

Serial Story
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The Family Honor

By...
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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

Following the death of Miss Austwicke's brother, surrounded as it was with conditions "passing strange" to Miss Austwicke, we reach the point where this lady finds it necessary to become closely associated with the affairs of her dead brother. We have already suggested how she fears that his unfortunate marriage will reflect on the family honor, but the story is taking a shape that would seem to indicate that Miss Austwicke herself, as a result of that very "proper" pride of hers, will do that which more than, perhaps, anything else will touch the family honor of the Austwicke family. The visit of her little niece Gertrude at the point where the last month's chapters ended, has prevented an intended visit concerning her brother's affairs, and the chapter closes with the little niece asking about her dead Uncle Wilfrid in a way that is somewhat confusing to her aunt, Miss Austwicke.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.



How little did she know that a time would come when the guilty secrecy she was maintaining would eat like a gnawing cancer into her heart, and banish forever all peace. At present those unknown children inherited nothing, as she argued, but a name—barren to them of wealth—it might be of influence; what, after all, could it matter? Why should she soil the family honor by such a disgraceful avowal? Little did she deem that the family honor would be perilled far more by concealment.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE WRITING MASTER.

"The world is cruel, the world is untrue,
Our foes are many our friends are few;
No work, no break however we sue;
What is there left me for to do?"

BARRY CORNWALL.

While these events had been transpiring at Austwicke Chace, there was an humble abode in the neighborhood of London that was by no means uninterested in them. In that populous district, now called South Kensington, there were, at the time we speak of, still some old houses standing in the lanes that intersected the nursery grounds between Brompton and Kensington, to the north of the Fulham Road. In a dilapidated cottage—so old that it probably had been standing when Oliver Cromwell occupied a dwelling near—there lived an elderly man, who might, from his looks be described as an invalid, but that he never complained, and never left his work—that of writing master to certain schools in the vicinity—unperformed. Pale, thin, and lame, a stranger meeting him as he walked to and fro on his daily avocations, would have thought a tenant of a sick room had just struggled out for a breath of fresh air; though a second glance would have shown his clear grey eyes, in which pain had by no means quenched the light, and a well-cut, firm mouth, that showed a character more ready with endurance than complaint. We have said that the house occupied by this man was dilapidated, yet, like himself, it had a certain

air of respectability. There was nothing low nor sordid in the infirmities of either. The old, time-stained walls of the house, with the little, quaint bow-window of its parlor abutting about into the road, and which, like its door and doorstep, bulged a little out of the straight line by reason of age, was not without evidence of care and attention, to remedy the defects that could not be concealed. A drapery of ivy adorned the crumbling wall, and clung to the scattered eaves and overhanging gable; while the neatest little muslin blinds, in folds upon the casement, made it look something like a cheerful old face decorated with a cosy muslin cap. The paint on the door might certainly have been fresher; but it was impossible that the little oval brass plate, which announced "Mr. Hope" dwelt within, could have been more bright. Indeed, the constant burnishing had done by the letters of the name what some people did by its pronunciation nearly obliterated the H. The door-step, too, was a little alarming in its spotless whiteness—that is, if the mud of the lane had much encumbered the visitor's feet. Somehow the abode, as well as its master, seemed struggling to put a good face on its affairs, and to hold its own perseveringly on the narrow, debatable land that separates vulgar wealth and genteel poverty. It is upon the agonizing ridge of that same debatable land that the most desperate effort often has to be made to retain a place, and "Mr. Hope, Writing Master," had for some years clung with such a straining grip thereunto, that it was no wonder he was something worn and wasted in the effort.

But if the outside of the house bore such evidences of a struggle, the whole inside was still more demonstrative. The passage-oil-cloth was so worn that its original pattern was gone, yet, nevertheless, there was the polish of incessant dry rubbings on its sere surface; and the thin strip of carpet that covered the gaps and patches in the woodwork of the stairs boasted quite an arabesque of darns. In the best parlor, whose window we noted from without, there was a similar triumph of female ingenuity in the way of carpet darning. The old-fashioned chairs that surrounded the centre-table were so bright that, like many a venerable lady, they might be complimented on the admirable way in which they carried their age. A wonderful piano, made even before pedals were in use, and looking, in its oblong shape, mounted in a stand, not very much unlike a coffin on trestles, occupied one side of the room, and responded asthmatically to any touch that might be laid on its yellow keys; while an old sofa, with its lame leg carefully bandaged up, was made, by a chintz cover, to look quite an interesting invalid. Indeed, there was nothing plethoric, gaudy, or upstart in the room. Even the ancient brass fender and long spidery fire-place had a refined look, suggestive of purity and good breeding.

It was evening when Mr. Hope's knock at the door announced his return, and his daughter Marian Hope who had been at needlework by the bow window, was rising to open the door when she was prevented by the swift step of a girl some years her junior, who, jumping up from that gasping piano we have named, ran to the front door; and her laugh of welcome, and the kiss that accompanied it, could be heard all over the little house.

"Don't be so boisterous, child," said a quiet,

not displeased voice, and Mr. Hope, entering the parlor, was received by Marian more calmly, though a certain earnest anxious look showed she was not less interested than the younger and more demonstrative girl whose salutations had elicited the slight reproof of their object.

"Father, you are are not well?"

"Yes, Marian; oh, yes, I'm well enough. Don't worry either yourself or me about looks."

As he spoke the younger girl had taken his hat and brought his slippers, and the elder had placed his house-coat, while both were busied in putting carefully away the garments he took off; and resuming her inquiries with, "I don't want to be worrying, father, but I'm sure something has vexed you, and you're home earlier than usual."

"So much the better, my girl; then I'm not so tired. But get tea! When one door shuts another will open."

The last part of the sentence was said absorbedly, as if to himself, but Marian heard it, and leaning over the old arm-chair in which her father was seated, she bent down her head and whispered affectionately, "What door is shut?"

"Only Miss Webb's, Marian. They told me very politely to-day that they had long feared the walk was too much for me, and that, in short, a distant connection of theirs was coming to teach elementary drawing to the pupils, and he would undertake the writing."

"Oh dear, father, and you have toiled so hard, and felt such an interest in the pupils at Miss Webb's! It's a shame of Miss Webb."

"My dear she professes it is out of kindness to me. My lameness, Marian—though it's nothing, just nothing—I think is more apparent."

"I am afraid it is really worse, father."

"Not a bit child. I'm equal to anything—that is, of course, in my way. And I certainly think that I have toiled to do justice to the young folks. And some have repaid me: some I shall be sorry to see no more. That sweet wee thing, Gertrude Austwicke, she'll miss her old master; yes, she will, I know."

"He rocked himself back and forward in his chair as he spoke, as if to lull some inward pain, and his words fell, not only on Marian's ear, but on those of her companion, who was just entering the room, and said—

"Is that the dear little clever young lady, father, that you so often tell me of?"

"Ay, Mysie, 'tis. I would that you, child, learned like her. But there, she and I have parted, and whether the bonny blossom grows into fruitage, or is blown off life's tree, as such a fragile thing most likely will be, is nothing to me. I'm a soft fool to care sae muckle about the weans. It's a weakness I must e'en shake off."

Mr. Hope did not generally betray his northern origin in his speech, but when he was deeply moved the old Doric came to his tongue.

Meanwhile, the tea-table was soon laid, and a little warm cake was brought with a gleesome look by Mysie as the crowning triumph of the simple board, just as Marian seated herself and began to pour out tea. Mr. Hope, who had for a few moments, while these preparations were going on, sunk into a reverie, looked up and noticed the simple dainty that was handed to him. He put it aside gravely, saying, "No luxuries Mysie; no, child, they always disagree with me. Brown bread, little