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CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

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CHAPTER III.

THE PRIORY.

The palmy days of the Priory departed when it became the property of the laity. The quarrel between the throne of England and the Vatican destroyed the glories of that old monkish institution, and with the confiscation of church property the brotherhood were cast forth to find a refuge and a rest whither they might. From the situation of the Priory there can be no doubt but the monks of old had an eye to the beautiful in nature to assist their upward efforts, and in this locality fixed their residence on the slope of a hill that stretched away in gentle gradient toward the principal road that formed the line of travel on the south eastern coast. From the windows of the Priory could be seen the English channel, commanding an expanse of water as far as the eye could reach, while the lawn leading to the edge of the cliff was matted with the wild thyme of the district that sent forth a perfume most refreshing. Surrounding the old residence the appearance was park like, and clumps of trees relieved that nakedness of scenery so common to the coast of Kent. In the rear of the Priory nature uninterrupted still prevailed, and the wild furze which flourished there formed the home and orchestra for numerous feathered songsters. There also, and as indigenous to the soil, grew that wonder of the floral world, the Bee-orchis. This flower is the pride of the locality, and justly so, as on first seeing the stranger might be readily pardoned should he place its home in the world of insects. Rising from the loose and barren chalk, it erects its straight stamen to the height of about eleven inches, and then enfolds its delicate and variegated petals with such perfection, that when the floweret trembles on its stem, as touched by a passing breeze, its appearance resembles that fugitive which fills the air of summer with its droning chant, the humming bee.

The Priory itself had no charms for the lover of the beautiful in architecture, being a plain religious house, so constructed as to tone down the rays of light to the shade agreeable to pensive minds, and doubtless this fact was made a sufficient excuse for the more mirthful brethren to seek their pursuits and pleasures out of doors. But since the days of Bluff King Hal, the residence and its lands had been the property of the laity, and frequently changing hands had ultimately fallen into the possession of the family of the Chillingtons. For many years they had been masters of that rich domain, and being entailed, the estate had long been subject to the control of a Sir Harry Chillington. The last of that race was now the owner of it, and is the Sir Harry of this story.

Why this prefix of title should have been given to any ancestor of the Chillingtons does not appear. There was no trace of doings heroic or honorable to be found in the family archives in an old oaken chest. Even tradition was silent on this subject; while the portraits of a long line of the race, that hung against the wall in the picture gallery of the Priory, bore such a striking family resemblance, that the living baronet in different costumes might have sat for them all. These portraits, as the living specimen, represented a robust, gigantic and hard featured race, to whom belonged neither the dignity nor grace of the aristocracy. Yet they conserved the title legal, or fictitious, that had long been worn by them, and so tenaciously did they hold on to it as to make the thought of losing it a family dread.

In the mind of the present Sir Harry this apprehension did not so strongly prevail, yet even he possessed enough of the feeling to be the cause of the greatest wretchedness to others. The baronet was a widower, with only one child, a daughter. To have but one child had been the lot of the Chillingtons for generations, but in this case it was a daughter.

The characteristics of the family at the Priory had long been known, and for years commented on in the district, and so prominent were they and so faithfully transmitted, the name of Chillington had become a synonym for family pride and covetousness. Indeed the people were so well acquainted with these peculiarities, that nothing which could represent them, although opposed to all the ordinary rules of society, excited the least surprise in the popular mind. Acting, therefore, on this hereditary trait, the father of the present baronet sought for his son the woman who afterwards became his wife. But in this instance, the scale so usually poised by the twin passions of the Chillingtons lost its equilibrium, and covetousness prevailing, he passed beyond his idea of the sacredness of rank in search of the object. At this time blood to him was of less worth than gold, and the family

pride transmitted to him as a heir-loom was to be traded off for pecuniary advantage. But title was still the bait with which he meant to angle, and having found a human moth in the person of a commoner, one whose wings were richly coated with silver and gold, and of the class who are readily dazzled with the flame of title, and regardless of burning their own wings and of destroying the happiness of those otherwise dear to them, fly toward the shining thing, he laid his plans for making a bargain.

The person whose love of dignity the old Sir Harry, as he was then termed, meant to play upon, was a wealthy merchant in the town of Folkstone, whose money was never likely to raise him to wear a more honorable appellation than that of being a rich man. Placed by his money on terms of intimacy with the old baronet, the weakness of either became known to the other, and a golden victim quickly arose before the man of title. To gain the daughter of the merchant at the sacrifice of a little family pride would enrich his coffers, while the merchant dazzled with the thought of being allied to title was ready to sell the child he otherwise loved. Matters being therefore arranged with the seniors, they who were most interested in the affair, and whose life happiness was in all probability being bartered away by this transaction, were not favored at all with the privilege of being consulted. All thought of their feelings in the matter being ignored without a moment's consideration, it became purely a commercial transaction between the heads of families. How far such a determination to unite two persons in wedlock by such means could succeed now may be considered a question; but that was an age when parental dictation was supposed to possess absolute power. There was nothing left them but to obey, and the bride elect was led to the altar a decorated sacrifice to parental authority.

At the marriage of Sir Harry Chillington there was neither joy nor mirth on the Priory estate. From childhood the bride had been known in the district, and was by all classes highly esteemed for her beauty and goodness, but the feeling that she had been wickedly immolated at the shrine of a foolish pride and worldly gain, cast a shadow upon every heart. In vain it was that the old Sir Harry sought to make a festive season out of the occasion, and in vain the tables groaned from the weight of good things placed upon them gathered from land and sea and from every clime. Invitations were liberally scattered and responded to by the class of persons over whom control could be exerted; yet the excellencies spread in abundance to appease the human appetite, or to pander to the most luxurious taste, failed to draw forth even from the greatest sycophant to the house of Chillington more than the semblance of pleasure.

Nor were the more wealthy alone resentful on that occasion. The common people on the Priory estate had been commanded to be mirthful, yet the quantity of ale they poured down their throats failed to put heart into their effort to be jolly. The welkin did not ring with the hearty shouts of the tenantry and hinds when Sir Harry brought home his fair and beautiful bride, and the natural disgust of the people with the marriage was the reason why it did not.

The sire and son of the Chillingtons in this instance were one in greed and family pride, and it did not take long for the sensual and greedy heir to the Priory domains to show a dislike to the beautiful victim parental authority had compelled him to call his wife. There was, there could be no sympathy existing between two such natures, and cruelty and neglect soon characterized the conduct of her husband toward her. Disappointed in not having a son as their first-born the cruelty of his conduct toward his wife increased, until weary and broken hearted she sunk to her grave and to her rest.

Deprived of his wife, Sir Harry had no tears of sorrow to shed at her departure; he had married her at the dictation of his father, and now did not regret her removal from him. The family vault echoed with the heavy tread of the mercenaries employed to deposit in its last resting place the corpse of that young and beautiful wife, and then closing the tomb they hid from the husband the victim of his cruelty. The family dread had become considerably weakened by the time it reached the present Sir Harry, yet lingered in his mind, though only as a shadow, and apparently because it was a family sentiment rather than from any other feeling.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

It was evening, and the oblique rays of the setting sun were cast upon the waters of the English Channel, lighting them with golden

splendour as though they were billows of fire rolling on in gentle wavelets until they dashed themselves to pieces at the cliff which formed a barrier to their further progress. It being ebb tide, and the waters low in the channel, the chalk cliffs of the French coast raised their pale faces to look on the monarch of day as he descended to rest beyond the distant horizon. With the approaching twilight there was a sharpening of the outline of every object, and the distant trees stood out in full relief against the wall of sky. Conspicuous amid the beautiful scenery to which the decline of day had given prominence, was the form of Clara Chillington. As was her usual custom, she had ridden from the Priory along the cliff road, and mounted on a splendid bay horse she now sat motionless gazing upon the beautiful waters that lay before her, and drinking in the soft murmur of the riplets as they kissed the shore at her feet. So immovable were they that both horse and rider might have been taken for a statue.

It seems but yesterday as a child, in company with an unnatural father, she had followed her mother to the place of graves; but the few years which had rolled away had brought her to womanhood, and now as she sat there in the pride of youth and beauty, with one hand resting on the neck of that beautiful steed, her form appeared ethereal, and her countenance almost angelic. Clara was positively beautiful, and her features being illumined with the simple goodness of a kind and innocent heart, it gave to her aspect an attractiveness irresistible. Reining up her horse, and pushing back a stray lock of golden hair which had escaped from its confinement during the exercise of her ride along the cliff, she fell into a profound reverie.

The sun had sunk to rest, and Clara retained her position, lost to all surrounding objects, while her bosom heaved to expel the heated sigh, and the tear of innocent sorrow floated as a shining pearl drop in her eye. It seemed sad that one so young, so beautiful, should have her countenance shaded with the craving that arose from the depth of the reverie into which she had fallen. She felt herself at that hour to be alone in the world, and she longed to obtain a suitable companion.

From the sordidness and rugged nature of Sir Harry, they were excluded from the Priory who would have formed a friendship with his daughter, and under whose teaching she might have become eminently fitted to shed a lustre upon the circle in which she was expected to move. But Clara had grown up to womanhood almost a recluse. Shut up within her home, without companionship suited to her age and position, her fine intellect remained to a great extent undeveloped. Yet there are minds possessing such native force that the grossest neglect cannot reduce them to the common level, and such a mind belonged to the heiress of the Priory. The strength of her intellect frequently led her to grasp and to comprehend subjects that the highest culture could not impart to others, while the goodness of her heart imparted a grace to all her doings. Still Clara longed for a friend, one to whom she could unbosom the secrets of her heart, and on whom she might lean and be led upward to adorn that station in life she occupied.

Repeatedly, and for years, had the young heart of Clara been employed in the vain endeavour to entwine the tendrils of her affection around her rugged sire. But Sir Harry had no heart to love his beautiful daughter, and every effort on her part to awaken within him a tender emotion was cruelly thrust aside. He did not hate his child; how could he? the most malevolent must have admired her; and yet his conduct toward her was such as to border closely upon it.

Frequently did Clara entreat her father to introduce her to the world, and to respond to the invitations that etiquette sometimes brought even to Sir Harry; but her effort was always unsuccessful, for his vulgar nature denied him all taste for refinement. Failing to obtain this favour from her father, she begged of him to permit her the pleasure of a companion; but choosing to keep his doings at the Priory from the eyes of the curious, he also sternly refused her even this. Yet the Priory was not always without guests; and occasionally they would appear there; but they who visited the baronet were of such a character as to render it impossible for his daughter to appear among them.

Still, however palpable and cruel the neglect of her father toward Clara, the idea dwelt in his mind of some day introducing the wealthy heiress into the circle of her equals, although how he could hope to do so successfully, and with happiness to his child, did not concern him. Indeed, had such a thought entered his mind, the idea of her wealth and personal attractions would have been considered by him as being sufficient for any emergency, and equal to commanding the hand of any available peer of the realm. Possibly in this he might not have been far wrong; but the cruelty of subjecting his daughter to undergo the penalty attending a want of preparedness to take fearlessly her proper position in the social circle, should have caused him to yield to her request, and to the dictates of nature. These finer feelings, however, the baronet was a stranger to; and such companionship as she could glean from the domesticities of the Priory was all that was permitted her.

Being thus ostracized from her class by the rudeness of her father, the active mind of Clara sought another channel through which it might flow, and leap the barrier of loneliness that oppressed her. Guided by the goodness of her

heart, this course created of necessity led her to seek the homes of such as were in humble life. Having therefore ample means at command, the luxury of doing good to those occupying a lower position in the social scale than herself was freely indulged in. Sir Harry did not interfere in this, doubtless considering it beneath his notice, and the humbler classes accordingly received largely from her kindness.

Alone Clara visited the bedside of the sick, the homes of the needy, and the domicile of age and decrepitude. To such she appeared one of earth's angels, sent by the great Benevolent to scatter blessings on the pathway of His poorer creatures. By them she was positively adored, and from her beauty and goodness she obtained from her humble friends the appellation, "The Pride of the Cliff."

It is not an uncommon thing for such as are in humble life to apply a name of their own to those who endear themselves to them; it is a kind of worship they bestow upon their patrons and friends, and in doing so they flatter themselves that secretly they are rendering homage to the person they revere. It is hardly possible that Clara could have known the honour thus conferred upon her by her humbler neighbours; yet so highly was the name and person esteemed, that more than one fishing boat launched in the district went dancing gleefully over the waves as though rejoicing in bearing the name, "Pride of the Cliff."

Although blessed alike by all, both rich and poor, Clara was not happy. Her loving heart longed to find a resting place in another; and as she sat watching the waters that were momentarily becoming more placid, the feeling of loneliness filling her soul, caused the tear drop which had welled up in her eye to leap the barrier holding it back, and to steal its silent course down her beautiful cheek. The condition of Clara was more painful than that of an orphan; she was the victim of a cruel father, and chained by his caprice within that prison house, Seclusion.

These painful thoughts rolling through the brain of Clara as she sat on horseback on the edge of the cliff seemed to be shared by the noble brute, which remained as motionless as though it were not a thing of life. Nor did these thoughts become less numerous, nor weakened, as casting her eyes upon the ground she beheld that beautiful little bird, the "Wheat ear," which migrates in summer across the channel to the southern shores of England, leading home to its newly fledged offspring, that it might guard them from danger amidst the dews and darkness of approaching night. This little touch of nature caused the tears of Clara to flow faster, until unable longer to restrain her emotions she turned her horse's head in the direction of home, that she might seek the sanctuary of her boudoir, and weep out the strong feelings of her heart without a comforter.

CHAPTER V.

DICK BACKSTAY.

"I don't care what any of you say, I tell you that the *Fairy Queen* was as fine a ship as ever cut the waters."

"I say, Dick, that she settled down too much abaft, and never sat upright let the water be ever so smooth."

"You tell that to the Marines! I should like to know what a long-shore man like you knows about it? You never sailed in any craft bigger than a crab-shell, and never went out of sight of land in your life only when you were asleep."

"You chaps that have been on long v'yages think you know everything; I tell you that the *Fairy Queen* was as ugly as—"

"Your mother," muttered Dick Backstay, angrily.

The *Fairy Queen*, that was once commanded by the gallant Captain Freeman, had been the subject of debate with the fishermen of Folkstone. Where now stands in the elegance and grandeur of modern architecture the Paris Hotel, inviting by its generous hospitality the traveller who crosses from England to France via Folkestone and Boulogne, there once stood a blacksmith shop. He who wrought iron there into shapes for marine purposes, did so more from an innate love of work than from any other cause, and this left him a comparative man of leisure, who only worked at will, and was also favourable to making his place of business a rendezvous for the gathering of unemployed seamen, where they might talk over the gossip of the hour. It was at this place the ship beauty of the *Fairy Queen* was being discussed in manner so offensive to Dick Backstay.

Dick Backstay, a tall loose jointed man, with a slender waist, and chest and arms, that denoted herculean strength, had been in his time the beau ideal of a sailor, and for years had traversed the ocean on board the *Fairy Queen*. To him, therefore, she was an old friend, and but that Time, which had powdered his own raven locks with the snows of declining years, had also enervated the muscular power of his arm, it would not have added to the condition of the health of any person to have spoken lightly of that gallant ship in his presence. But Dick Backstay had sense enough to know his own weakness; and in the conviction that he was no longer able to contend with younger men, he withdrew from his companions at the point in the debate already mentioned. It was against his quid of tobacco harder than ever, not only that he might extract a greater amount of com-