

One Of The Six Hundred

Continued from last issue.

"Yes; Newton Calderwood Norcliff—
—and yours?"
"Agnes Auriol."
"Good heavens!" I almost exclaim-
ed, as the whole mystery of her life and
manner burst with a new light upon
me.

So my mysterious incognita was that
poor girl of whom the mess had whis-
pered. Berkeley's mistress—Agnes
Auriol—the girl whose letter—a heart-
breaking one, likely—he had dropped
at Calderwood, and which he had burn-
ed so carefully when I restored it to
him. So his were the initials that were
on the gold locket at her neck, and his
were the forage cap and cigar which had
attracted my attention on first enter-
ing the cottage parlour.

It was certainly an awkward situa-
tion for me, this self-introduction and
visit. If discovered there, I knew not
how far it might compromise me with
him, and still more with others whose
opinion I valued.

And as thoughts of the Chillinghams
and of the mess flashed upon me, I felt
that I would gladly have changed places
with Sinbad on the whale's back, or
Daniel in the lion's den.

CHAPTER XVII.

Oh, for the wings we used to wear,
When the heart was like a bird,
And floated through the summer air,
And painted all it looked on fair,
And sung to all it heard!

When fancy put the seal of truth
On all the promises of youth!

Hervey.

To have introduced myself abrupt-
ly to Mr. De Warr Berkeley's wedded
wife, if he had one, might be explained
away satisfactorily enough; but to

present myself to Miss Auriol, related
as she was to him, there could be no
palliation whatever, and in duelling
days could have led to but one result
the pistol!

Something of what passed in my
mind, together with an air of bewilder-
ment, must have been apparent in my
face, for the young lady, after gazing
at me earnestly, as if her clear and
bright, but dark blue eyes would read
my very soul, looked suddenly down,
and said, while her colour came and
went, and her bosom heaved painfully.

"I can perceive, Captain Norcliff,
that my name explains much to you;
but not all—oh not all. There are
secrets in my short but wretched life
that you can never learn—secrets known
to God and to myself alone!"
"It really explains nothing to me,
Miss Auriol," I replied with a smile,
being willing to relieve her embarrass-
ment, by affecting ignorance of that
which the whole mess knew—her ambi-
guous position; "for I am aware that—
that we never met before."

"But you have heard, perhaps—you
know Mr. Berkeley?"

"Of ours—yes; he was in Scotland
with me a few weeks ago."

"That I know too well for my own
peace," said the girl, coughing spas-
modically and applying her handker-
chief to her mouth.

"He is frequently in this quarter, is
he not?"

"Yes."

"At this pretty cottage, perhaps?"

"No, sir."

"Where then—the Reculvers?"

"At Chinnillingham Park. Since
he has begun to visit there he scarcely
ever comes here. Have you not heard—
have you not heard," she repeated,
making a fearful effort at articulation,
"that he is to be married to the only
daughter and heiress of Lord Chilling-
ham?"

I felt that I became nearly as pale as
herself, while replying—

"I certainly have not heard of such
an alliance; it is probably the silly hu-
mour of a gossiping neighborhood."

She shook her head sadly, and seated
herself with an air of lassitude.

"Are you sure that Mr. Berkeley was
not here—after I escorted you home last
night?"

"I am unfortunately, but too sure.
Why do you ask?" she inquired, look-
ing up, with her eyes dilated.

"Because I could have sworn that I
passed him on horseback in the dusk."

"Riding in this direction?"

"No, towards Canterbury."

"Ah, towards Chillingham Park, no
doubt—there shines his loadstar now!"

"And mine too," thought I, bitterly.

The girl's intelligence, whether false
or true, crushed my heart more than I
can describe.

Aware, however, of the imperative
necessity of retiring, I took my hat and
bade her adieu; but for the purpose of
learning more of Berkeley's movements
I promised, when riding that way, to
call again and inquire for her health.

"The locket you have just restored
was Mr. Berkeley's gift to me upon a
fatal day," said she; "and, believe me,
sir, that—that whatever you may
have heard of me, or whatever you

may think, I have been 'more sinned
against than sinning."

In another minute I was in the saddle
and on my way back to Canterbury.

Though she did not know it, nor
could she know it, this unfortunate girl
had been planting thorns in my breast,
I could not believe in the reality of such
perfidy on the part of Louisa—of such
facility on the part of the haughty
Countess, her mother—or of such rapid
progress on the part of Berkeley with
all his wealth, the hard-won thousands
of the late departed brewer.

How I longed now for the arrival of
Cora, who might solve or explain away
some of the doubts that surrounded me.

My heart swelled with rage; and yet
I felt that I loved Louisa with a passion
that bade fair to turn my brain!

As Miss Auriol would be certain to
know something of Berkeley's move-
ments, and as she and her faithful fol-
lower, old Mrs. Goldsworthy, might
prove invaluable in acquainting me
with what passed at Chillingham Park,
for they had jealousy to spur on their
espionage, I resolved to visit once or
twice again the cottage at the Recul-
vers, when I could do so unseen.

This timid, little knowing how greatly
the poor girl would interest me in her
sad fate, and still less foreseeing that
the course I pursued was a perilous
one. But the agony of my anxiety,
the bitterness of my suspicions, and
my love for Louisa, overcame every
scruple, and blinded me to everything
else.

She, on the other hand, was natur-
ally anxious to learn the movements of
Berkeley, whom, notwithstanding his
cold desertion, she loved blindly and
desperately. Thus we could be useful
to each other.

My heart recoiled at times from such
a mode of working; but I could have
no other recourse till my cousin Cora
came.

As I rode up to the door of the hotel,
my heart leaped on seeing Willie Pit-
bado, awaiting me there.

"A letter at last!" I exclaimed, as he
came forward.

"From the colonel, sir," said he,
touching his cocked hat.

"The colonel?" I repeated in disap-
pointment and surprise as I tore the
note, the contents of which ran briefly
thus:—

"My dear Norcliff,—As the barracks
here are becoming uncomfortably crow-
ded, by the Indian depots and so forth,
your troop is detached to Canterbury
for a week or two, to share the quar-
ters of the hussars. You will remain
there, probably, till the route comes.
You need not return to head-quarters,
unless you choose; but may report your
self to the lieutenant-colonel command-
ing the consolidated cavalry depot at
Canterbury. This is a stranger day at
mess. We are to have an unusual
number of guests, and the band. Wish
you were with us.

Believe me, &c., &c.,
LIONEL BEVERLEY, Lieut-Col.

"P. S.—You will drill the troop once
daily to the sword and lance exercise
on horse back."

"How lucky?" thought I. "I shall
have Canterbury for the basis of my
operations, and the Reculvers for an
advanced post; quartered here, and
Chillingham close by!—When does the
troop march, in Willie?"

"To-morrow forenoon, sir, under Mr
Jocelyn."

"Good. You will take my card to
the barrack-master, and my horses to
the stables, and receive over my quar-
ters. I shall remain at the hotel until
the troop comes in."

I did not ride to the Reculvers on
that afternoon, though I scoured every
road in the vicinity of the city, by Stru-
ry, Bramling, and Horton.

Next morning I went for a mile or
two in the direction of Ospringe, and
soon saw the troop advancing leisurely
with their horses at a walk, along the
dusty Kentish highway, their keen
heads glittering with all their bright
appointments in the sunshine, their
scarlet and white banners, and the
long plumes in the men's square-topped
caps dancing in the wind, as I trotted
up and joined them, though in mufti.

My lieutenant, Frank Jocelyn, and
the cornet, Sir Harry Scarlett, were
both pleasant and gentlemanly young
men, and would have been a most wel-
come addition to my residence in Can-
terbury, but for the hopes, the fears,
and plans which occupied me. They
asked me how I liked the cathedral
city, and there was a smile on their
faces, which, when taken in conjunction
with my secret thoughts, galled and
fretted me. Yet I could not notice it.

Accompanied by a multitude of the
great "unwashed," we proceeded
straight to those spacious barracks
which are covered for cavalry, artillery
and infantry, on the road that leads to

the Isle of Thanet, and there the lan-
cers were rapidly "told off" to their
quarters, the horses stabled, corned,
and watered.

We dined that evening with a hussar
corps, of whose mess we were made hon-
orary members while we remained in
Canterbury and from Jocelyn I learned
incidentally that for the last three
days Berkeley had scarcely been in
barracks. The hope that I had har-
rassed myself in vain passed away now,
and fear alone remained.

While the first set of decanters were
traversing the table, I slipped away
unnoticed, and without changing my
uniform, took the road at a rasping
pace direct for the Reculvers. The
moon was just rising from the sea, and
the last notes of the curfew were dying
away, as I drew up at the door of Miss
Auriol's cottage.

She was alone, and sitting at tea, to
which, she bade me welcome, in a man-
ner that showed she half doubted the
honesty of my visit, and betrayed such
emotions of shame, confusion, and awk-
wardness, I felt myself quite an intrud-
er. But I simply asked if she had heard
more of Berkeley.

She admitted that she had, and stated
mournfully that for the last three
days he had been constantly at the
park, thus confirming what Frank
Jocelyn had told me.

In the course of another visit or two,
I gradually learned piecemeal all the
poor girl's unhappy history, and how
she became the victim, first of evil for-
tune, and afterwards of a cold-blooded
man of the world as De Warr Berkeley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Where are th' illusions bright and vain
That fancy boded forth?
Sunk to their silent caves again,
Aurora of the north!

Oh! who would live those visions o'er
All brilliant though they seem,
Since earth is put a desert shore,
And life a dreary dream!

Moir.

She was the orphan daughter of the
poor curate of a secluded village on the
borders of Wales. Her mother, also
the daughter of a curate, had died
when Agnes was very young. She was
thus left to be the sole prop and com-
fort of the old man's declining years
and he loved her dearly—all the more
dearly that, with a little brother, a
beautiful, golden-haired boy (the same
whose miniature I remarked), she alone
survived of all their children; few in
number.

The rest had perished early; for all
possessed that terrible heritage,
seeds of which Agnes was now maturing
in her own bosom—consumption.

One by one the old clergyman had
seen them borne forth from his little
thatched parsonage, under the ivy-
clad lyke-gate of the village church,
and laid by her mothers side, a row of
little grassy graves, where the purple
and golden crocuses grew in spring,
and the white-eyed marguerites in
summer, all as gaily as if the last hopes
of a broken heart were not buried be-
neath them.

In the fulness of time the shadow of
death again fell on the old parsonage,
and the curate's white hairs were laid
in the dust, close by the quiet little Sax
on church in which he had ministered
so long; and now the ten graves of the
mark them.

"In the days this last calamity befell
me, Captain Norcliff," said Miss Auriol,
"when my poor father was wont
to take my face caressingly between his
tremulous old hands, and kissing my
forehead, and smoothing my hair,
would tell me that my name, Agnes,
signified gentleness—a lamb, in fact—
that it came from the Latin word Agnes,
and when he would bless me with a
heart as pure as ever offered up a pray-
er to God, how little could I foresee the
creature I was to become! Oh, my
father—oh, my mother! what a life
mine has been; and after my father
died, what a youth!"

"I have often thought of the words
of Mademoiselle de Enclos, when, in
the flush of her beauty, she exclaimed
to the Prince of Conde, 'Had any one
proposed such a life to me at one time,
I should have died of grief and fright!'"

"So my father passed away; the new
incumbent came to take our mansion,
with its humble furniture at a valuation.
After paying a few debts, with a small
sum, I found myself with my little bro-
ther, who was sickly and ailing, in Lon-
don, seeking subsistence by exerting
the talents I possessed—music, chiefly,
for I am pretty well accomplished as a
musician."

She continued to tell me all of her
heart-breaking struggles, her perils
and bitter mortifications, and of the
acute sufferings of that little fair-head-
ed brother, on whom all her love and
hope were centred; and how, daily in
the fetid atmosphere of a humble lodg-
ing, far away from the green fields,
the bright sunshine and the rustling
wood of that dear old parsonage on the
slope of the Denbigh hills, the poor child
grew worse and more feeble; and how
her stored heart was wrung as her little
treasure of money melted away like snow
in spring; her few ornaments went
next, and no employment came.

How misery depressed, and horrible
forebodings of the future haunted her;
how she remembered all the harrowing
tales she had read—and such as we

may daily read—of the poor in London
and how they perish under the feet of
the vast multitude who rush onward
in the race for existence, or in the pur-
suit of pleasure; and how thoughts and
doubts of God himself, and of His mer-
cy and justice, at times came over her
even as they came at times, now when
the man she had loved and trusted
most on earth had deceived her.

Employed at last as a hired musician
she was out frequently to play the
piano at balls and evening parties, for
half a guinea per night, in London, and
thus made a slender subsistence for the
suffering child and for herself.

After receiving her fee from the hand
of some sleepy butler or supercilious
upper-servant, as she nightly wrapped
her scanty cloak about her, and quit-
ting the heated and crowded rooms,
hurried through the dark, wet, and
snowy streets to an almost squalid lodg-
ing which even her native neatness
failed to brighten, and to the couch
where the poor, thin, wakeful boy,
with his great, sad earnest eyes, await-
ed her; ere long she began to find a cold
and cough settling upon her delicate
chest; and then the terror seized her
that if she became seriously ill, and
failed to obey her patrons at the nearest
music-shop where would the boy get
food? And if she died—in a hospital
perhaps—what would be his fate, his
end, in other and less tender hands than
hers?

Then, as she wept over him in the
silence of the night, and remembered
the prayers her old father had taught
her, she would strive to become more
composed, and sleep like the child that
lay hushed in her bosom; but her dream
if not full of terrors for the present,
were ever haunted by the sad memories
of the past; for the kind faces and sweet
smiles of the dead came vividly before
her, and the familiar sound of their
voices seemed to mingle in the drowsy
hum of the London streets without,
or with the murmur of her native Dee,
and the pleasant rustle of the summer
leaves in the woods of the old parsonage,
she would never see again, or the
green hills of Denbigh that overshadowed
her.

Foreseeing and fearing that the child
would be taken from her, she assumed
her pencil, in the use of which she was
very skilful and accomplished, and thus
produced the likeness that hung in her
little parlour. In this labour of love
I was struck by the close resemblance
it bore to herself.

On one occasion, at some West-end
party, she remembered having seen me.
On beholding me in uniform now the re-
collection came fully upon her; and it
would seem that, on the night in ques-
tion, when all else had forgotten the
past and weary musician amid the
glamour and merriment of the supper-
room, I had sent her cake and wine, and
the former she had secretly pocketed
for her little brother; but of this casu-
al rencontre I had no recollection
whatever.

On another occasion, it happened
that the neglected and lonely, but use-
ful "young person" past whom youth,
beauty, and merriment whirled in
white satin and diamonds, lace and
flowers, attracted the attention of Mr.
De Warr Berkeley. Her soft and wist-
ful glances at her former equals caught
his watchful eye; and the graceful po-
liteness with which she acceded to their
contrary suggestions to play quicker
or slower, together with the great remark-
ability of her execution, were all remem-
bered by him.

It was on one of these nights, like
some others, when old companions
passed her by in the waltz and galop,
and former friends too, without a smile
or glance of recognition; yet, as she
thought of the child at home, with a
flushed and swollen heart she prayed
no and on mechanically.

Some unusual slight had been put
upon her, and while she played in the
bitterness of her soul, her hot tears fell
upon the keys of the piano. At that
moment for Berkeley to introduce him-
self was an easy matter. He did it so
quietly, so respectfully, that the poor
girl felt soothed. She never mistrusted
him, and, as her evil fortune would
have it, he met her three nights, almost
consecutively, at three different places.
An intimacy was thus established.

On the third, the rain was pouring
through the desolate streets of a sub-
urban district in torrents. The soaked
shrubbery and the railings of the
garden shone flickering through the
lamp-light, and the dark clouds swept
past in lomy masses overhead. It
was a wild night or morning rather and
not even a policeman, in his oilskin
cape, seemed to be abroad.

Gathering her threadbare shawl
tightly round her, Agnes, terrified and
bewildered, was setting forth afoot,
timid and shivering, on her way home
having some miles of London to tra-
verse, when Berkeley, who had artfully
lingered to the last, respectfully offered
her a seat in his cabriolet, and by set-
ting her down where she mentioned, dis-
covered her residence, and marked her
for his prey.

Berkeley's attentions filled the girl
with gratitude instead of alarm; and he
soon inspired her with a passion for
him. "The more a young girl believes
in purity," says a writer, "the more
readily she abandons herself, if not to
her lover, at least to her love; because,
being without distrust, she is without
strength; and, to make himself beloved
by such a one, is a triumph which any

man of five-and-twenty may se-
cure himself whenever he pleases. And
this is true, though young girls are
surrounded by extreme vigilance and
every possible rampart."

To trace the gradual and downward
course she trod, she how artfully Ber-
keley gained an ascendancy over her
by the interest he affected to feel in her
little sibling brother and how lavishly
he supplied the means of such com-
forts as the poor child had never pos-
sessed even in his father's homely par-
sonage, can neither be for me to de-
scribe, nor my reader to know.

Suffice that the gentle Agnes fell in-
to the snare, as our common ancestress
did before, and became what I now
found her to be.

From that hour she had never
known real peace, and the memory of
her parents, blended with the agonies
of remorse, haunted her day and night.
As a drowning wretch will cling to
straws, so clung she to the desperate
hope that Berkeley would love her
while life lasted, and that he would re-
deem his promise by marrying her, for
she loved him blindly and devotedly,
with all the strength of her young heart
and of a first and only passion.

The change now, from work all day
and music all night, with trudging to
and fro, through rain or sleet, was dou-
blet great; but the change brought
with it no joy, no peace of mind.

Had she a thousand caprices, in the
first flush of her amour, her rone lov-
er would have gratified them all; but
luckily, her tastes were simple, and she
shrank from proffered boxes at the play
or opera, from rural parties, and every-
thing that made her public.

By retribution was coming now; her
tears and sorrow fretted him, and he
began to absent himself. The luxuries
with which he surrounded her brought
to her no happiness, and to her little
brother no health, for the child died,
passing peacefully away in his
sleep, and was buried—not in the plea-
sant green village burying-ground where
his kindred lay—but in a horrid fetid
London churchyard, amid the human
loam of ages; and when the little silver
mounted coffin was carried away, Ag-
nes Auriol, as she cast a bouquet of
lily of the valley on it, felt that she
had no real tie on earth, unless it was
her lover, and from him even she shrank
at such a time as this.

She stood alone by the little grave,
the only mourner there. She had
thought of asking Berkeley to accom-
pany her; but, somehow, his presence
would seem a species of pollution by the
grave of the pure and sinless little boy,
and the face of her father seemed ever
before her.

Her unwelcome repentance fretted
him, and without compunction he saw
the agony of her spirit, and how the
lustre faded to her eye, and the roses
died in her cheek. Sedulously she en-
deavored to conceal the sorrow that
embittered her existence, as she per-
ceived that it only served to disgust
him. And as this sorrow grew, so did
her strength diminish, and the hectic
flush of consumption and premature
decline spread over her delicate little
face.

He was frequently absent from her
now for weeks, and those periods seem-
ed insupportable, for the love of him
had become a habit; and to break that
habit seemed as if it would snap the
feeble tenure of her life.

He ceased, too, to supply her with
money. Her former musical connec-
tions were completely broken. She was
frequently without the means of sub-
sistence save by the sale of her orna-
ments; and at last she had parted with
all save her mother's wedding ring,
which she wished to be buried with her.

In January last she discovered that
Berkeley was at Calderwood Glen in
Scotland. She wrote to him a most
pious letter, to which, however, c-
corded no reply; and at that time
she must have died, had her nurse,
Goldsworthy—an old and faithful ser-
vant of her father's, not discovered and
brought her to this cottage near the Re-
culvers.

When the lancers were at Maidstone
Berkeley had visited her from time to
time, and pretended still his old views
of marriage to amuse her, but trammell-
ed with secrecy; and latterly he had
denied her letters entirely. Moreover
she had come to the bitter and sting-
ing conclusion that he hated her, as she
possessed letters of his which legally
compromised him.

He who does another person an in-
jury never forgives him for what he has
endured. He alike hates and fears
him; and in this spirit did Berkeley
fear and hate the poor girl whom he had
wronged.

Such was the plain, unvarnished
story of Agnes Auriol, which she related
in the intervals that were unobtruded
by a hard, consumptive, and undoubt-
edly, "churchyard cough."

"I have but one wish now," she said,
"as she lay back exhausted; and that
I cannot gratify."
"Is it so difficult to achieve?" I asked
in a low voice.

"There are insuperable difficulties."
"And this desire?"
"Is to leave this place forever," she
said; "almost in a whisper, while the hot
tears ran unheeded down her pale
cheeks; and—
"Go where?"
"To look on poor papa's grave, and
on dear mamma's and then die."

"No, no, no, do not speak in this
hopeless manner," I urged, feeling that
I, a young officer of cavalry, was a very
unfitting comforter or adviser at such
a time; and I rose to retire; for the
evening was now far advanced.

"This craving is so strong in the poor
lamb's heart, sir, that she will be a
dying as sure as we look on her, unless
it be gratified, and about an angel comes
from heaven; I don't know how it is to
be done," said Mrs. Goldsworthy,
weeping noisily, like all people of her
class, as she ushered me to the door,
and to my horse, which was pawing
the ground impatiently, with the dew
on his coat and saddle.

"Take her there without loss of time,
my good friend," said I.

"She divided her last crown with a
poor fisherman yesterday, to get some
comforts for his wife."

"Good heavens! Is she then with
out means?"

"Quite sir; and if Mr. Berkeley—"
I struck my spurred heels into the
gravel at the sound of his name, and
exclaimed—

"Poor girl, I shall give her the means
"You, sir?"

"Yes."

"Oh, sir—sir—but she'll never take
it from you," said Mrs. Goldsworthy,
sobbing into her apron with great vo-
ciferation.

"She must; and let her remember
me in her prayers when I am far away.
At eight tomorrow evening I shall be
here again for the last time, my worthy
friend, and will supply her with what
she requires."

Before the nurse could reply I was in
my saddle, and had closed the iron gate
but just as I rode off, I nearly trod
down a man who was muffled in a pon-
cho cloak, an who leant against the
gate pillar—whether listening or a-
sleep, I knew not; yet, I had looked
more closely, I might have detected
the moustached face of my quondam
friend, Mr. De Warr Berkeley. For
this loiterer, or eavesdropper, proved
in the sequel to be no other than he.

To outflank me, and to place him-
self, his fortune (and his debts) at the
complete disposal of Lady Louisa Loft-
us, was now the plan—the game—
of my friendly brother officer; and with
what success we shall see ere long.

I was full of thought while riding
slowly home to the barracks on the
Thanet Road; I longed for Cora's
coming to unravel the mystery of
Louisa's conduct, and yet dreaded to
face my cousin or broach the matter
to her. I was inspired with sympathy
for the poor creature I had just quitted,
and full of indulgence for her modes of
life, and excuses for her fate and fall.
Her singular beauty greatly aided
emotions such as these, for the morbid state
of her health lent a wondrous lustre to
her dark blue eyes, and marvellous
transparency to her lovely complexion;
and I felt extreme satisfaction that it
was in my power to gratify a wish that
was, perhaps her last one—to pay a
pilgrimage to the resting-place of her
parent.

The sweet verse of honest Gold-
smith occurred to me—

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom is—to die.

At the same time I thought it very
doubtful whether any such catastrophe
would wring the padded bosom of Ber-
keley.

Had Agnes Auriol been a wrinkled
crone it may be a matter for considera-
tion whether I—a young officer of lan-
cers—would have been so exceedingly
philanthropic in her cause. I hope I
showned.

On arriving at the barracks, my first
task was to despatch Pitblado by the
night train to head-quarters, with a