

CHAPTER XLIV.
A PAINT CLUB.

Weak, faint and footsore, kept up only by the most extreme effort, and haunted by a terror which was as wild and unreasoning as to others it would have appeared absurd, poor Moll Arkshaw pursued her way towards Manchester.

It might be going into the very lion's mouth, yet what must she do?

She must get to London.

She knew too little of the geography of the country to find out any other way of getting to London except by starting from Manchester to the metropolis by train.

Fortunately she had three or four pounds in her pocket, money given to her by Florence the very evening of their abduction, to pay certain expenses incurred by the expectant bride.

This Moll had still with her, and intending to repay it, if she ever had the chance, she had no hesitation whatever in using it.

The fear uppermost in her mind was that Bob Brindley might discover her escape from the mine, follow, and murder her.

Willie Bolton would thus remain in prison, his innocence never be established, and the wicked murderer would be successful and triumphant.

Any one possessing a cooler set of nerves, and better acquainted with the laws and the ways of the world, than poor, frightened, simple-hearted Moll, would have gone direct to the headquarters of the police, satisfied them of her identity, told her story, and have placed herself under their protection until her enemy was secure.

But the ordeal she had gone through, the terror which Brindley had succeeded in inspiring in her mind, which made her believe him to be far more powerful for evil than he really was, took from her any thought or hope of encountering him successfully, and made her desire only to hide herself until the murderer was in safe custody.

Consequently, more like an escaped criminal than a free subject, and one in a position to denounce her enemy, Moll entered Manchester, just as the bells from numerous factories pealed forth in the early morning air, calling the hands to their daily work.

She had on the large black tweed cloak in which she had been wrapped when taken down into the mine, and she had found a colored handkerchief in her pocket, which she had tied over her head.

Such a costume as this might do very well to go to work at a factory in, but would scarcely be the thing for her to wear in travelling to London.

It was a bonnet or a hat, some covering for the head she wanted; her cloak and the rest of her dress would do well enough. The question was how to get a hat at that early hour, before the shops were open.

The cheap train would, no doubt, start early, and she had not too much time or money to spare; consequently, unless chance favored her in buying a covering for her head, she would have to travel as she was.

She had nearly reached the railway station when a little girl, evidently late to work, turning a corner sharply, ran against her. In doing so the girl's hat, which had not been properly fastened, fell off.

"Elph, lass, will thee sell thee hat?" asked Moll, eagerly.

The child looked at her and thought she was jesting, for the hat was an old and shabby one, of simple black straw, much worn, and with a band and bow of crape on it.

"Aw've lost my hat," added Moll, hastily, "and aw'm going on a journey; aw'll give thee three shillings for thine."

"An' wha'll aw do?" asked the child, tempted by being offered six times the value of the article of attire.

"Thee may have my handkerchief into the bargain," was the reply.

"All root."

The transfer was complete, and if the child was late at the factory, and fined for being so, she had at least the satisfaction of having been well paid for it.

It was the evening of the same day, that the girl was seen by her mother, who had been at Oldham all day, visiting a sick relative, wearing this handkerchief as she returned from work.

Her natural question as to what had become of her daughter's hat, resulted in the girl, who was not remarkable for speaking the truth, asserting that she had lost it.

Where did she get the handkerchief from, was the next question.

"Aw found it," was the reply.

Not believing the story, the mother took the handkerchief in her hand, and examined it closely.

Red and white, with nothing extraordinary about it, she was just going to put it down, when her eyes detected a name, written with marking ink and half washed out, in one of the corners of it.

With some difficulty she spelt out the name, "Moll Arkshaw."

"Moll—Moll Arkshaw," she repeated, the word and name sounding strangely familiar. "Where have aw heard it? Ah! aw remembers, at Oldham. Where didst thee get this? Tell me the truth, or aw'll strap it out on yo'."

The threat of the strap was not an idle one, as the girl knew to her cost, but the very fear of it only made her persist more obstinately in her assertion.

Her mother could not, she mentally argued, find out how she became possessed of the handkerchief unless she herself told her.

Besides, if she told her parent of the three shillings she had been paid for her hat, the

money would be instantly demanded of her, and, as she had already spent sixpence of it, she would not only be required to give up the remaining half-crown, but would get a good dose of the strap for her extravagance.

Being firmly convinced of this, she stuck to her story with so much persistence that her mother would have believed her had the case been less serious, and the matter would have been allowed to drop.

But Oldham, Manchester, and indeed the whole country, had been ringing that day, and indeed the previous one too—for news flies fast—with the terrible murder and abduction.

To-day large rewards had been offered by the government for the detection of the murderer or murderers, and a second reward offered by Mrs. Gresham for any trace of the missing women.

The cotton spinner's mother had suddenly been aroused by her son's ravings, and the suspicious glances and questions directed towards her, to the discomfort, not to say danger, of her position.

She had uttered so many meaningless threats against the girl whom her son seemed determined to marry, had vowed so insanely and persistently that he should not marry her, that she would oppose it at any and every cost, and now it was effectually prevented by the mysterious and violent disappearance of the intended bride.

People who had heard all these threats naturally suspected that she had kept her word, or at least been an accomplice, directly or indirectly, in the crime.

By her son John's advice, she offered a large reward for the discovery of the two girls, or any clue which should lead to their return to their home and friends.

Those who knew the old lady's violent temper and unscrupulous will were not blinded by this clever move.

But as there was no real evidence against her, they had to be content with wagging their heads knowingly, asserting they were not such fools as some people thought them, and still persistently clung to their opinion.

The two rewards, however, excited the cupidity of many persons who would have sold their nearest and dearest—nay, even themselves—for gold, and to this number Betty Jones, the mother of the girl who had sold her hat to Moll, belonged.

All day the thought had been running in her head, if she could but find the missing girls, or discover some trace of them, what a prize in gold she might become possessed of.

Two hundred pounds to any one who should find and restore the two girls; fifty pounds to any one giving information or a clue which should lead to the discovery of either of them.

Mrs. Jones had a clue—she was sure she had. Fifty pounds for this handkerchief; just imagine it!

The very thought made her feel giddy, and once more she tried to elicit something more like a reasonable and believable story from her daughter.

In vain.

There are some children who are uncommonly like costermongers' donkeys—the more you beat them the more obstinate they become.

A little judicious kindness might have made them tractable to begin with; but unfortunately kindness is not tried until harshness has failed, and then it is too late.

The animal and child alike don't believe in it.

They expect treachery, for their confidence is gone, or look upon the experiment of kindness as a sign of weakness, and harshness again succeeding only appears to justify them in their belief.

Hence Betty Jones having beaten her daughter Sally with a strap until the child quivered under the cruel treatment, and her own brawny arms ached, threatened to send the girl to prison, and started off with the avowed intention of fetching a policeman.

Sally had no dread of the policeman.

Indeed, she had been beaten to that state of savage desperation which scarcely admits of the sensation of fear.

But she was determined that her mother should not have the treasure in her pocket; thus, sore and in pain as she was, she crawled to the little strip of ground at the back of the cottage in which they lived, dug a small hole in the soft earth, deposited her three silver coins, two shillings and a sixpence, in it, and having thus buried her hoard, the doggedly silent little creature crawled back to the room and lay down before the fire in the same position in which her mother had left her.

Not that she expected her worthy parent back soon, for it was not the first time that she had been left alone with similar threats, never to be fulfilled, and often forgotten before her return.

It was, therefore, with more surprise than might that she heard a heavy, tramping step accompany and pause with her mother at the door, and then, looking up, she saw a veritable policeman enter the room.

A child less accustomed to hardship and severity had been frightened into telling how she became possessed of the large cotton handkerchief, or any one more used to kindness would have been coaxed in the same course by her mother's new attempt at kindness.

But Sally was past all this. She had been thrashed until all the flesh and most nervous and susceptible feelings of her nature had been blunted and warped, and the feeling most predominant in her mind at the present moment was sulky defiance and a thirst for revenge.

It was, therefore, an unfortunate circumstance for Mrs. Jones that she promised her refractory

child a bright silk dress if she would only tell all she knew, and enable her mother to gain the promised reward.

Sally, however, was not to be duped.

She had been promised too many things even during her short lifetime, promises never kept and never intended to be, and she was not to be tricked into obliging her mother in this way now.

"Come, young 'un," said the policeman roughly, though not unkindly, "you'd best make a clean breast out; aw'll only have to look thee up if thee don't."

"Aw canna tell thee what aw don't know mysen," was the defiant reply.

"Well, come along wi' yo'."

"Aw will na go; aw bean't a thief."

"Yo'll walk, or aw mon carry yo'."

"Aw will na."

Whereupon, without more ado, the tall, strong man picked up the girl in his arms and despite her screams and struggles, carried her off to the police station, accompanied by her mother.

Here, however, they were not more successful.

Threats and bribes alike failed to get any other account of the handkerchief from the girl, except that she had found it just after she had lost her hat.

The consequence of all this was, that with her mother's consent, the refractory witness was detained in charge all night, and though her room and bed were far superior to those to which she had been accustomed, her consciousness that she was a prisoner drove sleep from her eyelids.

Her anger and resentment had worn off by the next morning, however, and after a small amount of persuasion from the wife of the superintendent of police she told the circumstance of her meeting with Moll, and the exchange of head-gear.

After numerous questions, a full description of the pretty mill girl, even to the coal dust that was upon her, was obtained, and no doubt as to identity left on the minds of those in pursuit of her.

The matter was becoming still more complicated, however, at every step.

If Moll and her companion Florence had been carried away by violence, how did it happen that one of the girls was in the street, free and alone, and yet shunning recognition and hastening away from the very place which, if only injured and innocent, she would have been expected to come to?

Conjecture was useless. There was nothing to be done but follow and capture her.

Things easily said, but difficult of accomplishment, for already Moll had thirty-six hours' start of them, and they could not even vaguely guess whither she had gone.

That Sally had an extra cut with the strap from her mother for holding out so long, and then imparting her information to the policeman's wife, might be expected; but Sally had her revenge, for no portion of the reward ever fell into her mother's greedy clutches.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

"So you are really going to marry that old man, Mary?"

The questioner was Edward Leister, the artist, and a grievous, almost contemptuous expression rested on his fair, handsome face.

"He is not old," was the evasive reply.

"He is old for you, much too old," was the next observation.

"I am the best judge of that," was the petulant rejoinder.

"True," he said sadly, "then it is settled?"

For the first time, the girl raised her eyes.

She was trying to be defiant, trying to brave out her own willful, foolish act, but the expression of tender manly reproach which beamed upon her from the bright blue eyes into which she looked, was too much for the shallow mist of pride and pique with which she had surrounded herself. Resentment, fortitude, all gave way; and not knowing what else to do, she took refuge in a woman's usual resource, a flood of tears.

Some women may look interesting when sobbing and crying; the number to whom tears are an improvement, however, is so small that the experiment is somewhat perilous.

Indeed, it was the recollection of what a fright a fit of crying made her, that induced pretty Mary Garrison to refrain from indulging long in the dangerous luxury.

"Then you do love me, Mary?"

Why would the man always repeat that objectionable form of love-making.

I am sure I don't know, and I don't think he could exactly have answered the question himself.

Mary at least did not like it.

He had said once that he thought she loved him, and the observation had not only irritated her, but confirmed her in the determination to deny and hide the feeling.

Mr. Ashleigh, however, had been a trifle too much for Mary of late.

He was heavy, prosy, dull, and it must be admitted, according to the young girl's ideas, disagreeably spoony.

Mary could have forgiven anything but this.

Had it been possible for her to love him, the case might have been different, but the prospect of becoming an old man's darling was not at the present moment alluring.

The period for the wedding was approaching, and it must be admitted she had spent the last few weeks wondering how she could escape from the fetters with which she had bound herself,

instead of in pleasant anticipation of the happiness in store for her.

So Mary burst into tears, and of course Edwin thought it his duty to console her, which naturally made her grief flow out afresh.

(To be continued.)

THE PRINTER-FIEND.

BY P. D.

The night was dark, and not a star Peep'd through the gathering gloom; And silence brooded o'er the type In the composing room.

The printers had to supper gone, And vacant were their places, When through the door a villain crept, And stole Bill Norman's spaces!

Oh, foulest wrong beneath the sun! Oh, deepest of disgraces! The darkest crime that can be done Is that of stealing spaces!

Bill went to "lunch," and left his case Filled—running o'er—with letter, And thought he would return again When copy should get fatter.

When he came back he took his place Again before his cases— You should have seen his attitude When he beheld his spaces!

It was no time for clarity, Or other Christian graces; He wildly cried—"I'll dot the eyes Of him who stole my spaces!"

The Fiend still lives and walks the earth, And so must walk for ever! He cannot die—a wretch like him—For rest awaits him never!

And printers for long years to come Will tremble at their cases, Well knowing that his spirit still Is fond of stealing spaces!

EDUCATING A WIFE.

A CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

BY ROBERT DALE OWEN.

Concluded.

Thus reassured, I suggested that it might be weeks before my father returned, and that it would be best to send him a letter, carefully prepared, at once. A copy of this letter, covering sixteen pages of note-paper and dated March 3, 1823, lies before me. It was in my sister's handwriting and signed by her, though in truth a joint production. I had put my heart into it; and for that matter, so had Anne, who made some excellent points. Here is one:—

"Do not imagine, my dear papa, that I intend to make a fine lady of this little girl; nothing is further from my thoughts. I wish to render her independent, and able by and by to take care of herself. With such an education as I propose to give her, she will, when she grows up, be a valuable instructor of youth; and how rarely do we meet with such a one! It shall be my study to prevent her acquiring idle or expensive habits, and to make my little charge much more diligent and orderly than you have ever seen us."

Then followed a diplomatic suggestion, intended, I am afraid, to put my father off the true scent. She told him:—

"In case I kept house for one of my brothers, she would, I am sure, prove a most agreeable companion for me; and, by affording me a never-failing source of amusement and interest, might enliven many hours I should otherwise spend in solitude."

The sly gypsy knew well enough that her elder brother, at least, was not likely to set up bachelor's hall and there to need a sister to preside; and that her pupil, instead of proving an amusement to her in the fraternal mansion, would probably there become a domestic blessing to somebody else. But of course it would never have done prematurely to suggest such a contingency as that.

Anne waited with an anxiety only less profound than my own for a reply. It was kind and favorable; and, my mother acquiescing, Jessie became a member of our family circle.

I was exultant; yet I put a still stricter guard than before on all I said and did when Jessie was present. It was a great exercise of self-control. No matter how numerous and brilliant the company in our drawing-room, I knew, by instinct, whether Jessie was there, and misad her at once if she withdrew. Young girls of my own age, beautiful, cultivated, and well-born,—and many such were, from time to time, inmates of Grassfield House,—all failed to awaken in me an emotion comparable to the feeling which the sight of that child, scarcely eleven years old when she came to us, uniformly called forth.

She seemed to win my parents' hearts, and they behaved admirably, making no distinction