

A Piece of Wild Broom.

Squire Mellet of Mellet Grange, was of old family, his predecessors having possessed large property in the county. But this had become smaller with each possessor. Extravagance and profligacy ran in the family. So with each new owner came new mortgages, and time after time went into other hands, until the present Squire found himself possessed of only the fine but dilapidated old Grange, of which half the rooms were shut up, and the home farm surrounding it. On these there was also a mortgage, the Squire's one effort in that line when young and 'fast.' Also, there were about a thousand acres of moorland and hill, of heather, oroom, and bracken, but except in his being able to say that 'the moor' was his, it added nothing to Alfred Mellet's position. Rabbits, and in winter snipe and wild fowl, dwelt on it; otherwise it was not available for producing anything. Speculative building was unknown in that wild district, and 'plots of land' not wanted. One son and three daughters were the Squire's family. The former was a sailor—a naval lieutenant. The girls were Ethel, the eldest, just twenty, and very pretty and winsome, and two younger girls, who were educated by their mother, for the Squire's income now was too small to afford the salary of an accomplished governess. He was harassed and chafed (though he knew that it was chafing his own soul) and only to a small extent his own, faint) at his lessened means and inability to keep up the ancient Mellet position. The great house sorely needed repairing the gardens cultivating; the stable had but the Squire's pony, equally used to saddle and the little pony carriage. Gone were the horses that of old filled the long rows of stalls; gone the vehicles that once occupied the coach-houses. The lawyer and the doctor of the little country town of Riverleigh, of which Mellet Grange was the famed 'show place,' were much better off than was the Squire in point of clear income, though they were not 'country-people.' The doctor, by the way, was more tolerated by the now misanthropic and always proud Squire than anyone else. Roland Wynnett was a very clever, highly educated young man, a gentleman, and a skilful and enthusiastic member of his profession. He had had an early education in the best things beside medicine. The fact was destined to be one of vast importance and benefit to the Squire. The doctor had called one morning to see Mrs. Mellet, who was ailing. After interviewing his patient, he was chatting with the Squire in the neglected, weed-grown avenue when a vehicle entered it. Mr. Mellet stared at the unusual sight, he neither waited nor wished to be visited now. Then he muttered under his breath an oath. From the hired dog cart out sprang a lithe, well-dressed, clean-shaven, dark-eyed man. 'How are you, Squire?' he said with much appearance of bonhomie. And the Squire, with constrained civility, replied perfunctorily, shaking hands, 'How are you, Mr. Beltley?' 'Just run down for a day or two to Riverleigh for change of air—stepping at the 'Elphant'—wanted to see you on a little business!' The Squire winced. 'Yes?' he said. 'I'm only sorry I can't put you up here, but, with a bitter smile, the Grange's hospitality is, perforce, only a memory.' Here Wynnett, finding himself in the way, shook hands with the Squire and rode off, after a momentary glance at the newcomer, which the latter, did not observe. 'Good-looking chap, that,' he said, with a familiarity which the Squire thought very vulgar. 'Who is he?' 'He is the doctor of Riverleigh, a very clever young man.' 'Ah?' said Mr. Beltley. The doctor, then he's out of our running,' jocularly, 'for you're a county man. So much the better.' 'I don't understand you,' said the Squire staring at him. 'No! Ah well, you will perhaps later on! Now let's have a talk. I suppose my fellow can put up his horse in your stable; they are big enough, ha! ha! ha!' Mellet glanced a glance of scorn at him, and then gave the driver the needful directions. When he had driven off, Beltley lit a cigar and offered the Squire one. 'They are the best in the market,' he said. 'We City men know what we're about' and the Squire, to whom the fragrance appealed with memories of his youthful days, lit his cigar appreciatively. Then the two men paced up and down the avenue. Mr. Mellet's face during the conversation showed various emotions—annoyance, pride, and alarm in turn. Then it became calmer as Beltley concluded his remarks. After this they went round to the stables and ordered the horse and gig to be got ready. And then Beltley with a jovial farewell drove away, leaving the Squire gazing moodily after him.

II.

'What is it, dear?' said quiet, handsome Mrs. Mellet, whose gentle sweetness had never been altered. 'Tell me, Alfred; I know you've had some unusual worry,' and she took his hand fondly. 'Well, I will, dear,' said the Squire wearily. 'Whom should I tell but you, who've been far too good a wife for a reckless, extravagant—'

'Hush! hush!' said his wife, 'you shan't say it. Tell me.'

'Well, Beltley has been here.'

'Mrs. Mellet grew pale. 'And about the mortgage?' she murmured. 'Yes, and he wants his money. Says he can make it pay much more per cent, hang him!'

'And if he does not get it?' said Mrs. Mellet breathlessly.

'Then—be'll—foreclose,' said the Squire, trying to speak calmly. 'And the dear old place, which for three hundred years has been—' and here, after a gulp and a groan, he broke down and fairly hid his face on his wife's shoulder. 'Then was the woman a ministering angel?' indeed. She soothed him fondly, and showed her own heart as the stronger, repressing her own desire to mingle her tears with his. By-and-by he grew a lacer. But look at it as he would, he could not see how he was to get £2,000, in debt as he was in other quarters, with a small income, every pound of which was needed, and at a time when land had much depreciated in value, while there were plenty of more paying investments. The home farm was of but average quality, the Squire a dilapidated place, though both were inexpressibly dear to their owner. 'I—I—' he said later to his sympathetic wife, 'forgot to say that he hinted—the usual thing in novels—that if Ethel—and he passed. Mrs. Mellet's eyes sparkled with unusual ire. 'He thought that Ethel would marry him to preserve the old place?' 'Yes,' said the Squire; 'but I said nothing. My mind seems torn and wearied and despairing.'

'Well, dearest, do not give way,' said his wife cheerfully. 'See whether you can in any way get someone else to lend the money. But at present all you need do is to be civil to him; don't say anything definite. We must not irritate him. And perhaps Ethel—but oh I don't know. The feminine diplomacy, as usual, was effective. Mr. Beltley lunched at the Grange—dinner for such an occasion was in the circumstances impossible—wandered about the garden, made jocular remarks at which the ladies were secretly enraged, took walks with them, treated them to long accounts of his London home, festivities, and successes, and paid all sorts of clumsy compliments to Ethel. 'Oh, what a contrast he is to Reggie Wynnett!' murmured the girl to herself. For, though nobody knew it yet, the doctor and Ethel were in love with each other though neither dreamed that the proud Squire would ever consent to their engagement. And Wynnett was secretly jealous and agitated. 'Surely, surely!' he would exclaim, 'that company promoting, cash-lending cad won't be allowed to woo Ethel! And yet what chance has a hardworking country 'sawbones,' though he does save a little each year, against such an income?' One day, however, his jealousy was specially aroused. Mrs. Mellet and her daughter and Beltley were strolling over the moor, Wynnett riding some distance behind them at right angles. His angry glance saw the financier bow over Ethel's hand—her mother was a little distance off, probably, as Wynnett said to himself, purposely—and then sentimentally uproot a piece of wild broom at her feet and place it between his coat next his heart. 'A pretty piece for the symbol of the proud Plantagenets!' said the doctor savagely; 'and for Ethel—well, I wouldn't have thought—but it's for her father, of course, poor girl!' and Wynnett rode away from the scene as rapidly as possible. Now at dinner that evening at the Grange—the modest repast shared by Mr. and Mrs. Mellet and their daughter—the meaning of that scene was explained far more satisfactorily, as Wynnett would have acknowledged could he have heard it. 'He behaved very well,' said Mrs. Mellet; 'for when Ethel quietly told him she could not accept his offer he said that he should not wish to force any woman's inclination, and he should always remain on good terms with us.'

A gleam of hope irradiated the Squire's mind. 'Perhaps he will let me have extra time for getting the money,' he murmured. 'These men sometimes do generous things.'

'And, indeed, it seems—well, as I mention Beltley were not the Shylock he was painted, but a whimsical compound. For next day he came to the Grange, cheery and smiling with none of the malevolence of the rejected mortgagee of fiction about him; and the Squire felt much lighter of heart. 'Well, Squire,' he said, 'I've tried my luck, and I take the young lady's decision without grumbling. But I've got an idea. I've all sorts of iron in the fire, and this is a splendid idea. Thought of it last night. It's rabbit farming on a big scale. Now your moor's just the place to stock with rabbits.'

'There's nothing else you could stock it with,' said the Squire, 'unless snipe and plover—I should have raised money on it.'

'Quite so. Well, you can do it now.'

'Now? How? What do you mean?'

'Give me a conveyance of the moor for £2,000, and I'll hand you over your mortgage and you can put it in the fire.'

'But the moor's worthless land—of course, if you mean it, and it's your hobby—but it's very generous.'

'So it was arranged, and Mr. Beltley returned to town. When the doctor next called he was told of this, at which he said little except 'Rabbits? Guinea-pigs' are more in his line, I should imagine.'

When Ethel (privately), however, told him of the proposal and her reply he was highly delighted. A day or two later he left for London also. In a few days he returned with a friend, a man of much activity and keenness of expression, who had been a former fellow student but had followed other paths than medicine. On the day when Beltley was to arrive, Wynnett and his friend Wheeler paid an early visit to the Grange, and on the appearance of the former retired into the drawing-room, though Wynnett exchanged a glance of intelligence with Ethel, who quitted the room. Meanwhile in the Squire's study—or 'den,' as he called it—be and his visitor were seated. Jovially smiling, the latter produced the Squire's title deeds and mortgage and a conveyance of the moor.

'Sign that,' he said, 'and here are your deeds, and the mortgage becomes extinct. We shall want a witness.'

'Shall I do?' said Wynnett, entering. Ethel had kept him informed. Up started Beltley savagely at the placid keen-eyed Wheeler, and white with rage. The doctor smiled, the Squire looked bewildered. 'Don't sign that, sir,' said Wynnett. 'This generous gentleman wants you to give him for £2,000, land for which a conveyance will get you £20,000. I had the curiosity to get another piece of the wild broom I say Mr. Beltley gather. I've studied, among other things, metallurgy, and had my ideas. It was as I thought. The roofs were loaded with ore. Lodes on lodes are beneath your moorland; Mr. Wheeler the mining engineer, has examined it—and can get you, with a glance at the deeds, 'any reasonable amount of money in advance you may want.'

Mr. Wheeler signified assent. Beltley, defeated withdrew. The mortgage has long since been cleared off, and Ethel was dowered with a good share of the wealth first guessed from a piece of wild broom. When a song is sung so much that everybody dislikes it is called it popular.

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- Lakeland, April 21, to the wife of John Moore, a son.
- St. John, April 20, to the wife of Sydney L. Kerr, a son.
- Bear River, April 16, to the wife of W. W. Clarke, a son.
- Halifax, April 15, to the wife of J. B. Chisholm, a daughter.
- Halifax, April 21, to the wife of James Hutt, a daughter.
- Falmouth, April 24, to the wife of Wm. Tolbut, a daughter.
- Sprinkhill, April 6, to the wife of Samuel McPherson, a son.
- Shelburne, April 18, to the wife of Clifford Peterson, a son.
- Falmouth, April 16, to the wife of Winters Burnham, a son.
- Truro, April 24, to the wife of Rev. E. F. Warling, a daughter.
- Parsons, April 10, to the wife of Palmer Winters, a daughter.
- Woodstock, April 21, to the wife of James Peabody, a daughter.
- West Green Harbour, April 15, to the wife of Geo. Firth, a daughter.
- Bear River, April 15, to the wife of Capt. George Fordy, a daughter.
- Fredericton, April 28, to the wife of Norman McDonald, a daughter.
- Bridgewater, April 22, to the wife of Edward Dukewitz, a daughter.

MARRIED.

- Yarmouth, April 26, Amiel Amiro to Katie Monahan.
- Truro, April 26, by Rev. J. A. Rodgers, Arthur C. Ford to Ellyth Bates.
- Ohio, April 26, by Rev. J. H. Sanders, Erasmus J. Baker to Dora Crosby.
- Truro, April 28, by Rev. H. F. Adams, William Corroy to Bertha Lumper.
- Liverpool, April 22, by Rev. H. S. Shaw, William Jullimore to Annie Murray.
- Parsons, April 24, by Rev. T. J. Butler, Jos. Phillips to Elizabeth Lewis.
- Sprinkhill, April 22, by Rev. David Wright, James Maloney to Lizzie Crawford.
- French Village, by Rev. H. Hackenley, S. E. Beakes to Mrs. G. E. Lestch.
- Halifax, April 25, by Rev. J. F. Duxton, Robert McLellan to Elizabeth Innes.
- Clarendon, Queens Co., by Rev. O. N. Mott, Noble Johnson to Millie A. Turner.
- Parsons, April 22, by Rev. D. McQuarrie, Charles Smith to Blanche Crawford.
- Pictou, April 22, by Rev. George S. Carson, Charles W. Graham to Bessie Gray.
- Upper Stewiacke, by Rev. J. B. Maclean, Alexander Fisher to Susan J. Steele.
- St. John, April 28, by Rev. J. A. Gordon, Frederick Stewart to Irvyne Irvine.
- Nine Mile River, April 25, by Rev. A. V. Morash, John A. Wright to Mary J. McPhie.
- Parsons, April 20, by Rev. T. J. Butler, Capt. John Steeles to Louisa May Burgess.
- Admiral Beck, Hants Co., April 18, by Rev. E. Smith, Eusabel Purple to Alice Brumcombe.
- St. John, April 28, by Rev. L. G. MacNeill, Edward Leitch to Isabel Margaret Dunnop.
- Mission, Montana, April 19, by Rev. C. H. Finley, George S. McLennan to Emma H. Beck.
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