

rived, and once more the purpling fields awaited the coming of the hay-makers. But Theophile did not wait, and on a fine morning in July the strident rattle of his mowing-machine filled the air. All the birds and beasts of the farm ceased their morning songs, pausing to listen to the unfamiliar discord. Then the cheerful orchestra began again, louder than ever, as if to welcome the new comer into the happy noisy country family.

All day Theophile drove up and down the broad fields, until the tasselled hay no longer waved in the breeze, but lay prostrate in fragrant rows, soon to dry in the sun, then to be raked into heaps, piled upon the great waggons and stored away in the spacious barns. In the course of ten days the entire crop of nearly twenty thousand bundles was saved in fine condition. At the high prices then current it was a fortune for Theophile. The success for which he had worked and waited was his at last.

## IV.

ONE evening after sunset Theophile sat on the piazza of his great empty house watching the play of lightning on the gathering clouds. The coming storm he had no reason to fear. It might, perhaps, do some damage to his neighbours' hay, but that was no fault of his. By and by they would come to his way of thinking and in the end would lose nothing. Meanwhile, it was a satisfaction to see them suffer a little for their stupidity.

As for himself, Theophile rejoiced to think of his well-filled barns. Twenty-thousand bundles! It was magnificent! Then there was the farm of nearly three hundred *arpents*, the horses and cattle, the money in the bank, the new stone house. "Truly," he thought, "I am a very happy man."

At this moment a flash, as of lightning, illuminated the dark recesses of Theophile's soul. He perceived himself as he was, the most miserable of men, pitied by the *cure*, hated by the neighbours, forsaken by the girl he loved, solitary and destitute in the cursed pride and hardness of his heart. "O, *Mon Dieu*! I am poor, very poor. There is not a soul in the world who is my friend. All my success, of what good is it? And all this wealth, to whom shall I give it? Philomene, Philomene, have I not said it is all for you?"

Was it that the good God heard the cry of repentance that rose from the heart of Theophile, or was it by accident that the answer came? Who can tell? But it is certain that gentle hands pressed the latch of the garden gate and soft footsteps advanced

along the gravel walk, until Theophile knew that his good angel stood by his side in the hour of darkness, in a low voice he said, "Is it you, Philomene, is it really you?"

"Yes, M'sieu' Beureparie, it is I, and I have something to tell you."

"Tell me that you love me, Philomene, say that you will marry me in October, if it please God."

"But no, Theophile, it is about Isidore that I wish to speak. He is a wicked man, and it was he who spoiled your machine last summer. It was he, also, who set fire to your barn, and not the lightning as we supposed."

"I know it," said Theophile, quietly.

"You knew it and you said nothing?"

"To what end, Philomene? Besides, Isidore was my friend."

"Your friend! Theophile! He is your worst enemy, and mine too. He is very angry with me also, for a certain reason. But that is not all. He will come again to-night, as soon as the storm begins. I am sure of it. You will watch, will you not, Theophile?"

"Yes, dear," said Theophile, as he kissed her, "and you are a brave girl to come so far on such a night as this."

"Oh, no, Theophile; it was nothing. And now I must go. Do not come with me. My father is back there by the gate. Good-bye, Theophile."

"Good-bye, dearest," said Theophile, as he kissed her, without protest, for the second time, "And it will be in October after all, will it not?"

About midnight the storm broke, and from the black clouds overhanging L'Ange Gardien there fell great bolts of fire, instantly followed by crashing thunder and heavy drops of rain. People rose from their beds in fear, crossed themselves and muttered infinite prayers, scarcely hoping to see the morning light. "It is because of Theophile Beurepaire," said many a pious *habitant*. "His barns will be burned again, without a doubt. It is the good God, and we shall have no more mowing-machines in L'Ange Gardien."

So also thought Isidore Gagnon, as he knelt on the floor of Theophile's barn, trying to kindle some loose hay with the aid of a box of matches and some cotton wool. Already two matches had spluttered out but the third burned well and Isidore applied it to the little pile. The cotton was damp and would not ignite.

"Sacre," he muttered, "I must use the turpentine after all."

Turning to get it he saw the tall form of Theophile standing near the door, lantern in hand.

"Good evening, Isidore," said the young man in a quiet voice.

Isidore did not reply. There was nothing to say. "Well, Isidore, do you wish to be sent to prison, or shall I let you go home?"

"You cannot send me to prison, Theophile, for you have no evidence. Besides, what have I done? Nothing."

"Nothing, Isidore? Not to-night, perhaps, but what of last year? Damase Tremblay remembers something, also M. Duhamel and even Philomene. The evidence is sufficient, I think."

At the mention of Philomene's name Isidore grew pale. "It is all over then," he said. It was for her sake that I did it. Do what you like with me, Theophile. Yet I was your friend."

"That is true, Isidore, and I cannot forget it. Perhaps we shall be friends again, if God will. But you will not try to burn my barn again, Isidore?"

"*Mon Dieu*, no!" said Isidore, as he turned away. "I have not deserved your consideration, Theophile."

The next morning at sunrise Bonhomme Duhamel came to see Theophile Beurepaire. "Theophile," he said, "it is impossible for me to cut my hay this year. I am not as young as formerly and I can get no labourers. Your work is all finished. Can you come to help me?"

"With great pleasure, M'sieu' Duhamel," said Theophile, "and shall I bring the mowing-machine?"

"As you wish, Theophile. I have been to blame. You must forgive me."

"I will come, M'sieu' Duhamel, and the horse-rake I will bring also. The small hay-cart will be better, since the barn doors are small. Will you not in time enlarge them and make use of the large waggons?"

"I will do whatever you say, Theophile. You shall have your own way in everything."

"And Philomene?" pursued the inexorable Theophile.

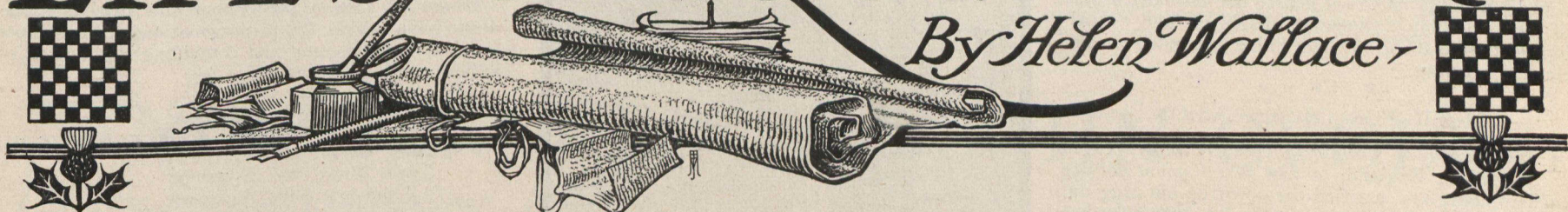
"Philomene also, my son," said the old man, embracing Theophile.

"Philomene shall drive the horse-rake, my father. It will be a fine arrangement and there are yet many days of good weather. The hay will all be saved, without a doubt. And after that—"

"After that we will celebrate," said Bonhomme Duhamel.

# LIFE'S CHEQUERBOARD

By Helen Wallace



Resume: Lady Marchmont and her grandniece, Lesley, are visiting the former's nephew, Richard Skene, at "Strode," his Scottish home. They withdraw from the dining-room, after Lady Marchmont has pled with her nephew to forgive an erring member of the family. Mr. Skene's lawyer, Dalmahoy, ventures to refer to this injury of many years before. The offender, Adrian Skene, the son of Richard's cousin, had refused years before to marry Lesley and the old lawyer advises his friend to alter his will. Mr. Skene tells of how Adrian had won Mary Erskine, the girl whom he had loved, and the emotion called up by this recital of past wrongs proves too much for his failing strength. He falls to the floor and dies of an attack of heart trouble. Lesley Home, after her uncle's death, dreads the prospect of meeting Adrian again. Adrian arrives and is greeted warmly. At the reading of the will it is found that the property is left to him, on condition that he marries Lesley. Otherwise the latter becomes owner of "Strode." In the excitement following this announcement, Adrian's wife appears. Lesley wishes Adrian to accept position of manager of the Strode estate. The latter accepts and informs his wife, Alys, a shallow and rather disappointing young person, of his new position with which she is naturally delighted since Adrian had not been successful as a London journalist. Sir Neil Wedderburne, one of the trustees, is dissatisfied with Adrian's management and shows plainly that he desires Lesley to become his wife. In the meantime, Alys becomes restless and discontented with the quiet life of "Strode."

One day, while looking over some old papers, Alys comes upon an unsigned will which gave "Strode" to Adrian. She forges the signature and places the will among papers which Lesley Home is to examine. The latter finds the will and arranges for a meeting of legal authorities. The forgery is detected and announced. Adrian sees that Alys is guilty but screens her by refusing to explain. He then leaves "Strode" in disgrace. Two years go by and Sir Neil resumes without success his suit for Lesley's favour. The latter informs Lady Marchmont of her belief that Alys, who had also suddenly left "Strode," is in London.



Only it had been in any other way," murmured Lesley, her eyes bright with pain. "If only I knew where she is." Lady Marchmont shrugged her shoulders under their fluttering laces. "Better not stir muddy waters, my dear, Alys was probably nearer the truth than she thought when she wrote that the air of Strode was too rarified for her, or something like that. But I think the little cockatrice had some kind of conscience, and it was that partly which drove her away. I can't bear to think of that horrible day, but whatever

that dreadful avowal of Adrian's may have meant, I am certain that that wretched girl was at the bottom of it."

"You think so, too?" exclaimed Lesley, a sudden change in her voice. "I have often wondered—it seems the only possible explanation—"

"Think so—I am sure of it," Lady Marchmont swept on, heedless of the halting words. "But, for pity's sake, my dear, don't let us speak of this again. I thought I should have died that day when I heard Adrian Skene's son make such a confession. If he had lifted his hand in anger and killed a man, it would at least have been a clean and honest crime, but a creeping, despicable forgery—and a forgery to despoil you! Faugh! don't let us speak any more."

"I can't believe it," exclaimed Lesley, hotly. "I couldn't believe it even at the moment when I bade him go. A man doesn't so belie his nature all at once."

"And how much do you know of his nature?" asked Lady Marchmont, with bitter shrewdness. "Or what five years' scramble for bread might make of it with a creature like Alys beside him, who I verily believe has no more notion of right and wrong than a cat when it licks the cream. There's nothing we can do. Adrian made that plain when he left Strode that night without a word or a sign. I wonder he didn't blow his brains out rather. Alys

(Continued on page 21)