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SOLITARY ISLAND
A NOVEL.
BY REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH

CHAPTER XL.—Continued.

"There, that will do," said the poet, "that's not a sensible thought, I don't know as I've had a sensible thought about this whole matter. I think I'll turn to the unexpected for a change."

"What can we do?" was Frances' daily cry.

"I can go to Clayburg," he said, almost with a blush. "I have a silly idea that perhaps great misfortune has made him penitent, and he has gone to do penance over his father's grave."

"That is it," said Frances eagerly. "I knew it would come to that. Mercy is not beyond him, Paul. Oh! go, like his good angel."

"I feel it is a nonsensical thing to do," said he, "but I suppose it must be done. And if I find him, and everything should be favorable, what could we say to him about—well, your mother and father, I for instance?"

He examined the paper on the wall attentively, while she looked at him with a puzzled face.

"If he is safe, that is enough," she answered simply.

"Well, let it go," said Paul, smiling. "He doesn't care very much for any of us, I fear, much as we are interested in him. And Frank, as long as you live let no one know that I made myself such a goose for your sake and his father's."

The poet proposed a trip to Clayburg that evening to his friend Ernest's company, and Peter received it with enthusiasm.

"I'll go in," said he, "and stop at the hotel; and when I meet Pandleton, dearest of old idiots No. 2, I'll not pay him the slightest attention, the poor old simpleton!"

"That suits me very well," said Paul. "I'll travel inco, also, and we'll arrive there in the evening. Next day we'll bloom on them like roses or turnips in the snow."

They started the next morning and went by way of Utica, reaching their destination at a late hour in the evening, when rheumatism kept the sturdy squire in his warm parlor. Peter was weary enough to retire to bed immediately after fitting on a nightcap of hot punch, and the coast thus cleared, Paul went quietly to the priest's residence, and suffered the disappointment of not finding him at home; but his knowledge of the people of Clayburg was large enough to make this mishap a trifle. He found a close-mouthed fisherman, after a few minutes' search, who for a reasonable sum agreed not only to take him to Solitary Island, but also to keep his mouth shut about it until eternity, and the journey was made in successful secrecy. Arrived at a spot overlooking the well-known cabin, Paul dismissed his guide and crossed the ice on foot to the opposite shore. It was now midnight. The lonely island lay three feet beneath the snow, and was singularly tranquil under the dim stars. A faint wind added to the gentle loneliness, and stirring the trees on the hill, brought Paul's eyes to the grave beneath them. No light or sign of human presence anywhere! No tracks in the snow save his own until he reached the cabin-door, and there began a pathway which led down the slope and up the opposite hill to the grave—the path marked out by the funeral procession! Even while he looked a figure came staggering from the grave and along the path to where he stood—a figure stooped, uncertain in its gait, moaning less like a man than an animal, without words or prayer, and stopping rarely to swing its arms upwards in impotent despair. Paul trembled with dread, and the tears sprang to his eyes. Was he to find the mental wreck he had once pictured? Florian gave no sign of surprise when he saw him, but adopted at once his usual reserve. "He was not insane."

"You here?" he said calmly, but the voice quavered. "I believe you were there that night, and I remember you said you had a message for me. Will you come in, if you care to?"

A cheerful fire burned in the hearth of the single room, and the yellow candle showed Izaak Walton in his usual place, with every other circumstance of the room undisturbed. Paul said nothing until he had scanned his old friend keenly. The great man sat down before the fire placidly and submitted to the inspection with an indifference so like his father's own that Paul drew a breath of delight. In ten days he

had changed woefully. His clothes hung upon shrunken limbs, and his face was wasted to a painful hollowness. Hollow cheeks, hollow, burning eyes, and wide nostrils! The hand which rested on the favorite book showed its cords and veins, the shoulders were rounded, and his whole attitude one of physical exhaustion. The tears again sprang to the poet's eyes. Here was a penitent surely, and there was something boyish or childish about him that appealed to the heart wonderfully, as if misfortune had stripped him of all the years since he was a boy, and of all his blushing honors.

"I have a message for you," the poet said, "but with your permission I'll put it off till to-morrow. I am going to remain here for to-night, with your permission also."

"Oh! certainly," Florian replied in the same uncertain voice; "there is a good room yonder where he slept. You can have the bed. Have you had supper?"

"I would like something to eat," the poet said out of curiosity. In a shuffling, shuffling way Florian took down a loaf of bread from the cupboard, poured some water into a cup, and sat down again without any apology for the scanty fare—just as his father would have done. Paul ate a slice or two of bread and drank the water, while a pleasant silence held the room. He did not know how to open the conversation.

"This was his favorite book," said he, touching Izaak Walton tenderly. "I remember often to have seen him reading it in this room."

"Yes," said Florian with interest, "and it is one of my earliest memories of him. I was very unfortunate in not knowing more of him. The world fooled me out of that treasure—and of many another," he added, partly to himself. Paul was surprised more and more. This pleasant, natural manner of speaking offered an odd contrast to his woebegone looks. It was something like the Florian of years past. He deliberated whether it would not be better to defer his communication until he understood his motives better.

"I came from New York to-night," he ventured to say. "I was anxious about you, and so were others."

"There was no need to be anxious," said Florian cheerfully. "I am quite happy here. It is a pleasant residence, winter and summer. I shall never regret leaving the city, which will certainly not regret me."

"You may not have heard of Mrs. Merrion," Paul remarked helplessly, so astounded was he by the last remark.

"No," said the other, without curiosity. "Some scandal connected with a Count Behrensk, probably."

"No. She married him and went to Europe last week quietly." And after that the poet said no more, for he was in a maze and knew not what to think or do.

"I shall retire now, with your permission, Florian," he said finally, using the old familiar name. "I hope I am not troubling you too much or driving you from your own bed."

"Not at all, Rossiter, not at all. I never sleep there. Good-night; and if you should not find me in the morning have no uneasiness. I shall turn up again assuredly."

Paul fell asleep without settling the vexed questions which Florian's odd manner and words suggested. The great man, left to himself, behaved in a simple, matter-of-fact fashion, at once pathetic and amusing. He snuffed the candle with a face as earnest as if snuffing candles was the one duty of his life, put away the remnants of Paul's supper carefully after washing the cup and drying it neatly, stirred the fire, opened much-handled Izaak, and settled himself for a quiet hour's reading. Ten days had fixed him in the solitary's groove as firmly as if he had been in it for years. On the night of Vladimir's revelations he had driven to his own apartments in a state of mind not to be described. He had long suspected his own share in his father's death, but the lurid color in which Vladimir painted his guilt was a fearful shock to him. He fled from the count in a sort of daze which his firm will could not dispel, and it seemed to him that madness or delirium was prevented only by the persistency with which he beat off the tumultuous thoughts that crowded upon him. His self-possession was entirely gone. The life which he had led, the ambitions which he had cherished, the woman



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It is with gratitude and heartfelt thanks I pen these lines: My wife had lost all control of her nerves and could only speak at times, and was in a very low condition generally. She commenced using Pastor Koenig's Nerve Tonic August 4th and a few days afterward she could come into the parlor and sing to the music and execute the solo part of hymns alone, it is impossible to do work about the house. I am sorry that I did not hear of this wonderful remedy sooner for I could have bought twenty-five or more bottles for what I paid the doctor here, just to come and look at her, for he did no further good whatever. Pastor Koenig's Tonic will be a blessing to all, and I can strongly recommend it. I send to-day for another bottle for my wife, and also for one for another lady whose nerves are weak, and whom I told what your Nerve Tonic had done for us.

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whom he had loved, all circumstances connected with his father's death, filled him with wild horror when he recalled them. He could not think of anything with method. He could only feel, and his feelings threatened to drive him into insanity, so sharp, so bitter were they, so confused yet active. It was instinct more than reason which sent him to Solitary Island. It was a mechanical effort of the will which produced the instructions for his clerk; but once on the journey, with people moving about him, and scene after scene bringing peace to his distracted mind, Florian was able to cry like a child hour by hour of his sorrowful flight. He scarcely knew why he wept, unless to ease the burden pressing upon his heart, which seemed to flow away with his tears. Like Paul, he reached Clayburg in the night, and unseen fled away on foot across the ice over the well-known course which he and Ruth and Linda had often taken in the yacht; past Round Island with a single light for the ice-waste, leaving Grindstone to the left as he ran along the narrow strait with two islands rising on each side of him like the walls of a coffin; through the woods to the spot overlooking the old cabin; across the bay and up the slope to the lonely grave on the summit, where he cast himself with a long, sad cry of grief and despair.

Five days passed before anything like calm and systematic thought returned to him. One idea stood before him like an inhabitant of the island, with a personality of its own—the words of the count: "Behold the murderer of his father!" He muttered those accusing words many times in the day and night, sitting on the grave, regardless of the cold, and whispering them to himself; weeping, sobbing, raving, moaning, silent by times, as the fit took him; never sleeping two hours at a time; haunted always by a dreadful fear of divine or human vengeance. Phantoms of past incidents and people were floating around him sleeping and waking, causing him constant alarm. Even the sweet face of Linda frowned upon him, and that was hardest of all to bear. At the close of the fifth day his delirium suddenly left him and he enjoyed a long and refreshing sleep. When he awoke the tedious nightmare of sorrow and remorse and dread had vanished. He was himself again, but not the self which had fled from New York to hide its anguish in the icy solitude. There was another Florian born of that long travail, and a better Florian than the world had yet known. He was not aware of any change. He had lost his habit of self-consciousness, and he was to become aware of what was working within him only when others pointed it out to him. Kneeling in the snow at the foot of the grave, he said his morning prayers, promising the father of his love that never again would he have occasion to grieve for him, and that what man could do to atone for murder, he, with the help of God, would do. His breakfast he made on fresh fish and meal found in the larder, travelling many miles that day in the snow to obtain flour and meal and necessaries at a distant village. He was very weak, but it troubled him not at all. He had no regard for his own sufferings so firmly were his eyes fixed on the martyrdom his father endured for his sake. Every available moment found him at the grave in deep thought or prayer. The priest of an obscure village heard with wonder his strange confession of ten years of life, marvelling what manner of man this could be; and his communion was simple and fervent, as became a penitent. Thus began the eighth day, and at its close he was sitting calmly before the log-

fire in the kitchen, and Izaak Walton was in his hands, with the famous paper lying open before him. He had placed it between the leaves and forgotten it during the time he remained on the island after his father's funeral. He read it again with a better insight into the contrast it afforded with his political career. Scarcely a line in the statement but he had openly or impliedly contradicted within ten years, and the ideal of Christian manhood penned by a boy had been lost to the maturer mind of the man. He put it away carefully, and in so doing noticed the famous campaign letter which he had once thought an evidence of his liberal feelings and his independence of Italian church domination. It hung in a frame, and must often have pierced his father's heart with its uncatholic sentiments. He did not disturb it. Much as it had increased his father's anguish, it must complete another work before its usefulness was ended.

What was he going to do? His period of uncontrolled grief was over and his long penance begun. Where was it to end? He had many injuries to repair—his scandalous life, his rejection of Frances, his treatment of all his friends. Not for one moment did he think of returning to New York or to public life. He saw clearly the precipice from which Providence, by means of great misfortunes, had snatched him. He had entered the great city a pure-hearted boy to whom sin was almost unknown, whose one desire was to preserve the faith, in spirit and in word, incurrant in himself. How gradually and how surely he fell! Careless intercourse with all sorts of people and the careless reading of all sorts of books, with the adoption of all sorts of theories and ideas had brought upon him an intellectual sensuality only too common and too little noticed in the world. Then came the loose thought and the loose glance and the loose word, the more than indifferent companions, the dangerous witticism, the state which weakened faith and practice and prepared the soul for its plunge into the mud. Thank God! he had escaped the mud, at least. But who had saved him? And was he to go back to it all? "There are some men whom politics will damn." Wise words for him, at whom they seemed to point. What was he to do? He thought over it that night and the next morning. His resolution formed itself slowly; finally it was made. He would take his father's place on the island, and remain there until death released him from his penance. Was it a hard thing to do? No, he said, not with the graves of his father and sister so near him. And thus was he situated when Paul found him.

The poet made his morning meal in silence and constraint. It reminded him forcibly of many meals he had eaten in the same room while sharing the hermit's hospitality. The circumstances were little changed. Although the day was cold, the sun shone through the red-curtained window with a summer brightness, the log-fire glowed in the hearth, the savory smell of broiled fish pervaded the little room, and Florian, a wonderful likeness of his father, sat eating sparingly, silent but not gloomy, save for the sad shadows occasionally flitting over his face. The contrast between the placid manner and the feverish countenance was odd, but not so forcible as the difference between this silent man and the ambitious politician. Paul gave up speculation as a hopeless task, and rightly judging his present temper, plunged abruptly into the matter of his visit.

"You may be aware of the circumstances which led to my stay on Solitary Island," said he for a beginning. Florian regarded him placidly, without a trace of the old feeling in his looks. Paul thought it pretence; but it was real. The great man had no feeling towards him.

"I am not aware of them," he replied.

"Strangely enough, our resemblance was the cause of it," said Paul. "The spy who pursued you because of your resemblance to your own family pursued me for the same reason, drove me out of all employment, and, with the aid of injudicious friends, brought me to the verge of poverty and death. Your father saved me, and, for reasons quite plain to us both, took me in and earned my everlasting gratitude for himself and his son."

A faint flush spread over Florian's face in the pause that followed.

"I must ask your pardon," he said humbly, "for my guilty share in your sufferings. I was your friend, and should have aided you; but I was led to believe that you stood between me and Ruth, and again between me and Frances Lynch. I was glad you suffered. I regret it

sincerely now. I trust you will forgive me."

It was the poet's turn to blush furiously at this humility.

"Don't mention it," said he. "Peter Carter was the cause of all these troubles. You are not to blame. I am not sorry for them. They brought me in contact with your father."

"And I hated you for that," Florian went on in the same tone, "because your worthiness won a privilege which my crimes deprived me of. I spoke to you once under that impression in a manner most insulting. I ask—"

"Hold on!" said Paul, jumping to his feet with a red face. "No more of that, Florian. I cannot stand it. If you are really sincere in this awful change that has come over you, keep four apologies for Frances and others. But I do not understand it. I expected something like this, but not so complete and astounding a revolution."

Florian offered no remonstrance to this blunt suspicion, but after a little pointed out to the grave with such a look in his face! then back to himself.

"Behold the murderer of his father," he said in a sudden burst of wild sobs, as he repeated the count's telling words. "If I could apologize to him as I do to you, my friend, as I shall do to all the others! Alas! what humiliation is greater than that?"

"He's on the right tack," said the satisfied poet, wiping his eyes in sympathy and thinking joyfully of Frances.

"It's all cleared up between us, then, Flory," said he cheerfully, as he clasped the great man's hand. "My business is made the easier for that, and it will send me back to New York with a light heart. Come, I have some spots of interest to show you about the old house. Your father loved me, Flory. How proud I am of that honor! But, ah, not as he loved you, his son. I was his confidant in many things, and I have the secret of his life and the explanation of its oddities. Flory, your father was a saint, of princely soul as well as princely birth."

He lifted a trap-door in the floor of the bedroom, and led the way, holding a lighted candle, into the cellar.

"It is not a cellar," he explained, flashing the light on the rocky walls, "but a cave. Here is a door concealed in the rock very nicely. We open it so. Now enter and here we are."

"They could hear the sound of running water in the cave, but Florian paid no attention. His eyes were fastened on the new discovery. A set of rude shelves took up one whole side of an almost square room, and was thickly crowded with books. Their general character was devotional and mystical, but the classics were well represented, and astronomy and philosophy had the choicest volumes. A rough desk below contained a wooden carved crucifix, a few bits of manuscript, and writing materials. From a peg in its side hung a leather discipline, whose thongs were tipped with fine iron points. A few sacred prints hung on the walls. Florian knelt and kissed first the crucifix and then the discipline.

"This spot," said Paul reverently, is secret to all save you and me. When I first came here, broken down and disheartened—it seems a beautiful and fit sanctuary for the disheartened—I was sincerely disposed to lean more heavily on God for the support I needed. After a little the prince took me into his spiritual confidence, and I beheld such a sight!—the tears of emotion poured from his eyes—as I had never dreamed of seeing this side of heaven. Long meditations and prayers, mortifications such as that discipline hints at, unbounded charity for all men, are virtues common to all saints. They did not impress me as did the glimpses of his soul which I received. Ah! such an overpowering love of God. It seemed to burn within him like a real flame, and to illuminate the space about him as does this candle. I would have feared him but for the love and strength these very



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qualities gave me. I knelt here with him often, and when I was strong enough tried to stay by him in his vigils. I know the angels often came to him visibly. I saw wonders here and dreamed real dreams. It was a vision of the ancient Thebaid. And no one knew it save myself. Who would have believed it had they not seen what I saw?"

"Blind, blind, blind!" murmured Florian. "We all caught glimpses of his glory, but our love was not as sharp as hate, and our souls too low to look for such a manifestation of grace. My sin is all the greater."

"The last time I saw him," continued Paul, "was in this spot, kneeling where you are kneeling. He had a premonition of his coming passion, but it was lightened by the conviction—perhaps it had been revealed to him—that out of it would come your salvation. 'Tell my son,' he said, 'that I died because of him.'"

"Behold the murderer of his father," Florian murmured to himself.

"Tell him also not to despair, but with a good heart, and without haste or great grief for anything save his sins, to begin his penance. You see he knew; and when I asked him if he were about to die, 'God holds all our days,' said he: 'who knows but this may be our last? I never saw him again in life. God rest his soul, if it has suffered any delay!'"

There was again a short pause as Paul waited to review that last scene and to recall the tones, the feelings, the incidents of a most pathetic moment. Florian still knelt at the desk with his fingers about the discipline.

"Well, it is all over," he said to the kneeling figure: "let us go. You notice the dry air of the cave. It is beautifully ventilated and very safe for such a place. Your father loved it. Come, my friend. Or do you wish to remain here?"

Florian rose and they returned to the room above.

"I have finished my work—almost," said the poet, putting on his hat, "and now I am going. Can I be of any help to you?"

"My father's friend and mine," Florian replied, "I have need only of your pardon and the renewal of that affection you once had for me."

"And never lost, my Florian. You have it still, and the pardon which is always yours beforehand. After a little you will return to New York?"

"Yes, after a little," he replied slowly, "but not to remain. Here is my home in the future. I have my business to close up and a great act of justice to perform. After that my solitude."

(To be continued.)

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SCOTCH PRIEST JUSTICE.

In Bathgate, Scotland, a Catholic clergyman, Rev. Father McDaniel, has been appointed Justice of the Peace. This is a rare, probably unique, distinction for a Catholic priest in Great Britain. The office carries with it no salary. Justices of the Peace under the British system, being honorary officials, though they sit on the Bench and try and dispose of cases in the inferior courts. Here they are called judges, but in Great Britain only justices. It seems very fitting that a Catholic priest, one of whose functions it is to preach justice, should also be an administrator of justice.

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