

# UNCLE DICK;

Or, The Result of Diplomacy and Tact.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Masters did not leave Wivernsea. The obstinacy of his character came into play there; he had come down for a month and he stopped.

He had come for a purpose too—business purpose—had his book to finish. Was a trifling incident, the accident common to men's lives, to disturb the current of his life? To turn him from his prearranged plan in the smallest degree? Perish the thought!

All he had altered was the direction of his walks; he thought that wisdom. Because, like other wise men, he left the east and went west. It was Cliffland there; sheltered spots innumerable were easily found.

She, yet more proud than he, altered nothing; took her walks with Gracie as usual. Sat on the seat at the far end of the walk; read novels there with stoic fortitude—except for an occasional long look across the waters.

Looking across the wide sea seems to afford scope for, to encourage, limitless, aimless reflections. At any rate hers were aimless; she knew that. But a woman dearly loves the memories of the past, to bring them before her; to pet and fondle and keep alive with the warmth of her heart.

Being at opposite poles, east and west, their daily meetings ended. Once he met her in the post office; he was leaving as she was entering. He raised his hat, and would—

from mere courtesy—have said "Good morning." But the unframed words wilted on his lips.

Her eyes, as they fell on him, lighted up with indignation; a second edition of what he had seen before. As they for a moment rested on him they seemed to scorch up what he would have said. His raised-to-hat hand trembled and fell: he passed out.

Reaching home she found that she had carried with her a recollection of his face. By the seat he had said things to her that no woman could forgive. She told herself that an average hundred times a day—to say nothing of the sleepless nights she passed with thoughts full of him. But she was sorry to see the haggard, worn look he was wearing as he left the post office.

He had appeared ill. His, she had told him, was a face which had borne no worry lines; lines of thought but not of trouble. The absence of the latter had made him appear younger than he really was.

With a smile she thought back on the time—it seemed quite a long while ago—when she had fancied that she had almost come to love that eager, enthusiastic face; boyish but still with an air of manly determination about it, set in a manly frame.

Masters' shoulders were quite abnormally broad and square; accentuated the impression of strength made by the broad bronzed forehead. How foolish women were, she thought. Well, she had learnt a lesson; she would profit by it. Experience had taught her; she would prove herself a grateful pupil.

She had deceived herself for the first time and the last. Of course it was painful—the awakening. Waking up to the perception of unvarnished facts generally is unpleasant. But she could look at her own foolishness without wincing, indulgently—her foolishness of a week ago. Just an error of judgment that there was no likelihood of her repeating.

Still—she admitted it to herself—he was undeniably attractive. Hardly less so because he looked older in the post office than he had done formerly. The worry lines, whose absence she had remarked, were there now. One hasty glance had shown them to her; they were so apparent. She wondered—a kindly feeling stealing over her—whether she had anything to do with it: the change. Then memory came and withered up the softness; pointed out what had been said to her that night when she knelt by the seat! The memory was a blasting breath; her softness withered away.

The mere remembrance of it made her feel hot all over. She—

she to kneel to a man! Because she had fancied he was ill—full of kind feelings towards him, she had knelt; and he had talked of hugging and slobbering! To have her kindness, so well meant, recoil on her, thrown back on her hands as it were, with unwarranted insult instead of thanks.

It is galling to have a gift returned; the gall is greater when the gift is of the heart's kindness; more galling still when the ungracious recipient vacates a place in that heart itself. The return then savours of brutality.

Fury too came to her at the mere memory of his speech. She was almost as angry as when his words rang freshly in her ears. But with all temper there was mingled wonder. Surely he could not be a man to whom brutality came easily. Why—why—why—had he behaved so?

Fool! No. She told herself that she was not that. She had read in his eyes that he loved her; indeed, had more than once checked his telling her so. What could be the cause?

He had spoken of seeing her in the back garden that night—but that was a mere incident—there were a thousand-and-one explanations of that. He would know that; there must have been something else.

But why should she worry herself about the matter—about the man? Plainly he was not worthy a second thought. Ready to misjudge her as he had been—well, let him! She did not care; not a scrap. She was quite capable of fighting her way alone.

Then she picked up one of the books of his he had given her. On the fly leaf she read—

"Miss Mivvins;—to remind her of Our Seat, on which so many of these pages were written.

"William Masters." She stood with her eyes on the writing, the book in her hand, for many minutes. Then put the volume down with a sigh. After all, real friends are as rare as Christian charity.

Crunching sounds—boot pressure of gravel, made her look out of the window on to the path leading to the gate. The doctor was coming up to the house. She went out to meet him.

Gracie was not well—restless and feverish—was now lying on her bed sleeping. The doctor, on his previous visit, had thought it a cold merely, but there were faint symptoms which made him promise to come again. He had come in fulfilment of that promise now.

She was waiting for him at the door when he reached it. Nodding to her, in an informal, friendly way, he questioned cheerily—

"And how is the little one this morning?"

"Much, better, I think, doctor. She is sleeping peacefully now."

"Sleeping? Still? Is she drowsy? . . . Let me see her."

They walked into the bedroom together. The noise of their entrance roused the child. She looked up and around her, with the frightened eyes of one suddenly awakened from alarming dreams.

"Well, little girlie!" The doctor spoke merrily. He was of that type; did not carry the undertaker when visiting a patient. He advanced to take the child's hand lying on the coverlet; continued—

"This is a nice idea of yours, upon my word! Going to sleep in the day—"

His intent in the adoption of a reassuring tone was to change the current of her thoughts: the wild thoughts evidently surging in that active little brain. But when he clasped the child's hand in his own, the merriment left his voice, the smile his face. His other hand he placed on her forehead, then turning, said—

"Why did you not send for me?" The mother was standing close beside the child, stooping so that her face was on a level with the terror-stricken little one's bright eyes. She was speaking loving words, in the loving way that appeals to children. Words which read so foolishly, yet sound so sweetly. She turned round sudden-

ly, startled by the gravity in the doctor's voice.

"Send!" she cried. "Why? She—she is not—oh, don't tell me—"

"Hush!" She became quiet at once. Another phase of the doctor's character showed: his will power. The loving anxiety was suppressed. The practical woman was to the fore, intent on the doctor's instructions—

"She must be undressed and put to bed. Have a fire here; it must be kept going night and day. Send one of your maids"—he was writing on a leaf of his note-book as he spoke, and finishing, tore it out—

"with this prescription at once." Gracie was fever-stricken! Tossed in delirium all that night and the next day. All the next day and night—and the mother sat by the bedside, tending, never leaving the little one.

The doctor came three or four times a day. Each time he looked grave. There was no sign of improvement in the child's condition. The mother, worn out with watching, looking at him for comfort, read none.

Did ever—during all those hours of wearing, waiting, anxious watching—the thought of Masters cross her mind? She had shut him resolutely out of her heart, turned the key of consciousness upon him. But even bolts and bars are proverbially of small efficacy in similar cases.

In those long hours, the only silence breaking sounds were the monotonous ticking of the clock and the short, quick breathing of the little white-robed, white-faced form on the white pillows. Sometimes, then, the woman's resolution broke down; thoughts of The Man crept in upon her all unbidden. Gentler thoughts than she had harbored in the previous days: troubles' softening influence was around.

Their first meeting!—she thought of that. Of his affection for Gracie; of the child's love for him. Surely a child's instinctive love and trust went for something. Perhaps, after all—and then those horrible words of his rang in her ears, and she hid her hot face in the white coverlet. Never, never—they were unforgivable. Besides, he did not seek forgiveness.

Strange that, by the bedside of the panting child, with Life and Death fighting for the possession of its fragile little form, her ears ever straining to catch the sound of that softer breathing which she knew would signal Life's victory—strange, that with fear and hope surging in her bosom, even while her gentle hand restrained her dear one's restless tossing to and fro and cooled the burning forehead and feverish, clinging little fingers; strange that there should seem no wrong, nothing incongruous in the thought of an almost stranger—of William Masters. Perhaps it was because Gracie loved him so dearly: that must have been the reason.

Poor little Gracie! She little knew what manner of man it was to whom she had offered her affectionate, trusting little heart. Yet he had been kind to her, more than kind. There was pleasantness in the memory of that.

Fugitive thoughts were these; stealing in under cover of the night. Those hours when that watchful keeper of the heart—a woman's pride—is prone to forsake his trust; to leave the secret of that heart revealed before its Maker, and herself. A moment, and the watchful sentinel is back again at his post; repentant in his lapse, guarding his treasure more jealously than ever.

The white soul of the child stood at the entrance of the Valley of the Shadow. Hour by hour the watching woman seemed to see the Shadow deepening, growing. Hour by hour she strove with all the power that in her lay to lead that white soul back into life's sunshine.

The watching and anxiety told on her. The doctor noting her sunken eyes, said firmly—

"You must take rest. You need it as much as your patient."

"Rest!"

"Don't be foolish! You have a good woman; this woman who is helping you."

"She has been a nurse."

"I see she understands. You must take rest or you will be ill. Ill, too, at a time when you are most needed."

"Tell me, doctor. Oh! For God's sake, tell me—you don't know what she is to me! Tell me—"

"My dear madam, I can tell you nothing. As it nears midnight, will come a crucial time. Humor her; whatever she wants, no matter how extravagant it may seem, let her have it. She has an excitable nervous temperament. Do

all you can to soothe her. She must not worry for anything: it might prove her death. Gratify her desires and she may sleep—sleep will be her salvation. You understand!"

"Yes, doctor."

"Whatever she asks for, gratify her."

"Yes, doctor."

"She is needing sleep; rest for that active little brain of hers. She is full of ideas of triple-headed giants, fairies and stories of that sort. Don't contradict her, get her into a state of contentment if possible. Who is this Prince Charlie she was asking for just now?"

"A friend—a casual friend—some one we know."

"She is inexplicably anxious to see him. Soothe, by letting her do so if possible. She has intervals when she is as rational as you or I; it is well to prolong those by letting her talk to people she knows and wants to see. Does he live far away—this Prince Charlie?"

"In—in the town."

"Then, by all means, if she asks again, send for him."

"Yes, doctor."

"Fretting and excitement are to be avoided. Soothe her in every possible way; gentleness and firmness combined go a long way. But this Prince Charlie—from the hold he seems to have on her—may go a longer way still. Of course she may not ask for him again—may be it is a mere delirious fancy—but if she does, you will know how to act."

But Gracie did not ask again. Asked persistently, petulantly, pleadingly. The watcher with a breaking heart allowed the mother in her nature to smother the mere woman. She resolved to humble herself in the dirt: to send for him; he who had so grossly insulted her.

She would not write, she would not see him herself. She could not. She would send a verbal message. Late as it was there was no fear of not finding him up, she knew. He had told her that he always wrote till one in the morning.

The midnight oil phrase was one he was ever using.

## ASLEEP UNDER WATER.

### A Diver's Escape on the Great Battleship Dreadnought.

As showing how much at home a man may be to-day under water, I may relate an amusing story, says a writer in "St. Nicholas." Some months ago, while the great battleship Dreadnought was at Malta, one of the seamen divers went down to clear her propeller from some flotsam that had become entangled; and he failed to come up.

It chanced that the rest of the battleship's divers were ashore, and grave concern was felt on the ironclad for the missing worker. Signals by telephone and lifeline were sent below, without avail. In the launch above the throb, throb of the air-pump's cylinders went on, but the attendants looked at one another in dismay, fearing some strange tragedy deep down in those heaving green seas.

The worst was feared when some big brushes and other tools came floating to the surface, and thereupon the navigating lieutenant sent ashore an urgent message for one of the other divers. The man came on board, dressed immediately, and went below, only to come up full of indignation.

"Why, that fellow's been asleep all this time," he said, wrathfully.

It was true. The man had just had his lunch, and, finding the work much less serious than he had thought, he finished it in a few minutes, and then sat comfortably on one of the giant blades of the Dreadnought's propeller and went to sleep, with inquisitive fishes swarming around him, attracted by the dazzling searchlight at his breast. The officers were so amused at the occurrence that no punishment was inflicted on the lazy one.

## QUAINT ENGLISH CUSTOM.

Among the quaint old customs and ceremonies still kept alive in country districts there is only one "horn dance," and that is to be found at Abbots Bromley, in Staffordshire. Every year at the village wake the dance is still carried out. The origin of the horn dance is lost in the mists of history, but it has been traced back as far as the eleventh century. Until the seventeenth century it was practised at Christmas, on New Year's day and on Twelfth day. In the time of Henry VIII. the dance was performed in front of the church every Sunday and a collection for the poor taken up from the spectators.

A greater variety of fish can be found in the Nile than in any other river.

## JAPANESE GIRLS' WORK.

### Rules of the Tea Ceremony—Feast of the Dolls.

"There is a new woman in Japan," says Miss Alice M. Bacon, for many years head mistress of the Japan Peers' school in Tokio, in the London Daily News, "and she is the problem of the day in Japan. Girls are coming into the city from the whole country to go to school, and it is a problem to know what to do with them. They know only the old system, and their parents know only that, but they feel the pulse of the new life and they cannot be held back."

"It is rather pathetic that the Japanese girl knows so well that her school days are her happiest days. She never plans the gay, happy years 'when I'm grown up.' Instead she takes all her little school-girl pleasures with the full consciousness that when they are over there will come a time when devotion to duty will be almost the only pleasure in life for her, and that there in the lowest place in a stranger's house she will have to work patiently her way up to respect and good will of a strange family."

"The little daughter of a wealthy house goes to school from 6 to 17. She learns reading, writing, natural science, English, the koto, sewing, cooking, and the tea ceremony."

"The rules of the tea ceremony were fixed about the time the Spanish Armada was besieging Elizabeth. Every movement of the woman, every position of cup, spoon, tea caddy, towel, is prescribed."

"To a foreigner, Japanese sewing seems so extremely simple that it would be hardly seem necessary to study it, but the Japanese girl applies herself to it with the knowledge that in the future the appearance of her children, her husband, her mother-in-law and her father-in-law will all be set down to her credit or discredit."

"She learns to cook sufficiently to direct her servants, particularly in the line of rice and pickles. The daughter of the house must learn to arrange the flowers not only artistically but so that they will bear that wealth of symbolism found in every Japanese grouping of flowers."

"The feast of the dolls is the quaintest of all the little Japanese girls' festivals. In the storeroom where are kept all the family treasures there are boxes filled with dolls which have come down from the grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Each new bride brings her dolls when she comes to her father-in-law's house, and she keeps the feast each year till her eldest daughter is old enough to take it up."

## DEGENERATE BULL FIGHTERS.

### Public Sentiment in Spain Against the Trocadero's Trust.

The trust formed by the bull fighters of Spain, who refuse to go into a ring where bulls of the dangerous Miura breed are used, has had an amusing development.

Patrons of the bull rings have formed a rival trust, and have bound themselves not to go to a bull fight where there is not at least one Miura bull loosened in the ring.

The public complain that the bull-fighters are degenerating, and that the grand terrors of the past would never have confessed cowardice of this kind, and tried to exclude the dangerous bulls from the ring.

Between the terrors' trust on the one side and the spectators' trust on the other, the proprietors of the bull rings are in an embarrassing position.

## PERQUISITES WORTH HAVING.

At the Austrian Court articles are never permitted to appear a second time at the Royal table, but become the perquisites of the servants; the choicest of wines go to one, the joints to another, the liquors left in the glasses to another, and so on, a sale of the dainties being held in the lower regions of the Palace every morning. At the Spanish Court, until quite recently, a similar custom prevailed.

A traveller, recently returned from India, was relating his impressions. "What a country that is!" he exclaimed. "There everybody keeps dozens of servants. I had four whose sole business was to look after my pipe. One brought it to me, another filled it, a third lighted it for me—"

"And the fourth?" "The fourth smoked it for me. Tobacco never agreed with me."