

(For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.)

DISENCHANTED.

Not lovely; but her mobile mouth
Half open like a crimson flower,
Bursts into such a wondrous laugh,
That I can only madly quaff
The sounds delicious hour by hour,
Like music floating from the South.

Not true of heart; and yet my heart
Wheels round her heart in ceaseless passion;
Why should her face have such a power,
Which well I know is falsehood's dower?
Will my heart ever mothlike dash on
This pitiless light till life depart?

Nay! it will, knowing of the blight
That lurks beneath those sweet soft eyes,
And seeing 'neath that marble bust
Hearts cindered into loveless dust,
No longer seek that deadly prize:
But flutter out to the cool night?

BARRY DANF.

Montreal, August, 1876.

THE CURATE'S SON.

CHAPTER I.

A widowed mother and her only son are sitting on the opposite sides of a table that stands in the centre of a seven-roomed cottage, which they jointly occupy in the northern suburbs of London.

Both are busily engaged in writing. She is apparently making a fair copy of manuscript, each folio of which he from time to time hands over to her as he hurriedly dashes it off; and if a looker-on might judge from the quantity of loose sheets which lie carefully piled up on the sofa, it is evidently intended to be a work of no slight length.

They pursue their task with silent earnestness, and scarcely a syllable passes between them beyond an occasional question on the fond mother's part when some more than usually illegible word or phrase necessitates a momentary pause in her "labour of love."

While they are thus occupied it may be as well to take the opportunity of recounting some of the principal incidents of their former life, a knowledge of which is needful for the education of our tale.

Mrs. Needham was the widow of a poor curate, who, for the paltry stipend of seventy pounds per annum, had for years faithfully administered to the spiritual wants, and, as far as in him lay, to the physical needs, of a large rural parish, situated not far from Windsor.

Her husband, who had died at the comparatively early age of forty-five, had taken his degrees at Oxford with so much credit that he shortly became a "fellow" of his college; and if he could have made up his mind to remain in that state of single blessedness which a "fellowship" entails, the well-read, clever young clergyman would no doubt in due course have become a thriving and prosperous member of the Church militant; but, alas! "Love struck him with unerring dart," and in marrying Miss Amy Caldecot he lost his three hundred a year, and, in spite of all his scholastic attainments, ultimately subsided into that worst of all gentlemanly slaveries—a hard-working, ill-paid village curate.

Only the one child to whom the reader has just been introduced had blessed their union; and it need scarcely be mentioned that the fond father had, as long as he lived, taken all possible pains with the education of his darling boy.

His sudden death, however, when the lad was hardly sixteen, had cruelly cut short the many hopes which both parents had justly entertained of their son's future eminence, inasmuch as it had deprived him of such a tutor as he could hardly hope to meet again, even if the means had been forthcoming to command services of so high a grade; much less when the sorely straitened pecuniary circumstances in which both mother and son had been left by the loss of their sole support, had rendered every shilling that could be scraped together for "daily bread" scarcely sufficient for the provision of the commonest necessaries.

Still, young Arthur Needham had, at any rate, received that inestimable boon, the groundwork of a sound classical education. And as he had already given proof of aptitude and unflagging industry in pursuing his studies, and had also—his poor father had more than once told her—evinced tokens of no ordinary future talent, his mother continued to indulge in bright secret hopes; and, in her heart of hearts, ventured to predict no common success in life for her darling boy, provided he obtained "the ghost of a chance," as she phrased it, to fight his way through the dark clouds then surrounding them.

It was about six weeks after the curate's death that an incident occurred which completely changed the whole course and current of young Arthur's life—whether for future good or ill-fortune, the progress of our narrative must determine.

He was returning along a secluded lane from his usual afternoon ramble in the neighbourhood, and had nearly arrived at the garden gate of his small cottage to which their now sorely diminished income had only a few days before compelled them to remove, when the sound of rattling wheels and galloping horses, accompanied by loud screams for "Help!" fell suddenly on his startled ear.

He had hardly time to turn round, when he saw, within a few yards of him, a low, four-wheeled basket-chaise, to which was harnessed a pair of ponies that, having evidently taken flight at the report of a gun which had just been discharged by a boy who was employed in

scaring crows from a field that bordered on the hedge, had taken the bit between their teeth, and madly bolted off, kicking and plunging, to the dire distress and alarm of a young lady who was the sole occupant of the tiny carriage.

She had evidently lost all control over the reckless animals, and could scarcely keep her seat, as the frail vehicle swung dangerously from side to side, while it was dragged to and fro through the deep ruts, and up and down the shelving banks which rose steeply on either side.

The boy immediately sprang forward to arrest them in their furious career, and, at the imminent peril of his own life, he happily succeeded; but, at the same instant, a sudden descent in the lane, and a deeper rut than usual in its rugged surface, caused the chaise to overturn, and its youthful occupant to be thrown out, fainting and senseless.

To raise her in his arms, and carry her to the cottage in which he dwelt, was the work of but a few moments longer.

When he had transferred his inanimate burden with all possible tenderness to his mother's arms, and the exceeding loveliness of the girl whom he had thus gallantly rescued from almost certain death for the first time fairly met his view, Arthur Needham, boy though he was, felt a strange emotion rise in his heart and course rapidly through his veins—a emotion which, although he then knew not, would never cease to dominate his being until death stepped in and stayed all earthly sensation.

The kind care and attention which Mrs. Needham bestowed on the young lady who had been so providentially rescued by Arthur's coolness and courage, soon restored her guest sufficiently to be able to inform them that she was the daughter of Mr. Bute, one of the largest and most celebrated London publishers, whose country house was about two miles distant. And a medical man, who lived close by, having pronounced that all the serious harm which she had sustained from her accident was a most severely sprained ankle, a messenger was immediately despatched to their residence, to inform her father of the upset and its results.

He usually returned from business in town to a six o'clock dinner, and would, very probably, have arrived even before the note which she penned to him of her hair-breadth escape, and its happily results, could reach the villa.

A verbatim copy of the young lady's missive to her sole surviving parent is herewith appended:—

"DEAR OLD DAD,—

"The ponies you so kindly gave me the other day ran away with me this afternoon. I was pitched out of the basket-work, and should have been killed had it not been for the presence of mind of a young gentleman—not a young 'gent,' mind—who stopped them at the hazard of his life; and picked me up and carried me insensible into his mother's cottage. But I'm all right now; and, barring a badly-sprained ankle, I'm not the bit the worse for my acrobatic tumble. So don't fidget about it, but come and see me as soon as you've dined.

"My ankle is rapidly assuming an astonishing likeness to the pillar of your library table, which is, I think, about nine inches in diameter; and the medical man whom they have called in vows I ought not to touch the ground with my swollen foot for a week at least. He strongly recommends my staying here for that time, and says they are highly respectable people, &c., &c. The mother (a clergyman's widow) is most assuredly a remarkably nice sort of body; she has put me into a cosy little spare bed-room; and I think I should like it of all things. You can come and see me every day, course, when you return from town; and, dear old dad, you have plenty of money, you know, and could recompense them handsomely for my board and lodging, and any trouble that I might give; so get your dinner, and drink a couple of glasses extra of the old port, and then come over, and we'll arrange it all as nice as can be. I'm just going to devour a mutton chop and two beautiful potatoes.

"Ever your affectionate daughter,

"EDITH BUTE."

It need not be said that the first part of the foregoing communication put the worthy publisher into a sad state of trepidation, for Edith, was his only surviving child, and he loved her dearly.

But he calmed down considerably as he continued his perusal of it; and after hastily partaking of a good dinner, during which he turned the matter in his mind, he resolved, as usual, to let his darling pet have her own way, and domicile herself at the widow's cottage until the medical man pronounced her able to use her foot without fear of further injury.

So, after taking the two extra glasses of old port which she had recommended, he ordered his brougham to be brought round, and had half a dozen bottles of sparkling Moselle—the wine he knew she liked best—carefully placed on the front seat, and drove off to see the young lady who had been "pitched out of the basket-work" and sprained her ankle, and proclaimed her intention of devouring "a mutton chop and two beautiful potatoes."

CHAPTER II.

When Mr. Bute arrived at the cottage, he found his daughter reclining on a couch in one of the prettiest and neatest little chambers he ever recollected to have seen.

The furniture was old-fashioned, but exceed-

ingly good; the accessories were quiet, but in excellent taste; and altogether there was an air of real comfort about the apartments, that, in comparison with any of the large gorgeously appointed rooms of Bulwer Villa, which he had himself built, and named after the celebrated novelist, was absolutely refreshing.

"Well, dad," said Edith, as her father entered the room, "here I am, you see; all serene and snug, after my topsy-turvy tumble." "You are a sad madcap, Edith," said Mr. Bute, kissing her fondly. "But how on earth did it happen?"

"Ah, that you must ask the ponies." "Now don't be a foolish child! There must have been some cause!"

"Of course there must," archly replied this rather fast young lady; "you know your favourite Shakspeare says, 'This effect defective comes by cause,' and I perfectly agree with him; but still," continued she, pointing to her swollen ankle, "I may not know the cause of this effect defective."

"She's a chip of the old block! She's a clever girl, although she is a madcap!" muttered the fond father to himself, highly pleased at this apt quotation from his dearly loved poet.

"I forgot to ask you in my note," she said, laughingly; "but do you happen to have brought a glass of my pet wine for me, dad, to wash that little bit of old *Polonius* down?"

"Yes, my darling, I have," replied he eagerly, as he produced a bottle of Moselle from his pocket; "and I've brought five more in the carriage with me, to last you the whole week. But I don't think"—(this somewhat seriously)—"that Shakspeare requires a washing down to make him palatable."

"I said to wash *Polonius* down, and he was an old fool you know; and fools require some sort of stimulant to enable one to swallow their folly without disgust."

"Humph! Deduction passably good, but founded on a false premiss. *Polonius* was not a fool, my dear, and Shakspeare never intended to make him one. He was an astute, clever old man, whatever the critics may aver to the contrary."

"Well, we'll say that it is wanted to wash the mutton chop and potatoes down, then. They brought me up a tumbler of spring water; but, you see, they didn't offer me any wine, and I didn't like to ask for it."

"You were very right. Ah! stop, though! What will the doctor say? What about inflammation? I quite forgot that."

"The doctor be fiddled! I'm as well as ever I was in my life. Come, make haste, like a dear old dad! I'm dying with thirst; there's a cork-screw and wine-glass on the table."

"I see there is; but we must not make use of them without the medical man's permission."

"Nonsense! One glass, at any rate, won't hurt me!"

"It may, my child."

"But I say it won't."

"And I reply that I cannot be a party to giving it, at all events!" And, so saying, he rose from his seat, and placed the bottle on a table at the opposite side of the room.

Now, Miss Edith Bute did not so particularly want the wine; but she did desire to have her own way. It has, no doubt, been already discovered by the reader of this true history that she was a somewhat self-willed young person—in other words, a spoiled child; and she had, ever since her mother's death, been so humoured and petted by her father, who was foolishly fond of her, that the slightest contradiction was apt to put her into an ungovernable passion.

"I will have it!" she exclaimed, in a tone of towering rage.

"And I won't give it to you!" replied he, with great determination; for the probable danger of increasing the inflammation in her already frightfully swollen ankle gave him a strength and firmness to resist her, which nothing short of his fear for the consequences of yielding to her temper could have accomplished.

"Then I'll get it myself!" vociferated the headstrong girl, totally forgetting her inability to move, and indignantly starting up.

But at this juncture, our dear, good, kind but stern old Mother Nature intervened, and instantly settled the matter by throwing the young lady back on the sofa before she had well risen from it, in unbearable pain.

"Oh!—oh!—oh!—oh!—oh!" cried she, in pitiable agony.

"Oh!—oh!—oh!" echoed the fond, foolish father, in tones of the deepest commiseration.

"My dear darling!—my precious treasure!—what a stupid you are! Here, here, I'll give it to you—I'll give you the whole bottle rather than you should subject yourself to such pain as this, my child!"

But, luckily, this crowning act of insanity was put a stop to by a gentle tap at the door, and the entrance of the medical man; who, deeming it a rather serious case, had called in again to see how his patient was getting on.

"What is the matter?" inquired the doctor, as he took a chair and felt her pulse. "We are not worse, I hope? The pain ought to have subsided considerably by this time. Humph! pulse too high; febrile symptoms. You have used the lotion every half-hour, of course!"

"Yes doctor," replied she, with as much calmness as she could assume.

"You seem to be in much greater pain than I had expected to find you."

"It is—it is—still rather painful! But I unwittingly attempted to move it just now!"

"Ah, that accounts for it! This is a most severe sprain. You must not attempt to change

your position, on any pretence whatever, for some hours, or I won't be answerable for the consequences. This gentleman is—"

"My father, Mr. Bute."

"Ah!—I congratulate you, sir, on your daughter's narrow escape! If she is kept perfectly quiet for a week or ten days here, she can be removed to your own residence; but I must strongly advise that she does not stir from this room until at least that time has elapsed."

"Very well, doctor," said the old publisher. "I am certain that she will have every possible care and attention from Mrs. Needham, who is a highly respectable lady, and a very kindly one, too. For the next two or three days the plainest diet must suffice."

"She can have a glass of good wine, I suppose!" inquired her fond father.

"Not a drop!—not one drop! Nothing but tea, toast and water, barley water, water gruel. No coffee—no beer. Wine and spirits are absolute poison!"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!" exclaimed poor Edith, with a sigh that came from the bottom of her heart.

"Ah, my dear young lady," said Dr. Williams, with a smile, "this is a very sad prospect for you, no doubt, after unrestrained indulgence in all the delicacies and luxuries of your father's table; but, believe me, it is absolutely necessary that you should adhere strictly to the regimen which I have pointed out. Your pulse is much higher than I had expected to find it. You must keep yourself quiet. I will send you a couple of pills, which you must take to-night, and a draught the first thing to-morrow morning. I shall be with you early, and shall hope to find a marked change for the better. Meantime, recollect that quiet—the most absolute quiet both of mind and body—is all essential. Good day!"

And with these instructions the doctor bowed himself out. And there sat the father and the daughter, wofully gazing at each other, and looking unutterable things!

"Poppet," said he, at last, "so fond as you are of a good breakfast, and a good dinner, and a good tea, and a good supper, you're in a nice predicament!"

"So it appears," said she, with a most lugubrious grimace; "but you didn't ask him anything about the eating part of the diet."

"No, I didn't, my poor child!"

"And why not?"

"Well, he astonished me so much with his catalogue of drinks, that I thought I had better leave it alone! Did he know of the mutton chop and potatoes, my child?"

"I can't say, I think not."

"I feel sure he didn't; and he had better not be told now. If he does, he will put you on bread and water, to a certainty."

"Ah! but even that isn't the worst!"

"What do you mean?"

"The pills and the draught! I detest physic! I can't conceive what good pills can do to a sprained ankle!"

"Nor I, my child; but you'll have to swallow them! We mustn't disobey the orders of our medical men, you know. I'd take the pills and the draught, too, for you, with pleasure, but that would do you no good."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" again sighed Edith; now deeply regretting the violence of temper which she plainly saw had run her pulse up to fever heat, and brought the pills and draught, and perhaps the whole catalogue of slops, into the doctor's prescription.

"Well, darling, it is useless to mourn over it; what can't be cured must be endured, you know. Eh? Hark! I declare the church clock is striking nine! I'll go down stairs and have a word or two with Mrs. Needham and her son, and thank them both for all their kindness, and then I'll be off home. You shall see me again to-morrow morning before I go to town. Keep up your spirits, darling; and pray take the pills. And now good night, my child, and heaven bless you!"

"Good night, darling old dad—good night!" And thus, with a kiss of fond affection, the father and daughter bade each other adieu.

CHAPTER III.

Whether Miss Edith really took the pills and the draught was a matter known only to herself; suffice it to say that the strength of her constitution and general state of robust health enabled her to recover very speedily from all the ill-effects of her accident, and, in a fortnight, her sprained ankle was a thing of the past.

As she gradually regained the use of her foot, the intercourse with her kind hostess and Arthur became more frequent, and the pleasure she took in their society increased daily.

Her father, who was a constant visitor at the cottage, was not only profuse in his expressions of gratitude, but strove to evince, by deeds as well as by words, his deep sense of what he owed to the boy who had so courageously saved his daughter's life at the hazard of his own; and the young lady herself was by no means chary of her acknowledgments.

During the intimacy which had sprung up between the families, the old publisher soon found out that in consequence of the curate's death, without his having been able to make any provision for his wife and son, they were in very straitened circumstances. And after a long consultation with Edith, who entertained the idea with all the ardour that belonged to her really kind and impressionable nature, he made Arthur an offer to take him into his London publishing house as a junior confidential clerk;