

The Interpreter.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD DESK.

Not one of my keys will fit it; the old desk has been laid aside for years, and is covered with dust and rust. We do not make such strong boxes nowadays, for brass hinges and secret drawers have given place to limmy morocco and russian leather; so we clap a Bramah lock, that Bramah himself cannot pick, on a black bag that the veriest burglar can rip open in five seconds with a penknife, and entrust our notes, bank and otherwise, our valuables and our secrets to this faithless repository with a confidence that deserves to be respected. But in the days when George the Third was king, our substantial ancestors rejoiced in more substantial workshop: so the old desk that I cannot succeed in unlocking, is of shining rosewood, clamped with brass, and I shall spot it sadly with the mallet and the chisel.

What a medley it holds! Thank Heaven I am no speculative philosopher, or I might moralize for hours over its contents. First, out lies a withered leaf of geranium. It must have been dearly prized once, or it never would never have been here; maybe it represented the hopes, the wealth, the all-in-all of two aching hearts: and they are dust and ashes now. To think that the flower should have outlasted them! the symbol less perishable than the faith! Then I come to a piece of much-begrimed and yellowed paper, carefully folded, and indorsed with a date,—a receipt for an embrocation warranted specific in all cases of bruises, sprains, or lumbago; next a gold pencil-case, with a head of Socrates for a seal; lastly, much of that substance which is generated in all waste places, and which the vulgar call 'filth.' How it comes there puzzles equally the naturalist and the philosopher; but you shall find it in empty corners, empty drawers, empty pockets, nay, we believe in its existence in the empty heads of our fellow creatures.

In my thirst for acquisition, regardless of dusty fingers, I press the inner sides of the desk in hopes of discovering secret springs and hoarded repositories: so have poor men ere now found thousand pound notes hid away in chunks and crannies, and straightway, giddy with the possession of boundless wealth, have gone to the Devil at a pace such as none but the beggar on horseback can command; so have old wills been fished out, and frauds discovered, and rightful heirs re-established, and society in general disgusted, and all concerned made discontented and uncomfortable—so shall I, perhaps—but the springs wry, a false lid flies open, and I do discover a packet of letters, written on thin foreign paper, in the free straggling characters I remember so well. They are addressed to Sir H. Beverly, and the hand that penned them has been cold for years. So will yours and mine be some day, perhaps ere the flowers are out again; *O beate Sexti!* will you drink a glass less claret on that account? Buxom Mrs. Lulage shall be the dressmaker therefore put unbecoming trimmings in your bonnet? The 'shining hours' are few, and soon past; make the best of them, each in your own way, only try and choose the right way:—

For the day will soon be over, and the minutes are of gold, and the wicket shuts at sundown, and the shepherd leaves the fold.

LETTER I.

Those were merry days, my dear Hal, when we used to hear the 'chimes at midnight' with poor Benjamin; very jolly times they were, and I often think, if health and pockets could have stood it I should like to be going the pace amongst you all still. And yet how few of us are left. They have dropped off one by one, as they did the night we dyed the white rose red at the old place; and you, and I, and staunch old 'Ben,' were the only three left that could walk straight. Do you remember the corner of King street, and 'Ben' strapped to the buff, as he called it himself, 'going in' right royally at the tall fellow with the red head? I never saw such right-and-fair, I never thought he had so much 'st' in him; and you don't remember,

tres to me. The child has not a notion of colors. I was painting out of doors yesterday, and he was standing by—bless him! he never leaves me for an instant—and I tried to explain to him some of the simplest rudiments of the godlike art. 'Vere,' said I, 'do you see those red tints on the tops of the far acacias, and the golden things along the back of that brown ox in the foreground?' 'Yes, papa!' was the child's answer, with a bewildered look. 'How should you paint them, my boy?' 'Well, papa, I should point the acacias green, because they are green, and—here he thought he had made a decided hit—I should put the red into the ox, for he is almost more red than brown.' Dear child! he has not a glimmering of colour; but composition, that's his forte; and drawing, drawing, you know, which is the highest form of the art. His drawing is extraordinary—careless, but great breadth and freedom; and I am certain he could compose a wonderful picture, from his singular sensibility to beauty. Young as he is, I have seen the tears stand in his eyes when contemplating a fine view or a really exquisite 'bit,' such as one sees in this climate every day. His raptures at his first glimpse of the Danube I shall never forget; and if I can only instil into him the principles of colour, you will see Vere will become the first painter of the age. The boy learns languages readily enough. He has picked up a good deal of Hungarian from his nurse.

To be continued.

Hugh Melton!

CHAPTER XI.

(CONTINUED.)

Just as I made this discovery and had come to this conclusion, the man next him, who had been at me with some interest, touched his arm, and directed his attention toward me by a word or two uttered in a low voice. The white slave turned his head with a quiet, graceful movement that awoke a sort of vague remembrance in my mind, and raised his eyes toward me. For a moment we gazed at each other in silence; then, with a kind of wail, the words broke from his lips:

'Cairnsford! Oh, heavens, do you not know me?'

'Hugh! Is it possible? You here!' was all I could utter, as I sprang toward him and grasped his trembling toil-worn hands in mine.

The overseer was on the other side of the building, so we were safe from his observation; and Hugh leaned his head on my shoulder and sobbed the agonizing convulsive of intense emotion. Pain and joy, too powerful, too exquisite almost for mortal frame to bear, struggled in his breast.

'I had lost all hope—I was like one dead,' he murmured when he had recovered voice to speak. 'But you will save me now? You will not leave me again?' he asked, with piteous entreaty.

'Surely not, old friend and comrade, my more than brother. This is the happiest day of my life, as I have found you; and I will never leave you again till you are safe and free as I am now.'

'Yes; but you must leave,' he answered, pushing me from him hurriedly. 'Do not let the overseer see us together, or he may persuade the chief not to let you have me. When the hour of audience comes, go to the chief, and ask to buy me. Do not be deterred by any difficulties—only secure my freedom. But go on; do not let us be seen together: it may ruin all.'

So saying returned again to his work, and as the overseer rounded the corner of the building and appeared in sight, I was already a few paces off, walking quietly away. How my heart danced as I bent my steps toward a shady grove of trees near our little encampment! Hugh was not dead; he lived, and would soon be at liberty, and through my means. Oh, it was joyful! I seemed to tread on air, and thought with rapture of the welcome the poor old fellow would get at A—when he returned, and how we would all try to efface from his mind recollection of that terrible captivity. Then he must come

gung on his wretched existence, lost to love and liberty, everything that makes life endurable gone forever? Have you no pity that you can leave him thus?'

'But I love her, I love her,' I half murmured, in answer to my own thoughts. 'The trial is too bitter; who could pass through it?'

'Would he act thus were he in your place?' the same inward voice repeated—'he, the upright and true-hearted. Would he let his own selfish feelings condemn his friends to such a fate, or even his worst enemy?'

'It is true, too true,' I groaned in anguish. 'Must I save him in spite of myself? But O, why did I come here? what evil spirit drove me into these wilds to make such a discovery? O Hugh, O my love, can I be true to you both, and to myself also? I can not; it is impossible. Then, God helping me, I will be true to you, let me suffer as I may.' For a minute or two, as I paced to and fro, I thought I would do and bear all things; then again my strength failed me, and I said, 'If the chief sends for me before I can get off, I will do my best for his release; but if I find everything ready, I will leave at once.' So I resolved with myself, as I rose and turned toward my tent. There I found the faithful Adams had prepared my breakfast, not thinking I would leave before the chief's hour of audience. I could not touch it, and told him to get ready for starting with the utmost haste, even while in my heart I loathed myself for the course I was taking. As I walked up and down under the blazing sun, waiting for Adams to complete his preparations, I lamented over what had befallen me. I thought in that dark hour only of myself and of my love who was also his, and who, I almost vowed in my wild despair, should never again behold him. But something—shame, I think, when I thought of his true friendship, withheld me from this sin; still my whole soul rebelled against my fate, and at last the tempter that had tempted me to abandon my friend took another and more specious form, while he urged me never to give up my love without a struggle.

'It would be unmanly, cowardly, feeble-spirited,' he whispered. 'Rather bind your friend whose life you have saved, and who therefore owes you everything—bind him by a solemn oath never to go near her or see her more. Tell him you have her promise, and that the happiness of your life depends on your obtaining her; he would rather die a thousand deaths than, after such a confidence, come between you and her. Let him remain in India when you go home; if she then hears he is alive, she will naturally conclude he has forgotten her. She will contrast his fickleness with your constancy, and the result will be certain. The love once his will revert to you; and if in after-life they ever cross each other's paths, you may look calmly on their meeting, for her heart will be yours, and he, bound by his promise, will avoid her presence, so that she will never know by what means your happiness was secured.'

I should have spurned these thoughts from me with loathing, but I was too weak, and still brooded over them while waiting, when a messenger came from the chief, saying he would see me now. It was a full hour before his usual time for giving audience; but his eagerness to see the stranger had, I suppose, made him deviate from his custom. I never troubled myself about his reasons, however, but followed the messenger mechanically, thinking bitterly, 'Fate is indeed against me; I can not now get off without seeing the chief, and I must ask for this man's release, as I decided to do, if I could not get away in time.'

Yes, I had become so lost to all good feelings that I mentally called him 'that man,' and for a minute almost hated him. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, I remembered that he was my own and only friend, dearer to me, as I had often felt, than any brother could have been. As I thought of all the years we had passed together, and the affection we had felt for each other, I shook off the tempter boldly, and determined that no danger or difficulty, no selfish hopes or fears, should ever cause me to desert my friend. At length I found myself before the great man; but, indeed, I remember little of what passed, only that I presented my small offerings, wherewith I hoped to propitiate his favor. They were graciously accepted, and I then asked to purchase a slave, which request, though it evidently surprised him not a little, was also granted; and by the middle of the afternoon my friend was restored to me, my adieux were spoken to

off.' Then, as we rode on in silence, side by side, I made a vow that, God helping me, I would be as true to him as my heart told me he would have been to me had our positions been altered. I felt better once this resolution was taken; before, I had feared to meet his eye, I had dreaded the touch of his honest hand; now, I could look at him fearlessly, and loved him even better than of old, for my friendship had been tried by suffering, and I humbly hoped it would be seen to bear the test. Not but that I had many a fierce struggle to pass through, and many times my resolution wavered as I thought of the love I might have won, and my heart would grow sick and faint as I pictured the long years I was doomed to pass, a lonely, disappointed man; for I felt that this passion was one not to be uprooted or lived down, as the more transient affections of my youth had been; it was the last and deepest love my heart could know, and I shrank with a natural repugnance from the dreary prospect before me. And then Hugh. Poor fellow! he, knowing nothing but that his love was safe and unwon, could do little but talk of her and his prospects; for she was poor now, as poor as he was, and that seemed somehow to afford him unmitigated satisfaction; though why the prospect of being able to starve along with her, instead of living in luxury together, should be specially delightful, I know not. In this way we travelled back to A—, and I forced myself to seem happy, and to lend a sympathetic ear to all Melton's day-dreams. Then, hardest task of all, I had to comfort and re-assure him, when the painful conviction would overwhelm him that the Hugh, Melton Maud Meares had loved was young, active, tall and handsome, very different from the bent, brown-enslaved man who now rode beside me. That he would regain much, almost all, indeed, of his former good looks in time I truly believed; but I know, as well as he, that eighteen months of privation, toil, and misery had left their mark on him in characters that would never be effaced; that there were wrinkles on his brow no soft white fingers could ever smooth away, and shadows in his deep sad eyes no light of merry laughter could ever chase out of their depths.

At A— he felt the change trouble had wrought in him keenly when he found that even those of his comrades who had loved him best seemed to find some difficulty in recognizing him, and the first minute we were again alone together he turned to me with a strange fear in his questioning eyes that was piteous to see.

'Tell me, Charlie,' he asked, 'do you think she will recognize me, changed as I am?' Under this question I saw their lurked another, which he cared not put in words. 'Will she still love this broken-down and altered man—unaltered in heart it is true, but in all else how sadly changed!'

A great pity for him rose in my heart as I thought what would be his fate if she should find the change too great, and refuse to see in the toil-worn wanderer her old love. But while I seemed to see this hanging over him as a dark possibility, my knowledge of Maud's character gave me confidence to say:

'Do not be afraid, old friend; your love is worthy of you, and she will think the same of you now as she did when your life was undimmed by care and sorrow, and your looks unchanged by toil and suffering.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF ALL.

At A— some good news greeted us; Solace had received a letter from home, in which it was mentioned that Mr. Upton, Hugh's rich old uncle, had died, and had left all his vast property to his nephew, if he should ever be found. The old man was of opinion that as no actual proofs of his death had been discovered, he might still be alive; but if he did not turn up after a term of ten years, then, and in that case, it should revert to another branch of the family, distant cousins of Hugh's whom he had never met.

Here at A— Hugh confided to Solace, Langham, Templeton, myself, and some others, all he knew about his captivity and its cause.

He had been surrounded while out sketching by a party of natives, seized, and carried into the hills. He knew the dialect of the people here at A— very well, but this patois puzzled him; he made out enough, however, to ascertain that some one of his brother officers had paid one of the chiefs a large sum of money to make away with him. The chief

that some dreadful charges have been made against me, and as slander against one's self is peculiarly disagreeable, I decline hearing it. Do not think for a minute, my dear Sir, I acknowledge the truth of those charges; it is hardly worth the trouble of denying them when every one around me believes them true, so I shall dispense with that ceremony. And now I have only to tell you that, finding the air of this place disagreeable, and the society not so agreeable as I could wish, I have determined on selling out, and will send in my papers at once. You can not prove your charges, and will therefore, I suppose, allow me to sell out quietly. I do not think I have anything farther to say that would be agreeable to you to hear, so I had better wish you good morning; and with a sneer on his lips, Cameron left the room.

'A precious scoundrel we have got rid of,' muttered the colonel, as the door closed on him. 'I do not envy his future associates.'

As this is the last time Cameron comes across the thread of the story, I may be permitted to mention that when I last saw him he was acting as croupier to a gaming table at a small German Bad. Thus my revenge came to nothing, after all; and perhaps was best so, for what was I that I should desire to triumph over this man—I who had tried to desert the best friend ever man had in his need? As Cameron turned away could not help feeling that if those around only knew all they would not think me better of me than of him.

We did not stop long at A—. Melton was far too anxious to return to England, and to satisfy himself with his own eyes of his love's safety and the continuance of his affection, to delay a moment longer than was necessary; I, who had now made up my mind as to the course I should pursue, intended to accompany him.

It was a dull wet day about the beginning of June when we arrived in London. I knew from my mother where to look for the Meareses, for they had long ago taken up their abode in the capital. We arranged that Hugh should go to his lawyers's to put in his claim to his uncle's property, and talk over business matters, while I went to Miss Meare's lodging to break the news. Maud that one had indeed returned from the dead, as I murmured to myself, repeating sadly the words of the Arab's prophecy. I was to follow me thither as quickly as I could, and I hoped fervently his coming would not be long delayed. Once the news was told, I should find each minute pass with her an age of pain till I could make my escape. I drove to the house quickly, though in my state of suspense every moment seemed an hour. What if she should have taught herself to consider him as dead, and to look on me as her future husband; nay, had even grown to love me? I thought I had heard of such things, and with a beating heart hoped against hope as I mounted the narrow stairs to her little drawing-room.

But all such hopes, if indeed I ever entertained them, fled as I met her quick friendly smile, her frank outstretched hand. There was none of the shy timidity of lone ones of its happy gladness visible in the quiet deep eyes. She welcomed me as if I were a dear trusted friend, a brother perhaps, but no more. We were alone; so there was nothing to prevent my telling her everything. This I did in a few words as possible, keeping my eyes fixed on one particular bunch of flowers in the pattern of the carpet and yet seeing distinctly the flush rising on her cheeks, and a troubled look dimming her dear eyes. I could see the trembling of white hands clasped in her lap, the nerve hurried breathing, and still I spoke on, spared myself in nothing; I felt almost as if making myself base in her eyes in so sort doing penance for the betrayal of a friend. I told even of that—of my wild desire to leave him there to his fate, could feel her large eyes turned on me with a look of sorrowful reproach. She spoke a word as I went on to relate what had passed at A—, when suddenly I heard a drive to the door. I knew it was Hugh, rising, said:

'All the rest you will hear from him. You are free forever from the promise I forced from you. One request only I make of you. Do not let him know that his relationship between me and all that I hold dear in life. It would mar his happiness, grieve his loving heart if he thought for a moment that his peace had been purchased by the sacrifice of mine. Years may pass before we meet again; till then, farewell.' 'Good friend and true, farewell,' she