home, my dear Sophy, an altered man; not altered so far as you are concerned, but in many things. I do not suppose that my conduct or position will be much changed, but I hope to avoid many faults into which I have fallen in the course of my life.—My terrible position in the schooner Ganges headed by a murderer, whom my hasty temper brought me into contact with, brought home to me a lesson I shall not easily unlearn. I hope it may benefit me all the days of my life. God bless you! Perhaps I bring you news you little expect.'

'He means, I suppose,' said Sir Edward 'that he will now own his family, and end this unfortunate separation.'

'O Heavens! if he meant something else,' cried Mrs. Lester wildly.

'What, my dear madam?' asked the baronet kindly.

'If he meant that the rescued sailor was my poor long lost husband,' she began.

'It is quite possible,' said Sir Edward musing. 'Do you think so?' asked Sophy timidly.

'I think the tone of his letter such, that this explanation is more likely to be correct than mine.'

'But, my dear mother, such a surprise would kill you,' faltered Sophy.

'No, my dear,' cried Mrs. Lester; 'it is only grief that is fatal—joy never kills.'

'Then, my dear mother, it is true!' half shrieked Sophy. It is true. Hear the rest:—'Break it gently to your mother; but tell her that she may bless the day she met me, for I bring her home her husband, her own true, loving husband, whom, by the mercy of God, I have rescued from his seventeen years imprisonment on a distant island of the South Seas.'

'My God!' was all the widow—widow no longer—could say.

'Wonderful indeed,' said the baronet. 'Mrs. Lester, I congratulate you on your happiness.—But in your own joy forget not us. I think my boy is coming home very well disposed to be all we could wish. He has perhaps not now made up his mind to seek us, but I do not think he will avoid a meeting.'

'My dear sir, will you leave all to me?' said Sophy earnestly, 'I think I could manage him better than anybody. Nay, I am sure of it: let me at least try.'

'I trust wholly to you, Miss Lester—we all trust in you. Command—we obey. Restore to us our son, our hope, and our gratitude is illimitable.'

'And my husband is to be restored to me?' began Mrs. Lester, beside whom her daughter was sitting.

'Yes, mamma; but do not excite yourself. You are not strong; and you must try to be well by the time he comes home.'

'He does not mention any particular time, I think I remarked?' said the baronet, who was anxious to read the letter himself, who was anxious to read the letter himself, although too well bred to exhibit such desire in any direct manner.

'Pray, read it yourself, sir; I have perused it rather hurriedly. Never mind,' she added blushing, 'the first few lines—it's all nonsense about me.'

'The simple truth, so far as it describes your charms and your character. I hope and believe it is equally so as regards his own estimation of your worth,' said the baronet emphatically. He then eagerly devoured the letter, presently taking his wife aside, and reading it over to her; while Sophy and her mother, folded in each other's arms, talked anxiously of him who had been as it were raised from the dead.

'Come, come!' said Mrs. Desmond suddenly; 'no one has yet taken any breakfast, which is neither wise or prudent. I insist on everybody sitting down and doing justice to my fragrant tea and new eggs. You must all be well and strong to hail the return of Harry and his father-in-law.'

This well-timed speech brought them back to a little reason, and the breakfast proceeded.—The rest of the day was spent in commenting on the letter.

Two days later, another came. It was brief and definite. William Harvey, as he still styled himself, had arrived in England. His ship required his presence for forty-eight hours; but after that he would be free, and would bring Mr Lester down to Newton Alway.

'To Newton Alway of course,' said Sophy; 'of course he thinks us there. You leave all to me. Well, mamma, you and I must set out tonight for the village and our old house for a couple of days. Ask me no questions. There shall be no delay; no, not the delay of an hour. But I must have a talk with him first. I will then bring here; I answer for it.'

'God bless you!' said Lady Templeton.

'Act as you will,' added Sir Edward.

'Then please, sir, let us have the carriage at once. Let it then be sent every morning to wait for us at the Little Red Cow above our village, and I promise to be here in little more than an hour after he arrives.'

The carriage was placed at their disposal; Mrs. Lester and Sophy, dressed in their village costume, entered it, and drove down to Alway. The cottage was inhabited by old friends, who readily gave it up for a week. Sophy was quite happy in her old home once more, although she felt she should never like again the drudgery she had once submitted to with so much complacency. But she was glad to renew her acquaintance with the sea, to see her old friends the children, and to talk with some of her young companions, now hard working fisherwomen. Still, nothing drew her thoughts away from those who were coming; and it was with a wildly beating heart she saw, on the morning of the second day, two men de-

scending the pathway to the house. They moved slowly for one was obliged to lean on the other for support.

'My husband!—my wife!' was one cry, and the long separated pair were folded in a trembling embrace.

'My dear Sophy!' said William Harvey, with a fond and happy smile, kissing her, sailor-like, on both cheeks. 'What a beautiful woman you have become!'

'You are only a little darker, and a little more manly,' replied she trembling.

'My dear girl!' exclaimed Mr. Lester; 'but let this brave young man say his say to you, for to him we owe all under God's blessing.'

'We owe more than we can ever repay,' added the wife gently; 'but come in and sit down, my husband; I cannot stand.' The long separated pair entered the cottage, leaving the lovers on the outer bench.

'And now, my dear friend,' began Sophy, after ten minutes had passed, 'now that we have spoken of ourselves, let us think of others.—During your absence, my mother's illness compelled me to leave this place. We went to live in a family, where we have remained ever since. They have been very kind to us, and take a deep interest in our welfare. They made me promise to bring you to them at once. Besides, the owners of this house want to come back again. Will you oblige me, William, and do all I ask of you for one day?'

'For one day, and every day!' exclaimed William eagerly.

'Then do not let my friends wait longer,' said Sophy. 'Come, mamma, let us go home.'

'Are you not at home?' said Mr. Lester curiously.

'No papa. We left this because the sea-air was too keen for mamma; but you will like our other home better still. Mamma will tell you all about it as we walk. Let us make haste, because we promised to lose no time, you know.—And she took William's arm, and pressed on first. 'O William!' she said tenderly, 'what a blessing it is to find both one's parents alive!—What a blessing to have a kind father and mother!'

'It is,' replied he with a sigh.

'You sigh, William dear,' she added; 'have you no father and mother?'

'No—that is—yes; but I am not friends with them,' faltered William.

'What! not friends with your father and mother, William? Why, how is that? How can people be unfriendly with their father and mother? There must surely be something bad about them if their very son abandons them.'

'No, love; they are everything that is good and kind; and—'

'It is you, then, who must be a bad man!' said Sophy, gently taking away her arm. 'How can I respect a son who will not be friends with a good father and mother?'

'The fact is, dear Sophy,' exclaimed William eagerly, 'it is simply that our tempers are different. We could not agree; we had a quarrel.'

'And do you mean to keep it up. William—a quarrel with your father and mother?' asked Sophy gravely.

'One cannot argue with you; but I will explain all, and leave you to judge me. By your advice I will then be guided.' And here William Harvey told his story, calmly and dispassionately, without disclosing his name, but with scrupulous regard for truth, and rather for thank against his father. So animated did he become, that he never remarked that for ten minutes he had been standing still, restrained from advancing by the gentle pressure of Sophy's arm. 'And now, my beloved,' said he fondly, 'what would you have me to do? Command: I will obey.'

'I will have you, Henry Templeton, step with me into your father's carriage, and drive 'home'—to your own home, and my home, where your parents are waiting for you with an impatience you can readily understand!'

'Henry Templeton! you know my name, you have been living in my father's house; your home is my home!' said the young man wildly.

'Within a few months of your departure, I became the inmate of Leascombe Park, as companion to your widowed sister; the handwriting of your letters did the rest. They have read them all, Henry,' said the young girl, now as timid as a child.

'Then let us go,' cried the young man—'let us go and ask their blessing.' And he leaped into the carriage, which, in twenty minutes, swept them up the broad avenue of the park, to stop only at the door of the hall.

Markman was standing there. Sir Edward and Lady Templeton were too much moved to come to meet them; but the servants raised such a clamor, that they knew all was right; and in one minute more, the Hope of Leascombe was embraced by his mother, while one warm pressure of the hand was sufficient explanation be-