

(Copyright secured. All rights reserved.)

CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

THE REVEREND JAMES LANGHORNE BOXER,

Rector of La Porte, Ind., U.S., and formerly co-Editor with Charles Dickens of *All the Year Round*.

EDITED BY THE

REV. WILLIAM SMITHETT, D. D., of Lindsay, Ont.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HOME SCENE.

It was approaching the hour of noon, and old Alice was sitting at the window of Clara's apartment looking at the flowers, which, in well-arranged parterres, graced the front of the Priory. By the side of Alice lay Clara sleeping on a couch. Her countenance still retained its beauty, although pale from indisposition as the result of her fall. She had spent a restless night, and with the morning she had sunk into a refreshing slumber. Turning her eyes from the garden and fixing them on her mistress, that faithful old creature smiled and wept. The tears which dimmed her eyes came from the thought of the dead, while the smile, which was a sunbeam struggling through a rain shower, was presented as a thank-offering to Heaven that Clara still remained.

"Beautiful creature!" exclaimed Alice, as she sat with her eyes fixed on the sleeping form before her. "Surrounded by all that could make life happy, and yet the condition of the humblest cottager might be envied by you. She at least can be happy in what you are denied. The exercise of her choice in the matter of a life happiness is hers, a privilege denied to you. She is free; but they would have you become a splendid slave, chained to do the bidding of a man you could not love. Oh! that my darling may hold out to the end against him who brought my lady to an early grave. I am glad I was born poor, if to be rich is attended with the misery I have seen. I am glad that I am poor, although I should be left friendless were Clara taken from me. Friendless! it is true. Would that I could again see my brother, my childhood's friend, although too young to know me when removed; but there is little chance that I shall see him; the sea, I fear, has long since swallowed him up. Let me see, how old would he be? I should think about the age of Jacob Winter. His death leaves me alone in the world; yet, friendless as I am, I would not change my lot with that sleeping beauty."

As she uttered this last sentence she arose for the purpose of driving out from the room a humming fly, which had intruded its presence through the half-opened window, and whose droning she was afraid would disturb the sleeper. "You're gone!" she said, as a blow from her handkerchief brought the insect to the floor. At that moment a gentle breeze stealing into the room played around the face of Clara and aroused her from her slumbers. On opening her eyes, she exclaimed:

"Alice, I have had such a beautiful dream!"

"I'm glad to hear it, darling," replied the old woman.

"I have been walking through marble palaces and in gardens, where the most exquisite taste had exhausted itself in producing scenes of beauty. In those gardens fountains, wrought with the highest skill, threw forth their sparkling jets in the most fantastic shapes, and birds of most beautiful plumage poured forth their voices in sweetest harmony. Both in the halls of the palaces and in the gardens I saw persons walking, but who they were I could not tell, for the figures changed so quickly; yet the transition did not affect the happiness of being present with them, while their appearance was most attractive—most lovely."

On hearing the dream related, Alice shook her head and was silent.

"Doesn't my dream please you, old friend?" enquired Clara playfully, as she saw the conduct of her nurse.

"I don't like it, my lady."

"Pray, why not?"

"I beg your pardon, but dreams which come to us after twelve o'clock at night have to be taken contrary to what they appear. I have noticed this for many years, and I am afraid your dream means no good."

"Nonsense, Alice! I place no faith in dreams nor think of them but as the vagaries of a playful imagination producing for the moment either pleasure or pain."

"I wish I didn't!" and as the sound of footsteps approaching the apartment were heard, all further talk on the subject of dreams ceased.

It was Sir Harry, whose footsteps they heard; he was coming to see Clara.

As he entered the room, Alice retired, and, passing her, he advanced to where Clara was reclining. There was a resolute manner in his conduct, and yet so troubled as to give him the appearance of a man who had made up his mind to commence an unpleasant task, and was doubtful if he should be able to carry it through. Clara quickly discovered the mood in which her father presented himself, and a momentary misgiving seized her mind.

"So you have met with an accident, I hear,"

he commenced abruptly; "it might have been worse with you; but who succeeded in stopping the horse?"

This question had been studied by the baronet in his determination to come at once to the matter which had led him to visit his daughter. The paleness resting on the cheek of Clara increased as she heard her father; and that she might prepare a reply, and show to him that she understood the purpose of his coming, she gazed at him for a moment in silence. That look he could not endure; it was the light of innocence flashing on that dark soul.

"May I request of you to close the door?" Clara replied; and during the pause that had succeeded the question of the baronet, she had gained command of her feelings. Having her request fulfilled, she proceeded: "The person who saved my life is one toward whom you entertain no kindly feelings."

"Kind feelings may suit women and fools," he harshly returned.

"Does Sir Harry then think it to be manly to exclude them?"

"Pray who is the person to whom I am so greatly indebted for saving the life of such a precious child as yourself?" he again enquired, now bluntly sarcastic.

"The person to whom I owe my life is Charles Freeman."

"I heard as much; but how came this protégé of yours so near the scene of danger?"

"My father, may I request that on this occasion, and in consideration of my weakness, you will spare my feelings in speaking of Charles Freeman; and as to the circumstance which led him at a time so opportune to the scene of my misfortune, I have no means of knowing beyond that it was accidental."

"Tush! your feelings. Indeed. It is my feelings which will have to be considered in this matter, and I am determined that such shall be the case."

"Sir Harry, will you always permit your prejudice to consume your reason?"

"Ask me no questions. I am not here to be catechised by you, neither to assign any reason for hating the beggar who has your patronage. It is enough for you to know that I do hate him, and that I will hate him for ever. Nor am I without suspicion that the whole thing was a ruse, planned by him, and carried out by yourself for the purpose of bringing the wretch into my favour."

"Is it possible that you can think so basely of me, as for a moment to entertain the thought that for the purpose of imposing on you I would lend myself to an act so vile, and in so doing offer an insult to Heaven by my dissimulation?"

"To me, such conduct on the part of you both appears highly probable, for the infatuation which carries you to disobedience, would easily lead you to other evils."

"I scorn the charge of disobedience; when have I refused to obey you that you thus accuse me?"

"You certainly are most obedient—a very paragon of filial affection, or you would not persist in opposing my will."

"Nor would I, Sir Harry, did you assign a reason for your command worthy to be entertained."

"Then your powers of appreciation are to be the regulator of the right of my demand upon you."

"Not necessarily so; but who is most interested in the matter, yourself or me? Your command that I should sever my acquaintance with Charles Freeman is a matter of family pride rather than parental affection; but to obey it is to ask the sacrifice of my life happiness. The question between us, and I deplore it should exist, when stripped of all its surroundings, is, that your family pride is balanced against the happiness of my life. Sir Harry, which ought to be consulted? For once let reason and conscience be heard on this subject, and oh! do not persist in demanding my life as a sacrifice to that which I consider but little else than a phantom."

"I didn't come here to argue this matter with you," replied the baronet, "but to hear from your own lips the name of the person who saved your life, and to warn you for the last time, that, in permitting him to employ this event to grasp with a firmer hand your esteem for himself, that you will make me a terrible enemy to you both. I can become a fearful enemy, Clara, and I will be so, rather than you shall ever become allied to that plebeian race."

The rage of Sir Harry had now reached that point when anger ceases to rise in the lurid flames of distant denunciation, and had become a clear and withering heat, consuming all before it. Clara trembled as she heard this scorching determination of her father, and exclaimed:

"Oh! Sir Harry! My father! recall that

fierce resolve. Command me in all things but the one to which my heart is pledged, and I will make it a life study to seek your happiness. Bear with me when I tell you that Charles Freeman has never employed artifice or guile to control my affections. Did you but know him, you would be assured that he never would stoop to such an act, your prejudices would sink before his goodness, and that barrier of class, which now distresses you, would sink before his genial influence."

"Have you finished?" said the baronet when Clara had ceased speaking. "Madam, I repeat my firm resolve that, unless you obey my will, I am the eternal enemy of you both."

"Sir Harry, I cannot obey you; my affections, the most sacred treasure of my womanhood, are fixed for ever, and not even your threat, strong as I know it to be, shall cause me to withdraw them. I pledged my word to a dying mother, and I will rest my happiness, my life, upon my vow." On uttering these words the eyes of Clara shot forth the determination which characterized her, and, rising from the couch on which she had been lying, she stood confronting the baronet.

Under the influence of his passion Sir Harry became blind, dead to all sense of propriety and right, and in his excitement he so far forgot himself as to lift his hand against his daughter. Clara saw the intention of the baronet, and to avoid the blow removed herself, and thus escaped being smitten to the earth. Failing in this mad act, and now thoroughly ashamed of the folly into which his passion had betrayed him, he rushed from the apartment, exclaiming, "I'll be avenged at any risk!"

When Sir Harry had gone, the excitement, which had sustained Clara through the interview, gave way, and she sank down on her couch exhausted. Her heart became filled with most painful feelings, and, turning her face to the wall, she wept tears of bitter sorrow. Had she done right in so resisting her father's will as to make him the implacable foe of Charles Freeman? Was the thought which now oppressed her. She was willing to suffer herself, but ought she to have involved him in her sorrow? This thought tormented her. She had not opposed her father for the sake of doing so, nor could she see a reason why the accident of birth should be made a barrier to human happiness. To Clara, as to many others whose natural affections have been crushed by a foolish prejudice, class distinction appeared a misfortune. Her affections were fixed on him she had chosen, and he appeared worthy of her love. If he had not wealth equal to that she possessed, he had enough to satisfy himself, and what to her was an abundance of wealth when compared with happiness? Had she not seen Lady Chillington, her mother, lying in the lap of luxury a crushed and faded flower? Had she not heard the fruitless regret fall from her lips that she was not born a peasant? And was not she, herself, compelled to seek happiness from another source than riches? Moreover, that her affections had embraced him, whose origin her father considered to be a disgrace to the name of Chillington, was it not chargeable to himself? Content with low associates, he had become to be despised by his own class; and instead of placing her in a position where she might have chosen association, he had shut her up in seclusion. Was she to remain a prisoner until, in a fit of caprice, her father should release her, and present her with a husband that necessity, or something worse, compelled him to? Was she to become the counterpart of her mother, and the misery of the race to be entailed for ever? A mother's warning voice forbade it, and the vow she had given the sainted dead justified her opposition to the meaningless caprice of the baronet. These thoughts ran through her mind as she lay weeping, and a firmer resolve to risk all results in claiming this sacred right of woman filled her soul. Dashing aside the tears which almost blinded her, she rang for her faithful, though humble, friend.

How priceless at that moment would have been the presence of some one of the same social rank as herself, to whom she could have told the feelings of her withered heart, and whose counsel she might have taken in this hour of her extremity? But the reputation of her father had excluded all such from the Priory, and had almost made her own name a reproach by such as did not know her personal worth.

In obedience to the summons of Clara, Alice again appeared, who, too wise not to know the nature of the interview between the baronet and his daughter, made no allusion to the matter. Nor did her mistress care to grieve the spirit of her old friend, whom she knew shared her distress.

CHAPTER XXII.

A VISIT TO THE SMUGGLER'S HOME.

The cottage of Jack Peglen stood near the Jolly Sailor. The situation of the residence of the smuggler seemed too good for one so vile. That place might have become the abode of happiness tenanted by a different person. In front of the cottage the sea lay sleeping in tranquil beauty, or rolled in majestic thundering; while the rear of the place was shut in by a range of hills which sheltered its garden from the bleak north-east winds. That half acre of land which formed the garden of the smuggler's home might by industrious hands have been made to appear as a vestige of Eden beauty which had outlived the lapse of years. Sheltered from the possibility of being reached

by any cold wind, nature had formed it to be come a very conservatory for fruits and flowers; but crime had taken up its abode on that fair spot of earth, and with it had come idleness and wretchedness.

The smuggler's cottage bore traces of having at one time been the residence of respectability. Then the jessamine trailed over the trellis work which graced the front of the house, and the rose tree nailed to the wall sent forth the delicious perfume of its beautiful flowers to fill the surrounding air; but now the trellis work was broken, and portions of it hanging by a fragment of the vine, or supported by a rusty nail, danced in mournful aspect in the passing breeze. The rose tree, too, had run wild, and its briery arms as they swung to and fro in the wind struck the panes of the cottage window as if to arouse the inmates to reflect on the idleness which had brought it desolation. In the garden, also, wretchedness prevailed, heightened in effect by the appearance of an old kettle and spotless coffee pot lying on the ground, and by the presence here and there of a few melancholy-looking cabbages from which the heads had been eaten by two ancient chickens that appeared to hold the land in fee simple for a promenade. These chickens, with the facility of their race, had filled the ground with holes they had scratched for the purpose of basking themselves in the summer sun, which in rainy weather became filled with water making the place sloppy and wretched.

Amidst this desolation and ruin lived the family of the smuggler skipper. Nor was the interior of the residence more inviting, for the furniture of the room used for both parlour and kitchen consisted of two broken chairs, an oaken table with one leg, to which was attached by a freak of artistic skill three feet, and a plank resting on two kegs which served as a seat for the children. Yet amidst all this misery and squalor there lived one pure spirit. In daily association with the godless crew, this purer spirit made itself known in a manner so simple, and yet so certain, as not to permit mistake.

In the midst of such surroundings of wretchedness, and as though to reproach it, grew one little flower, a common musk plant, placed in a cracked teapot stood on the window sill. That flower belonged to the smuggler's little Sally, and the carefulness with which she attended to it, and the manner she hung over it, contemplating its development, and drinking in the perfume exhaled by its yellow flowers, gave positive proof that she possessed a pure mind. Humble though it was, this plant claimed the daily attention of that child, and because it was hers, that lawless rattle who claimed Jack Peglen as a father refused to touch it. To quarrel and fight with each other was their daily habit and delight, and to destroy what each other found pleasure in preserving afforded lots of fun; but that musk plant was Sally's, and some mysterious influence led them to revere it.

The two men who had come to the domicile of Jack Peglen, and who had sent little Sally to call her father from the Jolly Sailor, were Sir Harry Chillington and Jethro Lee, the gypsy. The object of these men in visiting the smuggler was such as they had no inclination the world should become acquainted with. Having, therefore, fastened the door that no intruder within or without the house should enter that room, the smuggler drew one of the two broken chairs near to the window for himself, leaving the other for the baronet, while the gypsy was left to accommodate himself as best he might. Being seated the skipper began,

"Now, Sir Harry, I am ready to listen to your business."

"And to act in it too?"

"That will depend on what you wish me to do."

"You are very particular, I daresay," replied the baronet sarcastically.

"No, I'm not extra particular what I do; few men are less nice than I on such matters; still I like to know what I am wanted for before I promise to do it."

"Just so; not being extra careful of what you do is certainly something to boast of."

"Well, we can't all be clever in the same thing, and if I cannot do ugly things so neatly as some persons, I have at least the pluck to do them openly."

"Do you mean to insinuate?"

"By no means; I simply say that I am what I appear to be, and don't care who knows it; but what is your pleasure with me?"

"I have an enemy I wish to get rid of."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"I am not disposed to get rid of him in the manner your reply would suggest."

"Haven't pluck enough?"

"I wish to put him on one side for awhile, and until he has learnt better manners than to cross the path of Sir Harry Chillington."

"That is to say, you have some fellow who is unpleasant to you, and you would like to kill him only you are afraid you would get found out and be scragged; while to do it in a neater way you think will save your neck."

"I have no desire that my hands should be blood-stained."

"But it doesn't matter that your heart is, because nobody sees that. Well, it would be a pity that so fair a hand as yours should be stained with the blood of man."

This remark made the baronet shrink and turn pale, and but for the revenge for which he required the services of the smuggler he