

same spawn! He had been remiss, but would now compel those whom his neglect had injured to pay off his arrears! A most orthodox conclusion! but it did me little harm: it did not make me think that God was unjust, for my uncle, not Mr. Forest, was my type of Christian. The harm it did was of another sort—and to Charley, not to me.

Of course, while under the hands of the executioner, I could not observe what was going on around me. When I began to awake from the absorption of my pain and indignation, I found myself in my room. I had been ordered thither, and had mechanically obeyed. I was on my bed, staring at the door, at which I had become aware of a gentle tapping.

"Come in," I said; and Charley—who, although it was his room as much as mine, never entered when he thought I was there without knocking at the door—appeared, with the face of a dead man. Sore as I was, I jumped up.

"The brute has not been thrashing you, Charley?" I cried, in a wrath that gave me the strength of a giant. With that terrible bruise above his temple from Home's fist, none but a devil could have dared to lay hands upon him!

"No, Wilfrid," he answered; "no such honour for me! I am disgraced for ever!"

He hid his wan face in his thin hands.

"What do you mean, Charley?" I said. "You cannot have told me a lie!"

"No, Wilfrid. But it doesn't matter now. I don't care for myself any more."

"Then, Charley, what have you done?"

"You are always so kind, Wilfrid!" he returned, with a hopelessness which seemed almost coldness.

"Charley," I said, "if you don't tell me what has happened—"

"Happened?" he cried. "Hasn't that man been lashing at you like a dog, and I didn't rush at him, and if I couldn't fight, being a milkshop, then bite and kick and scratch, and take my share of it? Oh, God!" he cried, in agony, "if I had but a chance again! But nobody ever has more than one chance in this world. He may damn me now when he likes. I don't care!"

"Charley! Charley!" I cried; "you're as bad as Mr. Forest. Are you to say such things about God, when you know nothing of him? He may be as good a God, after all, as even we should like him to be."

"But Mr. Forest is a clergyman."

"And that was the God of Abraham before ever there was a clergyman to take his name in vain," I cried; "for I was half mad with the man who had thus wounded my Charley. I am content with you, Charley. You are my best and only friend. That is all nonsense about attacking Forest. What could you have done, you know?—Don't talk such rubbish!"

"I might have taken my share with you," said Charley, and again buried his face in his hands.

"Come, Charley," I said, and at the moment a fresh wave of manhood swept through my soul; "you and I will take our share together a hundred times yet. I have done my part now; yours will come next."

"But to think of not sharing your disgrace, Wilfrid!"

"Disgrace!" I said, drawing myself up, "where was that?"

"You've been beaten," he said.

"Every stripe was a badge of honour," I said, "for I neither deserved it nor cried out against it. I feel no disgrace."

"Well, I've missed the honour," said Charley; "but that's nothing, so you have it. But not to share your disgrace would have been mean. And it's all one; for I thought it was disgrace and I did not share it. I am a coward for ever, Wilfrid!"

"Nonsense! He never gave you a chance. I never thought of striking back: how should you?"

"I will be your slave, Wilfrid! You are so good, and I am so unworthy."

He put his arms round me, laid his head on my shoulder, and sobbed. I did what more I could to comfort him, and gradually he grew calm. At length he whispered in my ear—

"After all, Wilfrid, I do believe I was horror-struck, and it wasn't cowardice pure and simple."

"I haven't a doubt of it," I said. "I love you more than ever."

"Oh, Wilfrid! I should have gone mad by this time but for you. Will you be my friend whatever happens?—Even if I should be a coward after all?"

"Indeed I will, Charley.—What do you think Forest will do next?"

We resolved not to go down until we were sent for; and then to be perfectly quiet, not speaking to any one unless we were spoken to; and at dinner we carried out our resolution.

When bed-time came, we went as usual to make our bow to Mr. Forest.

"Cumbermede," he said, sternly, "you sleep in No. 5 until further orders."

"Very well, sir," I said, and went, but lingered long enough to hear the fate of Charley.

"Home," said Mr. Forest, "you go to No. 3."

That was our room.

"Home," I said, having lingered on the

stairs until he appeared, "you don't bear me a grudge, do you?"

"It was my fault," said Home. "I had no right to pitch into you. Only you're such a cool beggar! But, by Jove, I didn't think Forest would have been so unfair. If you forgive me, I'll forgive you."

"If I hadn't stood up to you, I couldn't," I returned. "I knew I hadn't a chance. Besides I hadn't any breakfast."

"I was a brute," said Home.

"Oh, I don't mind for myself; but there's Osborne! I wonder you could hit him."

"He shouldn't have jawed me," said Home. "But you did first."

We had reached the door of the room which had been Home's and was now to be mine, and went in together.

"Didn't you, now?" I insisted.

"Well, I did; I confess I did. And it was very plucky of him."

"Tell him that, Home," I said. "For God's sake tell him that. It will comfort him. You must be kind to him, Home. We're not so bad as Forest takes us for."

"I will," said Home.

And he kept his word.

We were never allowed to share the same room again, and school was not what it had been to either of us.

Within a few weeks, Charley's father, to our common dismay, suddenly appeared, and the next morning took him away. What he said to Charley, I do not know. He did not take the least notice of me and I believe would have prevented Charley from saying good-bye to me. But just as they were going, Charley left his father's side, and came up to me with a flush on his face and a flash in his eye that made him look more handsome than I had ever seen him, and shook hands with me, saying—

"It's all right—isn't it, Wilfrid?"

"It's all right, Charley, come what will," I answered.

"Good-bye then, Wilfrid."

"Good-bye, Charley."

And so we parted.

I do not care to say one word more about the school. I continued there for another year and a half. Partly in misery, partly in growing eagerness after knowledge, I gave myself to my studies with more diligence.

Mr. Forest began to be pleased with me, and I have no doubt plumed myself on the vigorous measures by which he had nipped the bud of my idleness.

For my part I drew no nearer to him, for I could not respect or trust him after his injustice. I did my work for its own sake, uninfluenced by any desire to please him. There was in fact no true relation between us any more.

I communicated nothing of what had happened to my uncle, because Mr. Forest's custom was to read every letter before it left the house. But I longed for the day when I could tell the whole story to the great, simple-hearted man.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONLY A LINK.

BEFORE my return to England, I found that familiarity with the sights and sounds of a more magnificent nature, had removed my past life to a great distance. What had interested my childhood had strangely dwindled, yet gathered a new interest from its far off and forsaken look. So much did my past wear to me now the look of something read in a story, that I am haunted with a doubt whether I may not have communicated too much of this appearance to my description of it, although I have kept as true as my recollections would enable me. The outlines must be correct; if the colouring be unreal, it is because of the haze which hangs about the memories of the time.

The revisiting of old scenes is like walking into a mausoleum. Everything is a monument of something dead and gone. For we die daily. Happy those who daily come to life as well!

I returned with a clear conscience, for not only had I as yet escaped corruption, but for the greater part of the time at least I had worked well. If Mr. Forest's letter which I carried to my uncle contained any hint intended to my disadvantage, it certainly fell dead on his mind; for he treated me with a consideration and respect which at once charmed and humbled me.

I fully expected that now at least he would tell me the history of the watch and the sword; even yet I was disappointed. But I doubt whether indeed he could have given me any particulars. One day as we were walking together over the fields, I told him the whole story of the loss of the weapon at Moldwarp Hall. Up to the time of my leaving for Switzerland I had shrunk from any reference to the subject, so painful was it to me, and so convinced was I that his sympathy would be confined to a compassionate smile and a few words of condolence. But glancing at his face now and then as I told the tale, I discovered more of interest in the play of his features than I had expected; and when he learned that it was absolutely gone from me, his face flushed with what seemed anger. For some moments after I had finished, he was silent. At length he said:

"It is a strange story, Wilfrid, my boy. There must be some explanation of it, however."

He then questioned me about Mr. Close, for suspicion pointed in his direction. I was in great hopes he would follow my narrative with what he knew of the sword, but he was still silent, and I could not question him, for I had long suspected that its history had to do with the secret which he wanted me to keep from myself.

The very day of my arrival, I went up to my grandmother's room, which I found just as she had left it. There stood her easy chair, there her bed, there the old bureau. The room looked far less mysterious now that she was not there; but it looked painfully deserted. One thing alone was still as it were enveloped in its ancient atmosphere—the bureau. I tried to open it—with some trembling, I confess; but only the drawers below were unlocked, and in them I found nothing but garments of old fashioned stuffs, which I dared not touch.

But the day of childish romance was over, and life itself was too strong and fresh to allow me to brood on the past for more than an occasional half-hour. My thoughts were full of Oxford, whither my uncle had resolved I should go; and I worked hard in preparation.

"I have not much money to spare, my boy," he said; "but I have insured my life for a sum sufficient to provide for your aunt, if she should survive me; and after her death it will come to you. Of course the old house and the park, which have been in the family for more years than I can tell, will be yours at my death. A good part of the farm was once ours too, but not for these many years. I could not recommend you to keep on the farm; but I confess I should be sorry if you were to part with our own little place, although I do not doubt you might get a good sum for it from Sir Giles, to whose park it would be a desirable addition. I believe at one time the refusal to part with our poor little vineyard of Naboth was cause of great offence, even of open feud, between the great family at the Hall and the yeomen who were your ancestors; but poor men may be as unwilling as rich to break one strand of the cord that binds them to the past. But of course when you come into the property, you will do as you see fit with your own."

"You don't think, uncle, I would sell this house, or the field it stands in, for all the Moldwarp estate? I too have my share of pride in the family, although as yet I know nothing of its history."

"Surely, Wilfrid, the feeling for one's own people who have gone before is not necessarily pride."

"It doesn't much matter what you call it, uncle."

"Yes, it does, my boy. Either you call it by the right name or by the wrong name. If your feeling is pride, then I am not objecting to the name, but the thing. If your feeling is not pride, why call a good thing by a bad name? But to return to our subject: my hope is that if I give you a good education, you will make your own way. You might, you know, let the park, as we call it, for a term of years."

"I shouldn't mind letting the park," I answered, "for a little while; but nothing should ever make me let the dear old house. What should I do if I wanted it to die?"

The old man smiled, evidently not displeased. "What do you say to the bar?" he asked.

"I would rather not," I answered.

"Would you prefer the church?" he asked, eyeing me a little doubtfully.

"No, certainly, uncle," I answered. "I should want to be sure of a good many things before I dared teach them to other people."

"I am glad of that, my boy. The fear did cross my mind for a moment that you might be induced to take to the church as a profession, which seems to me the worst kind of infidelity. A thousand times rather would I have you doubtful about what is to me the highest truth than regarding it with the indifference of those who see in it only the prospect of a social position and livelihood. Have you any plan of your own?"

"I have heard," I answered circuitously, "that many barristers have to support themselves by literary work, for years before their own profession begin to show them favour. I should prefer going in for the writing at once."

"It must be a hard struggle either way," he replied; "but I should not leave you without something to fall back upon. Tell me what makes you think you could be an author."

"I am afraid it is presumptuous," I answered, "but as often as I think of what I am to do, that is the first thing that occurs to me. I suppose," I added, laughing, "that the favour with which my school-fellows at Mr. Elder's used to receive my stories is to blame for it. I used to tell them by the hour together."

"Well," said my uncle, "that proves at least that if you had anything to say, you might be able to say it; but I am afraid it proves nothing more."

"Nothing more, I admit. I only mentioned it to account for the notion."

"I quite understand you, my boy. Meantime, the best thing in any case will be Oxford. I will do what I can to make it an easier life for you than I found it."

Having heard nothing of Charley Osborne since he left Mr. Forest's, I went one day, very soon after my return, to call on Mr. Elder, partly in the hope of learning something about him. I found Mrs. Elder unchanged, but could not help fancying a difference in Mr. Elder's behaviour, which, after finding I could draw nothing from him concerning Charley, I attributed to Mr. Osborne's evil report, and returned foiled and vexed. I told my uncle, with some circumstance, the whole story; explaining how, although unable to combat the doubts which occasioned Charley's unhappiness, I had yet always hung to the side of believing.

"You did right to do no more, my boy," said my uncle; "and it is clear you have been misunderstood—and ill-used besides. But every wrong will be set right some day."

My aunt showed me now far more consideration—I do not say—than she had felt before. A curious kind of respect mingled with her kindness, which seemed a slighter form of the observance with which she constantly regarded my uncle.

My study was pretty hard and continuous. I had no tutor to direct me or take any of the responsibility off me.

I walked to the Hall one morning, to see Mrs. Wilson. She was kind, but more stiff even than before. From her I learned two things of interest. The first, which beyond measure delighted me, was that Charley was at Oxford—had been there for a year. The second was that Clara was at school in London. Mrs. Wilson shut her mouth very primly after answering my question concerning her; and I went no further in that direction. I took no trouble to ask her concerning the relationship of which Mr. Coningham had spoken. I knew already from my uncle that it was a fact, but Mrs. Wilson did not behave in such a manner as to render me inclined to broach the subject. If she wished it to remain a secret from me, she should be allowed to imagine it such.

(To be continued.)

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TALES OF THE LINKS OF LOVE.

BY ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE.

LILLYMERE.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Continued.

"Whom, then, did you aim to save, in striking aside the deadly weapon?"

"Toby, my father's poor clerk."

"Not Lillymere?"

"And you, gallant sir, give me a life in every syllable of those precious words. No, no; not now were four thousand miles too far to come to be exalted to this unexpected, inexpressible joy! But, it was not Simon Lud I rode into the fight to save."

His response, if then formed in thought, was not spoken. The red flash of a cannon from a new position in the night combat, gleamed a moment on the black face of the seraggy forest. The flash soon followed by the roar. A streak of thin fierce light curving as a bow in the sky descended, trashing branches in weirdly whizzing ferocity; then exploding: tearing up stones; scattering fire and iron splinters in the bush thicket.

They had come a mile of the distance, and were riding easy, the escort twenty yards behind. Seeing other flashes, and other shells coming, the Captain called to the escort to halt, wheel about, and to Agnes to turn, and give her stead the rein.

At speed the party rode to camp; but as they approached saw live shells falling. The tent they had lately left was on fire, and the prisoner gone.

Hearing the Redbolt trumpets, and voice of Tass Cass, they rode in the lurid light to overtake the mounted troop, now out in pursuit of El Abra and the Guerilla scouts accompanying him. So the telegraph told nine hundred miles away, as you lately saw.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SUNK BY THE SCOURGE OF THE OCEAN, THE CORSAIR SHIP EL ABRA.

Pursuing into darkness pursuing the Guerillas, the Redbolts rode across a plain, five miles, on tracks well-known in the day, but hazardous then. At foot of a gently sloping eminence they halted and took possession of the deserted Bryer Clyne homestead, there to await daylight.

The captain, silent and deeply thoughtful, had given the lead to his lieutenant, and