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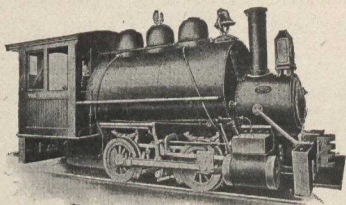
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"BRICK'S TASTELESS" is put up in eight (8) ounce bottles, retail price fifty (50) cents, and in twenty (20) ounce bottles, retail price one (1) dollar.

Life's Chequerboard

(Continued from page 16)

summoned in hot haste by half-a-dozen galloping grooms, to tell him that his friend of a lifetime was dead, and that Strode was awaiting a new owner.

CHAPTER II.

To and fro in the great hall, between the fire gleam and the shadows, Lesley Home was slowly walking up and down. The house, always silent with that silence with which a rich man can so easily surround himself—the silence of thick walls and massive doors, of deep-piled carpets and curtains, and the noiseless comings and goings of velvet-footed domestics—was hushed to-night to a deeper quiet. The stillness was something palpable, something which forced itself upon the attention. To-morrow the Laird of Strode would go forth for the last time. He would be laid with his fathers in the ruined nave of the old cathedral church at Dunkeith, but to-night he still held state in the old house which had once been his, and which in the majesty of Death he still possessed.

Lesley had come from the death-chamber, where she had looked her last look upon the still face. Though the high peace of death had descended upon it, it still bore the marks of the earth and of time in the deep lines which bitter brooding rather than the years had graven upon it. She had sought the chamber of the dead with the honest desire to leave behind her in that unjust presence the lingering sense of injustice, of wrong wantonly done to her maiden pride, which had rankled surely enough at times, ever since her cousin Adrian, as she called him, had departed so abruptly from Strode. For her uncle she could not feel more than the natural sorrow and awe at the sudden rupture of a lifelong tie of daily association, though he had been kind after his cold, indifferent fashion. She had stolen from the quiet room at last with a sob which was one of pity rather than of grief.

"Poor Uncle Richard! I pray God that he has found the happiness he always seemed to miss in life," was her parting thought.

Now, as she paced the hall, the future thrust out the past. It was the new chapter that was just about to open rather than that which was closing which held her thoughts. In this, though she chid herself remorsefully for it, she was but sharing the feelings of all to whom the name of Skene of Strode was one to conjure with. In farm and cothouse, up and down the long valley or scattered among the hills, in the old town of Dunkeith, everywhere the passing sigh of regret for the old master was quickening to the throb of expectation of the new. And who would that new master be, or would it be a mistress rather, who would reign at Strode, was the question which was hotly debated at the dinner-tables of the neighbouring gentry, down through every rank and grade of life to the taproom of the village inn or the wayside smithy, where each discussed it after his or her kind.

Lesley was quite aware of the gossip, and the consciousness of it brought every now and then a hot stain of red to her pale cheeks as she paced steadily up and down. The matter had never been broached to her. She was supposed to know nothing of it, but though the least precocious of girls and infinitely more occupied with her fishing and her gardening, the training of Sheila's puppies, or the rearing of the pheasant chicks, than with such far-away things as love and marriage, she had known by some instinct that she had been offered to her cousin Adrian and had been refused, that he had thrown away a great inheritance since it was burdened by such a condition. Nor had there been lacking hints and chance words which had amply confirmed her instinctive knowledge. Pride had closed her lips on her sense of injustice and her hot anger—anger which at first had burned as fiercely against Adrian as against her uncle. The latter, in the depths of her heart, she had perhaps never wholly forgiven, until an hour ago, when she had softly laid the sheet again over the marble-still face, though on the surface they had, after a time, been good friends enough, especially since he had let her taste the pleasures of responsibility, and given her a chance to develop her practical capacity. But with Adrian her humour and her sense of justice had soon come to her aid.

"Poor fellow; why should I be hurt because he wouldn't marry me?" she had once said, laughingly, to Lady Marchmont. "I was only a schoolgirl—you remember how I clung to my short skirts—or a schoolboy rather. We liked each other immensely, and I missed him dreadfully for many a day, but I should simply have laughed if he had spoken to me of marriage. It would have been like marrying my big brother, and I daresay he regarded me as a good sort of fellow for my age."

Lesley had been perfectly sincere in her protest, but sincerity may have more sides than one, and now, as she listened for the sound of wheels, her thoughts went out more and more to the cousin who had once filled so large a part of her life, and had so suddenly vanished from it, save in memory. In the silence these memories came thronging back thicker and faster. Aye, and softer and tenderer, too. Oh, what good days they had had together! She might jestingly say that Adrian had treated her as a younger brother, but in her heart she knew that it was not so. At times, in the fierce independence of a very young girl, she had girded at his carefulness for her, though, as she had truly said, she had missed it dreadfully when he was gone. Gone—after a strange, abrupt parting which she had long wondered over, but which she now throbbingly recalled. He had found her in the garden, busy planning some rearrangement of the beds, and had caught her hands and merely said, "Good-bye, I must be going." But he had stood gazing into her face, as though he were searching for something there. Then he had dropped her hands with a muttered word she did not catch, and had turned away before, in her surprise, she could ask him where he was going, or how long he would be away. Ah, if she had known then that it would be for years—but now he was coming back!

Suddenly, in a surge of mingled feeling, she caught up a lamp and crossed the hall towards the dim recess, where the portrait of Adrian Skene, the elder, hung. She held up the light to the dark, debonair face, still smiling its easy, careless smile, though the man himself was dust, and stood looking long and steadily at it. She was perhaps trying to reconstruct the image of her Cousin Adrian which had remained with her through the years, or else she was trying to picture the Adrian whom she would soon have to meet.

(To be Continued)



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507

