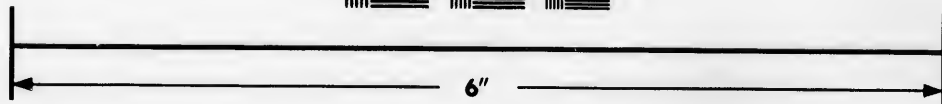
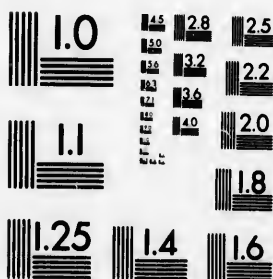


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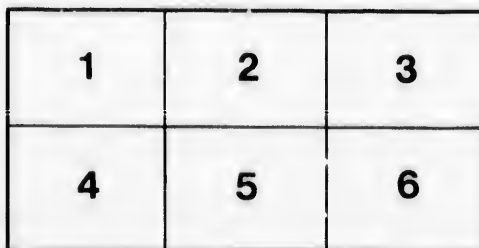
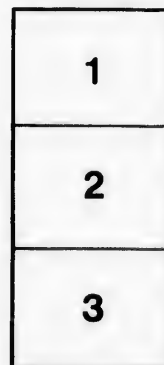
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Author

BUTTONS,

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BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER,

Author of "Beautiful Jim," "Army Society," etc., etc.

MONTREAL;
JOHN LOVELL & SON,
23 ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

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BUTTONS.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW DAYS' LEAVE.

"They pass best over the world who trip over it quickly."
—*Queen Elizabeth.*

It was a lovely April morning, though perhaps it was a shade too warm for the old-fashioned folk who believe in the truth of the old saying, "Don't cast a clout till May's out"—the people, by-the-bye, who generally pride themselves on cleaning up their houses and getting fires done with by the 1st of June and heroically doing without them till the 1st of November.

In the cavalry barracks at Routh the influence of the weather seemed to make itself felt everywhere. The lawn in front of the officers' quarters looked fresh and green, the sunshine glittered on the windows and on the helmet of the sentry at the gate, there were two cats dozing peacefully on a sunny ledge and several dogs holding a school-board meet-

ing a little way off, while just in front of the ante-room door three officers were standing talking together. Two of them were men well up the list of captains, the third a much younger man, little more than a lad, in fact, a good looking young fellow, fresh colored and with honest steady eyes.

"Yes," he said, in answer to a question from one of the older men—"I'm in great luck, I've got twelve days' leave."

"And you're going to town, of course?" said Mildmay.

"Yes."

"Where do you stop—Long's?"

"No. I always put up with my sister. She lives in Sloane street."

"Ah! very convenient for you," remarked Mildmay, and the subaltern moved off towards the quarters.

The two older men watched him till he disappeared through the doorway of the officers' quarters.

"High old time he'll have of it in town, I should think," laughed Brande.

"Very likely," answered Mildmay. "He's a nice lad all the same."

"Good fellow, yes—but weak."

"Weak—with that jaw!" echoed Mildmay.

"Well, he has a jaw, that's true," Brande admitted, "and when he makes up his mind he sticks to it—but it is possible for a man to be uncommonly strong at sticking to a mistake."

"Perhaps—perhaps," answered Mildmay, "but I must say I like Buttons immensely; I like him better than any sub in the regiment."

Meantime "Buttons," as he was called in the Twenty-first Dragoons, had gone gaily off to his quarters to set about getting himself and his belongings off to town by the afternoon train.

"You'll have to look uncommonly sharp, Broughton," he said, when he had imparted his news to his servant.

"Am I to go with you, sir?" Broughton inquired.

"No—there are plenty of people at Mrs. Meredith's who will look after me."

"Very well, sir," and Broughton went on with his packing, not at all sorry (having just begun to walk out with one of the prettiest girls he had ever come across in all his life) that he was let off this particular London visit.

An hour or two later saw his master driving up to the Routh railway station with a goodly array of

luggage, and when the quick train left at ten minutes past three, that happy young gentleman was comfortably seated in a first-class smoking carriage enjoying himself with a novel and a cigarette.

Before I go any further I ought to tell you something more about this young man who rejoiced in the homely name of Buttons. Well, to begin with, he was twenty-two years old, was the possessor of the comfortable income of three thousand a year, had come of a good family, was blessed with a good temper touched with hastiness, and was far and away the most popular subaltern to be found in the Twenty-first Dragoons. And his name was Roger Cottenham-Page.

Perhaps it is not often that a man in or out of the army is given a fancy name that is thoroughly to his liking, but when at Sandhurst and afterwards in his regiment Mr. Cottenham-Page found himself regularly called "Buttons," he had not only tolerated the name but even went further and was proud of it.

"Ugly name," he said one day, when he had been six months or so in the Twenty-first, to a lady who commiserated him on having a name so unromantic or high-sounding—"Oh, I don't know—it might be ever so much worse, you know. They might have

called me 'The Claimant,' or still worse, 'Double-Barrel.' I shouldn't like to be called 'Double-Barrel'—it's bad enough to be double barreled without being called so."

"But don't you like your double name?" the lady asked.

"Hate it," answered Buttons promptly.

It was true enough! When people first got to know him, or he to know them—whichever you like—there was always a tendency to give him the benefit of both names. "How do you do, Mr. Cottenham-Page?" would be the question.

"Page, please—if you don't mind"—would be the invariable reply.

However, this is a digression and I must get back to my story. In due time my hero arrived at King's Cross and got into a cab with his luggage, and had himself driven to Sloane street, feeling as happy as a king is popularly supposed to be, and as gay as a school boy out for a holiday.

"Mrs. Meredith at home?" he asked of the butler when that respectable personage appeared at the door.

"Mr. and Mrs. Meredith went away this morning for a few days, sir," he answered—"but Mrs. Mere-

dith left a message—a note I should say, sir, and your room is ready for you.”

“Oh; that’s all right,” said Buttons, and having paid the cabman he went into the house and read the note which Mrs. Meredith had left behind her.

“MY DEAR ROGER,” it said, “your telegram has just come, and, alas, we are just off to Paris for a fortnight. However, I have told them to make you as comfortable as possible, and I dare say you will have just as good a time without us as you would if we were at home. You might just have a look at the children before you go out on a morning, and let me know if you think they ail anything. If they started with smallpox old nurse would never worry me by saying a word until the last moment, and the little nursery-governess has never been left without me before.

“Make yourself quite at home, dear old boy, and have as good a time as possible.

“Your always affectionate sister,

“MURIEL.”

Buttons folded the note and put it back into its envelope.

“Rather a bore Muriel being away,” he said to himself. “And yet—oh! I dare say it will be all right—what’s that?” as a few words on the back of the envelope caught his eye, “Hilda Wrothersley is in town—staying with the de Carterets.” “Oh! bother—who wants to know anything about Hilda Wrothersley!” and then Buttons flung the note into

the fire with as much energy as if he wished he could dispose of Miss Hilda Wrothersley in as easy a fashion.

"Will you dine here, sir?" asked Jones coming in quietly.

"I think not, Jones—not unless dinner is being got ready for me."

"No, sir—my mistress thought you would probably dine out."

"Yes—I should like a whisky and soda, though, I wish you would send it up to my room."

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CHAPTER II.

ETHEL'S JEANIE.

Women have more strength in their looks than we have in our laws.
—Saville.

By the time he had had his whisky and soda, and refreshed himself further with soap and water and a change of clothes, it was seven o'clock.

"I suppose I shall have to go up and see old nurse," he said as he opened the door—so instead of turning down-stairs, he went along a passage to the left and up another flight of stairs to the nursery.

"Well, Nanna," he said, as he opened the door.

"My blessed boy," was the reply.

Buttons went in and shut the door behind him—it was a large bright cheerful room, this particular nursery, and the comfortable looking person who rejoiced in the name of Nanna was sitting before a bright fire, with a chubby baby in no more clothing than its little jersey upon her knee.

She had been nurse to the young Cottenham-Pages in the by-gone days, and Buttons was, because

of her having dragged him through several severe illnesses in his babyhood, the very idol of her life, the apple of her eye, and "the blessed lamb" of her familiar converse.

"The mistress told me you were coming, Master Roger," she said, when he had put himself a chair on the other side of the hearth and had seated himself thereon.

"Yes, I was very lucky to get leave just now, Nanna," he answered. "And how are you getting on? And how is this youngster?"

"After her teeth, Master Roger," the old woman answered, "but well in spite of it, and the lovindest bairn except yourself that ever I had to do with."

"Ah! I expect I was a nice handful if we only knew the truth," said he with a laugh. "And the others?"

"Master Jack will be here in a minute," said the old nurse. "Ah! here he is—come here, Master Jack, dear, and say 'How do you do?' to Uncle Roger."

The little lad came fearlessly in. "Are you my Uncle Roger?" he asked.

"Yes, I am. And how do you do? Eh?" asked Buttons, casting about in his mind what he should say next.

"Oh! I'm a little ill," said Jack promptly. "What did you bring me?"

For a moment Buttons was dumbfounded, then a bright thought occurred to him, "I'll tell you in the morning, old fellow," he said. "You see all my things haven't come yet."

"What is it?" Jack persisted.

"What did you most want?" enquired Buttons, slyly gathering information to guide him in a shopping expedition on which he must set out early the following day.

"Well, I think," answered Jack, deliberately, "that I'd like a butcher's shop."

"Eh?" exclaimed his uncle, genuinely taken aback.

"You get them at the toy shops, Master Roger," put in Nanna, hurriedly. "Sarah, go and ask Miss Wade if Miss Ethel can come and see Mr. Page?"

The young under-nurse went obediently out of the room, and Buttons asked a question. "And who is Miss Wade? Have you set up a governess, Nanna?"

"Well, something of the sort, Master Roger," Nanna returned. "The mistress felt that Miss Ethel wanted somebody about her a little better educated than Sarah, and whc'd be able to teach her a little without seeming to teach her at all, and—but here she is"

She broke off as a tall and pretty child of five years old came running into the room.

"Why, dear Buttons," she cried, gladly, "I didn't know you had come. Movah has gone to Paris with Mr. Meredith to get some frocks."

Buttons caught her up in his arms. "With Mr. Meredith—what makes you call him Mr. Meredith, eh?"

"Because," answered Ethel, with a vigorous hug, "because my father is Mr. Meredith."

"Of course he is, but still——" and then Buttons raised his steady grey eyes from the child's soft blue ones and encountered the direct gaze of the nursery governess who was standing behind old Nanna. Somehow what he saw there made him stop short. Ethel, not understanding, nudged him to go on.

"Yes—but still," she said by way of prompting him.

Buttons started. "Eh? What?—Oh—er—well, I don't know what I was saying exactly, Ethel."

He set her down on the floor again with an awkwardness which was new to him. The nursery governess, on the contrary, was standing perfectly composed and calm behind old Nanna's chair, not expecting him to take the smallest notice of her. Something

new and strange in his manner, however, caught the child's notice, for children are so keen, so quick to notice everything.

"You haven't spoken to my Jeanie yet," she said, going back to the girl and dragging her forward.

"Of course I haven't—you've never introduced me," said Buttons, mentally shaking himself together.

"Well, this is Miss Wade—my Jeanie," said Ethel, explaining the situation after the plain and matter-of-fact manner of childhood. "She is my governess, and she goes out with me and sleeps with me—and everything."

Buttons put out his hand and took the girl's hand in his. "Ethel didn't explain who I am," he said, pleasantly, "but, all the same, I don't advise you to ask Nanna here," laying his other hand affectionately on the old nurse's shoulder, "for information, for if you do, you will have a sort of dictionary of her blessed lamb, from the day of my birth up to the time present; eh, Nanna?"

"Ah! you may tease the old woman, Master Roger—she's used to it," laughed Nanna, as she spread out the strings of the baby's nightgown into a neat bow.

There was a moment's silence and it was Ethel who broke it.

"Did you bring us anything, Buttons?" she demanded.

Buttons dropped Miss Wade's hand as if he had forgotten that he was still holding it. "Well, to be candid, Ethel, I did not," he admitted. "They have such rubbish in the shops at Routh, and I believe I promised you a bracelet when I came to town again."

"I should like another bracelet," said Ethel, whose special vanity was in the way of bangles.

"And I thought you would like to go and choose it yourself."

"Oh! how lovely," cried the child in great glee.

"Will you go in the morning? We go out in the carriage every day, don't we, Jeanie?"

"Yes, dear," said Jeanie.

"All right," said Buttons, "we'll talk about it in the morning. I must go now, because I'm horribly hungry, and I know Nanna wants to get rid of me."

In less than five minutes he was out of the house and in a cab on his way to his club—and the image of Jeanie Wade went with him. He was soon there, for his club was in Pall Mall, and as he jumped out and went up the steps he shook himself together, and told himself he was a fool to be knocked over in that way by a girl who had hardly spoken to him, and

who had evidently scarcely expected him to speak to her.

"Buttons, old man, you're an ass," was his uncomplimentary comment to himself—and then he went into the dining-room, where three or four men he knew were just sitting down to dinner, and insisted upon his joining them.

He did join them, and being both hungry and healthy he made an uncommonly good dinner, and afterwards they looked in at a theatre, and being a ladies' night at the Lyric they went on to Bond street and finished up the night there.

The very last words Buttons uttered to the man whose guest at the Lyric he had been were, "Good night, old chap—thank you for an uncommonly good time." And yet, as his cab rolled along Piccadilly, the vision of that girl was still with him as it had been from time to time during the entire evening.

And he did not know what there was about her to stay with him so persistently. She was not very pretty, and yet she was not plain. It was rather a sad little face, pale and small, with soft dewy eyes darkly set. Of the features he was not very sure, except that they were not pronounced; but her hair was fair and waving, not frizzled and curled by art

but just as nature had made it." Still there was really nothing out of the common about her, nothing to make him think about her for a whole evening, absolutely nothing, or at least only the kind of attractiveness which had been thrown in his way hundreds of times without having the very smallest effect upon him. Altogether, it was absurd that he should find himself haunted, literally haunted, by a sad little face and a pair of dewy eyes—of what color he positively did not know. It was simply absurd, and as the cab turned into Sloane street he told himself that he would not stand any more of it.

Unfortunately for the success of his resolution, the workings of the human mind are sometimes very erratic, and altogether beyond the control of the owner of the mind. So Mr. Cottenham-Page found out for himself that night—he went to bed and he went to sleep, but do you think he got rid of Ethel's Jeanie by such simple means as those? Not a bit of it! It is true that his body spent that night in his own bed, but his mind did otherwise. His mind spent the night practically in his sister's nursery, in a strange and confusing jumble of letters—babies and old Nanna, with a mixture of Beerbohm Tree as a Russian minister of police, and a flavoring

of the Lyric Club and George Giddens thrown in; and through all this odd medley he was conscious of the sad little face and soft dewy eyes of the flax-haired girl whom his little Ethel called "her Jeanie."

The result of all this was that he woke up in the morning feeling somewhat more fatigued than he would have done if he had not gone to bed at all, and he jumped up with a sense of relief that the night was over.

Before he had got half-way through his breakfast, Miss Ethel made her appearance, very full of the expedition that he and she were to make in quest of her new bangle.

"Jack says," she remarked, "that you have bought him a butcher's shop."

"Oh!" said Buttons, who did not wish to commit himself.

"He has been wanting a butcher's shop ever since his last birthday," said Ethel in quite a grown-up voice, so grown-up indeed, and with so altogether young lady-like a manner that Buttons looked at her in some surprise, "but nobody has given him one. How did you know he wanted a butcher's shop, Buttons?"

"I didn't know," Buttons added, feeling that it was

useless to try and conceal anything from this observant young person.

"I don't believe you've got it at all," she remarked quietly.

"Well, I haven't—I thought I could buy it this morning."

"Well, then I'll choose it," said Ethel.

"What's it like? Is it big?" Buttons asked

"Oh—about a yard and a quarter big," answered Ethel with so perfect an air of thoroughly understanding the subject that her uncle's surprise turned to positive awe to hear her, child of five—well, yes, nearly six—talking sensibly of yards and of quarters.

Now, as a matter of fact, a yard and a quarter was Ethel's latest acquisition of knowledge, and just at that time everything with her meant "a yard and a quarter," everything in the way of size. If he had asked her how much she liked him, her answer would have been, as sure as eggs are eggs—"a yard and a quarter." Equally surely would she have given that particular measurement as that of her own height, and most probably also it would have done duty as to the extent of her age, if inquiries had been put to her concerning it.

Buttons, however, did not know all this, and her acumen impressed him accordingly.

"Well, I've finished my breakfast," he said presently. "I suppose I might have a cigarette before we go."

"Oh! yes. I think you may have a cigarette," answered the child gravely—"but hadn't you better tell them about the carriage?"

"The carriage," said Buttons doubtfully—"oh! we needn't wait for the carriage—can't we take a cab?"

"Yes, we can—but three is too many in a cab—Movah always says so."

"But you and I are only two," Buttons answered.

"But there's my Jeanie, you know," cried Ethel, who was not accustomed to going out without her governess.

Buttons looked doubtful—"I don't really think we want your Jeanie this morning," he ventured to suggest. "Supposing we go and see what Nanna says about it?"

"Yes, Nanna is sure to say yes," cried Ethel.

She ran off upstairs and Buttons followed more slowly. "Wouldn't do, that," he said to himself with a portentous shake of the head—"wouldn't do at all. It's bad enough that I can't get the girl out of my head, without making things worse by going about with her. Besides, Muriel would be in no end of a wax if I——" and then he broke off sharp as Ethel dragged him into the nursery. As ill-luck

would have it, Jeanie was there, consulting with Nanna about the alteration of some small article of Ethel's attire. She looked up as he entered, and for a moment or so he felt as if something was going wrong with his heart.

"Good morning," he said, trying hard to be very cold and nothing more than barely civil.

"Good morning—Mr. Page," she answered.

There was scarcely a perceptible hesitation before she uttered his name, and he fancied that she had been on the point of saying "sir" instead of his name, and that she checked herself. She got up off her knees as she answered him, and stood quietly beside the nurse's chair—then by some uncontrollable impulse Buttons held out his hand to her.

It is hard to tell how these things come about; scarcely a word had passed between them; the girl had been silent almost to taciturnity during the few minutes he had spent in her presence—she had not sought him by so much as a glance of her soft eyes, and equally little had he desired to seek her.

And yet certain is it that on that mild and balmy April morning when Roger Cottenham-Page and his small niece, Ethel Meredith, went out of the house in Sloane street and got into a hansom-cab, that he was over head and ears in love with the girl who was called Jeanie Wade.

CHAPTER III.

GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

You must measure the strength of a man by the power of the feelings he subdues, not by the power of those which subdue him.

—Robertson.

Now, although it was a fact that Buttons had fallen over head and ears in love with Jeanie Wade, he yet did not acknowledge it to himself, did not in truth realize that such was the case. He had, as yet, only a sort of feeling that she was the most altogether attractive creature that he had ever met in his life, that she was fresh and modest, a perfect little lady in her shy and retiring, yet wholly easy, simplicity; moreover, that she was exquisitely pretty, or, if not pretty in the usual acceptation of that word, that she was exquisitely uncommon—and to be candid, I think Buttons said to himself that she was so delightfully *chic*. He fancied that she had no idea of her own attractiveness, else she would never have been dressed “anyhow” as she was that morning. He even found himself wondering, as he and the

child drove past the park, how she would look with all her pretty fair hair piled up on the top of her head in a classic knot, with a nice fresh white gown on, quite simple and without much decoration (between ourselves, the sort of elegant simplicity which a good dressmaker always classifies as "a sweet little gown," and charges you five and twenty guineas for it if she thinks you will pay it), excepting for a bunch of fresh flowers, jonquils or lilies-of-the-valley, at her throat. And her name, so simple, so soft-sounding, so like herself—Jeanie! Such a dear little name.

"Do you like my Jeanie, Buttons?" Ethel asked suddenly, just as his thoughts had drifted to this interesting point.

Buttons fairly jumped—"Oh!—yes—yes—I think she seems very nice. I suppose you are very fond of her?"

"I think she's lovely," said Ethel. "Movah says she's 'So-So'—what does So-So mean, Buttons? Movah says she couldn't possibly explain it to me."

Buttons laughed. "Well, I don't know that I can either—but I think it means that your mother doesn't think that Miss Jeanie is lovely."

"Oh!" said Ethel, and sat bolt upright for full five

minutes gazing in front of her, all her attention being apparently engrossed by the stream of horses and various kinds of vehicles going to and fro. Presently, however, she looked up at Buttons. "My Movah thinks Miss Rottersley is pretty," she remarked wisely.

"Yes, I know she does," said Buttons rather impatiently—he had heard Miss Wrothersley's beauties and perfections well and persistently laid out before him for many months past by his sister.

"But Miss Rottersley does think my Jeanie is pretty too," cried Ethel triumphantly.

"Does she? How do you know?" asked Buttons, becoming in a moment more interested in Miss Wrothersley's sayings and doings than he had ever been before.

"Because I eard her tell Movah so one day," Ethel answered.

"And when did she see Miss Jeanie?"

"Oh! one day not long after my Jeanie came to live with us," the child answered. "She came to lunch—no, I mean she came in while we were at lunch, and Movah asked her to have some. I saw her looking at my Jeanie, and when she went upstairs to get something Movah wanted, Miss Rottersley said ever so crossly, Where did you get that girl, Muriel?"

"And then Movah said, 'Why?' and Miss Rottersley said, 'She's much too pretty, much too pretty. I wouldn't have her in my house for the world,' and then Movah laughed and said something about little pitchers—that meant me, you know—and they didn't say any more about it. I don't like Miss Rottersley, Buttons."

"Neither do I," said Buttons promptly.

"Buttons, I love you," said Ethel fervently.

She stole a very small hand in a neat little Suede glove into his, and Buttons gave it a squeeze such as made all the little bones go "scrunch" in his strong man's hand. "Oh! my dear old woman, did I hurt you?" he cried with much compunction.

"Well, you very nearly hurt me," said Ethel, who was a plucky little soul, and much too proud of being out with her beloved Buttons in a hansom-cab to be betrayed into tears for a mere trifle.

"I forgot, you know, that it was such a little wee tot of a hand," he explained; "you are such an old-fashioned grown-up little piece of goods, one forgets that your little fist is such a little one, and it is a little one—'pon my word it is. Where in the world do you get your gloves?"

"Movah gets them at her shop," Ethel answered, spreading out her hand with much pride.

"Yes—and that is?"

"Oh, I don't quite know where it is—but it's called Pen—Pen—erties."

"Penerties—never heard of it," said Buttons; "but I must buy you some gloves before I go back, eh?"

"Yes—but you'll go to Movah's own shop, won't you?"

"Of course, we will," said he good-naturedly—Buttons was always good-natured; it was his line, his *métier*, to borrow a word—and just then he felt so good-natured that if the child had asked him to go to the Tower of London in search of a particular shop, he would probably have said "all right," and would have gone.

"Now, here we are," he said, as they stopped at the door of a smart jeweller's shop—"stay, let me get out first."

He helped the child out—I had almost said that he lifted her out, but Ethel was a young lady of large ideas of her own powers, and never accepted more than a finger or so to help her to the ground. And then they went into the shop together, where Miss Ethel very soon became the happy possessor of a pretty gold bangle with a horseshoe set with turquoises.

"Look here." said Buttons, when the bangle-question was settled—"I want a very small single-stone diamond pin—just to keep an evening tie in its place."

"Certainly, sir," answered the shopman.

"Buttons," put in Ethel eagerly, "there's a *Lady's Petorial*—Movah's glove shop's in the *Lady's Petorial*—"

"May I look at that paper one moment?" Buttons asked.

"To be sure, sir," answered the man handing him the paper.

"I'll find it," cried Ethel eagerly.

"But you can't read yet, can you?" objected Buttons.

"Oh! yes, I can," cried Ethel—who could not read a word, by-the-bye—"I can read the picture of a lady in her comberations. There it is."

I am bound to admit that as the child triumphantly put her finger on the figure of a young lady in a single garment in which she was apparently going to dive into the vasty deep, Buttons sat down on a chair and laughed till the tears fairly stood in his eyes, and Ethel laughed too, though she did not know why.

"Ethel, my child," he cried, "I am afraid that

you and your quaint little sayings will be the end of me. You can read the picture of a lady in her comberations—oh ! child, child," and off he went into a gay fit of laughter again.

His laughter was so infectious that the gentlemanly young man on the other side of the counter fairly chuckled, and Ethel, the cause of it, laughed elaborately, feeling that Buttons was full in the enjoyment of some immense joke, but not in the least understanding it. "Isn't it funny?" she cried at last—then asked a question which set Buttons off again.

"Buttons—what is quaint?"

At last, however, they got out of the shop and safely into the cab.

"Pemberthy's, 390 Oxford street," said Buttons to the cabman.

"Wasn't it funny?" observed Ethel, still impressed by the importance of having sent her adored Buttons into such prolonged agonies of laughter.

"Little woman," said Buttons solemnly, "it certainly was very, very funny."

To Buttons it was even more funny to see that self-possessed young damsel, who was not yet 6 years old, march into Pemberthy's shop and, with an air of knowing the ways of the house, walk—her pretty

blonde head well in air—past the cases of smart silk stockings and mufflers to the stairs leading above.

“Hi”—said Buttons—“Can’t we get them down here?”

“Movah always goes upstairs,” said Ethel with dignity.

So Buttons, chucking inwardly at the whole business, followed the little white-robed figure obediently, and fairly laughed outright to see her seat herself at the counter—not without difficulty, for the chairs were rather high—and hold out her hand for inspection to the young man who came to attend to them.

“They always try your gloves on here,” she said—feeling, apparently, that it was her duty to do the honors of the place to him—“you put your elbow on this cushion and then they put your gloves on.”

“Gloves for the young lady, sir?” asked the young man in attendance.

“Yes—the same kind as these,” said Ethel answering for herself. “Buttons, do you see that picture?”—pointing to a small case showing a glove as it is first cut out—“that is a glove before it is born.”

“You don’t say so,” said Buttons with deep interest.

“Yes, I do—and that organ is to sew them with.”

Buttons was immensely interested, not in what he saw in the glove shop—for to a casual eye one glove shop is very much like another glove shop, and the fact that this particular one is to most others of its kind what Redferns is to most other tailors did not especially interest him. But to hear the ease and fluency with which his young niece boldly attacked the most difficult subjects and made a dash at getting hold of the right word, and, even when the meaning and the pronunciation were all at sea, managing somehow to convey her information in a perfectly clear and lucid manner—oh! it was too amusing, it was a perfect revelation to him!

"There, aren't they lovely?" she asked, holding up a neat little Suede-gloved hand for inspection—"Can I have another pair?"

"To be sure," was Buttons' reply.

So Miss Ethel picked herself out a second pair, and then she made a suggestion—"I should like to have a pair for my Jeanie," she remarked.

Buttons fairly jumped to find how the sudden mention of the girl's name had startled him.

"Can I?" asked Ethel, fixing him with her big innocent eyes.

"Of course—of course—only you don't know what size she takes, do you?"

"No, I don't—" Ethel admitted rather crestfallen "but—oh! I know, she takes the same size as Movah! Movah often gives her her gloves when she has worn them."

A wave of indignation swept over Buttons' mind; to think that she—oh! it was shameful that she, that—"I fancy your mother takes six and a quarter," he said, breaking in on his own thoughts.

"If it is Mrs. Meredith of Sloane street, the size is six and a quarter," said the young man, who had recognized Ethel.

"Yes—then show us some ladies' gloves," said Buttons, who was more interested at that moment than he had ever been in a pair of gloves in all his life before, even his own.

They chose two pairs of delicate grey gloves and then they went back to the cab.

"My Jeanie will be so pleased," said the child holding her two precious parcels very carefully.

"I hope so," said Buttons—"seems to me, little woman, that you are real fond of your Jeanie, eh?"

"I love her, said Ethel with emphasis.

"Ah!" was all that Buttons had to say about it.

He leant back in the cab, while Ethel amused herself by peeping in the little mirror in which she was

just high enough to see her own sweet little face, and by holding up her hand that she might the better see the effect of her new bangle. And he thought—well, first that he had never been so hopelessly gone in all his life, then that it would not do, not at any price. At least until Muriel came back he must keep out of her way, and perhaps by then the effect of those soft eyes would have passed away. Anyway it wouldn't do for him to be getting mixed up with any member of his sister's household during her absence—Muriel would be furious at the very idea of such a thing.

Full of this resolve, when they reached the house he just saw the child safely in with her parcels and then went off to his club and stayed out until it was time to dress for dinner. Then he did not come in till nearly seven o'clock; and as chance would have it, just as he entered the house he met Ethel and her Jeanie just leaving the breakfast-room where they had been having supper.

"Dear, dear Buttons," cried Ethel, "you are just in time to see me before I go to bed. Do carry me upstairs—pickyback."

As Buttons was also going upstairs, he had no choice but to comply, and he sat down on the third step of the stairs, while Ethel settled herself comfortably for her ride.

"You go up first, Jeanie," Ethel cried imperatively, "and then Buttons and I will catch you."

Jeanie was not, however, very easy to catch when, she once got a start; her fleet young feet carried her up well in advance of the young man, hampered as he was by a child who was too carried away by excitement to be careful to get a firm hold of her steed.

"I must get my breath—you are throttling me, child," Buttons gasped as they reached the first landing.

"Yes, get your breath, poor thing," laughed Ethel, to whom Buttons' distress was a great joke— "and oh! Buttons, my Jeanie was so pleased with her gloves—weren't you, Jeanie?"

Jeanie came down a step or two. "Yes, dear, I was. Mr. Page," she said, addressing Buttons a little shyly—"I believe I have to thank you for so kindly——"

"Not at all—not at all," returned Buttons in haste, and still keeping his sister in his mind—"it was Ethel's own suggestion entirely. I—I only paid for them."

Jeanie shrank back instantly. "I was afraid Mrs. Meredith might not like me to take them," she said, blushing scarlet—"but since it was Ethel—why—I——"

"Movah not like you to have new gloves, Jeanie,"

cried Ethel indignantly. "Why, how absurd! Why, Movah gets heaps of gloves herself. Buttons often gives her a whole box at a time."

"It's rather different, old woman," said Buttons, who did not want the fact of his having bought a couple of pairs of gloves for Miss Wade to be made a matter of too much importance. "I should not have presumed to give Miss Wade a box of gloves—but it's quite different for you to give her anything you like."

"Oh!" said Ethel, not understanding at all, and not being willing to say so.

Jeanie turned and went upstairs without another word. He had misunderstood her and there was nothing more to be said. It was natural, no doubt, but she felt that she had been put in her place without having tried to leave it; she felt that she had not deserved such a snub, and all her innocent pleasure in her new gloves had been turned to gall and bitterness.

Therefore she turned away and went up to the nursery, feeling hurt and crushed; and Buttons and Ethel followed, he feeling quite a glow of inward satisfaction in having honorably kept his unspoken faith with his absent sister when he would, if he had

followed his inclinations only, have been already at Jeanie Wade's feet.

"I don't think, Buttons" said Ethel when they got to the top of the stairs, "that I would go in if I were you, Jack isn't as pleased with you as he might be."

"But why not?" cried Buttons in amazement.

"Why?" said Ethel tragically, "because we went out this morning and we quite forgot the butcher's shop."

CHAPTER IV.

UNSPOKEN FAITH.

“Live in the Present wisely, alike forgetful of the Past, and careless of what the mysterious Future might bring.”—*Hyperion*

FOR three days nothing out of the common happened in the house in Sloane street. Miss Ethel insisted on taking up a good deal of her beloved Buttons' time, and Buttons was carried off here and there to suit that small person's convenience or pleasure in a manner which might have been highly irksome to him had he not been so fond of the child as he was, and so deeply interested in her Jeanie. As it was, it was a delight to him to take the bright and pretty child, in her smart white tailor coat and her dainty white hat, out with him each morning, to hear her naive comments on the shops and the people, and better still to hear her prattling on about her Jeanie, until Buttons felt that he knew the girl almost as well as he knew himself.

And on the third afternoon he was dawdling quietly

through the park on his way home, when he met them together. Jeanie bearing in mind, poor child, the snub she had had about the gloves, would fain have passed on; but Ethel had no idea of letting her dear Buttons off so easily as that.

"I go on and leave Buttons, Jeanie?" she exclaimed, when she fully grasped Jeanie's wishes—"why, as if I would. Of course I shan't go and leave him. You will be very angry if I do, won't you, Buttons?"

"Oh, awfully," said Buttons in a strictly conventional tone, which made Jeanie more desperately anxious to get away than ever.

"I am sure Mr. Page does not want us with him, Ethel, dear," she said to the child in an imploring undertone.

"I am quite sure he does, Jeanie," said Ethel with much dignity. "Don't you, Buttons?"

"Of course I want you," said Buttons promptly.

"Then, I will go home and you can come in with Mr. Page," said Jeanie.

She looked at him in a distressed kind of way, as if to say—"You see how it is with this child. I have done my best to get her away and she won't be got away. But at least I can betake myself off, if I cannot get her to leave you."

Buttons caught the look and understood it, and for a moment he forgot his sister and his unspoken faith with her, and only remembered that he wanted Jeanie to stay quite as much as even Ethel could wish.

"I don't see why you should go away, Miss Jeanie," he said mildly. "There is surely room enough for us all in the park, and I am going home presently. I really don't see why you need want to run away from us."

"I—I—thought you would rather I did," faltered Jeanie, meekly.

Buttons began to feel his blood dancing more quickly through his veins, and a certain devil-may-care feeling came over him. After all, why shouldn't he talk to this girl for an hour or so because his sister happened to be away from home. The girl was a little lady, every inch of her, and—"Well, hang it all," he said to himself, he had been fairly let in for this meeting, and as he was in for it he would make the most of it, and enjoy himself. Having come to this resolve, care and caution alike went to the winds and he let his voice drop to a dangerous tenderness.

"Of course, I don't want you to go away," he said gently; "you must know that I would rather you stayed. Let us sit down here and watch the people go by."

So they sat down under the trees, Ethel on one side of him and Jeanie on the other, and they admired the people a little and laughed at them a little too. Then Ethel, who soon got tired of one occupation, began to admire Buttons' shiny boots. "They are really very pretty boots, Buttons," she remarked wisely; "they are new, of course. I haven't got new boots on, but I have my new bangle and the gloves you bought me at—at Per—berty's. I wanted Jeanie to put a pair of her new gloves on, but she wouldn't. She said she would wear them by-and-by."

Thus reminded of his small gift to her, Buttons turned and looked at Jeanie's hands, which were covered by a pair of rather shabby black gloves.

"Why would you not wear my gloves?" he asked. "Don't you like them?"

Jeanie turned a fine scarlet—"Oh! yes," she answered—"but—but—oh! I can't tell you why I did not want to wear them," she ended, not being able to find any reasonable excuse for not doing so.

"You were not offended at my buying them, were you? I hope not," he said in anxious undertone; "I would not offend you for the world. But I could not very well disappoint the child."

"I should not have liked you to do that," said Jeanie quickly.

"But you thought it rather a liberty, I knew you thought so," he rejoined. "Well, it was a liberty, one I should not have dreamed of taking if it had not been for the child's wish to buy them for you."

"It wasn't quite that," Jeanie admitted.

"No? Then what was it?" he asked eagerly.

The girl turned her soft eyes upon him in hesitation and what was almost distress; and the look was too much for Buttons, in fact it fairly set his heart in a flame. "Tell me," he said persuasively, "do tell me."

But Jeanie still hesitated. "I—I don't think I can tell you, Mr. Page," she said at last. "You will think me so silly—and so—so conceited."

"Tell me!" was his answer.

"Well—I—I couldn't help thanking you for them," she managed to say at last, "because I thought it so kind—and—and I don't often have things given me, and these were so unexpected, and they were just what I wanted."

"Well?" said Buttons eagerly. "Well?"

"And when I said something to you about them, you—you——"

"Well? I—I what did I do?" he spoke anxiously, yet waited with a smile in his eyes for her explanation. "What did I do?" he repeated.

"Well, you snubbed me," she answered growing scarlet again, "and, after that, I did not care about them any more."

All the smile died out of Buttons' steady eyes, his mind went back to that little scene on the stairs, and he realized that, in trying to keep faith with his sister, he had hurt the feelings of the girl whom of all others he would least wish to wound.

"Miss Jeanie," he said gravely, "I understand what you mean, but will you believe that I had no intention whatever of making you feel like that? It was the very last thought in my heart to snub you—why! it is preposterous—preposterous!"

Jeanie looked down at the shabby black gloves in her lap, and Buttons longed to take the little hands they covered prisoner in his own eager ones. "You do believe me, don't you?" he urged.

"Why, yes, of course," she answered. "And—and I'm so glad, Mr. Page," she ended, with a blush and a smile over her girlish burst of confidence.

"And so am I," said Buttons. "And you will wear those gloves to-morrow?"

"Perhaps," she answered shyly.

"What are you two talking about?" suddenly demanded Ethel, who had been intently occupied in

watching an old gentleman who had dropped asleep on a neighboring seat, and who had been for the last five minutes the subject of much attention from a fine large fly that had survived the winter.

"Oh! various odds and ends," returned Buttons easily.

"Oh! only odds and ends," said Ethel.

Buttons looked at Jeanie, and Jeanie smiled; so already confidence was established between them, and unspoken faith!

CHAPTER V.

HONOR.

“A man’s own conscience is his sole tribunal.”—*Lord Lytton.*

SOMEHOW or other after the day that they met in the park and sat under the trees until it was time to go home together, it became quite a daily custom for Buttons to turn in there every afternoon towards five o’clock and spend an hour or so with Ethel and Jeanie Wade, under cover of a comfortable feeling that it would please Muriel if he took a little notice of the child. And more than once he was seen and noticed by his friends, who one and all wondered who the pretty girl was, with her dewy eyes and soft, flaxen hair, and more than one of them “chaffed” him unmercifully about her.

“Hollo, old chap,” said one man to him whom he met at the club—“having a good time in town, eh? Yes—saw you in the park this afternoon—what! You didn’t see me! No, I dare say not. I shouldn’t have seen you if I’d been in your shoes, take my word for it.”

It was easy enough to fence all such hints as these, and Buttons was, fortunately for him, a young man who seldom or never lost his temper. He almost lost it though on that particular question; for, after allowing as much of his leave to elapse as he decently could, he dressed himself very sprucely one day and set out to go and make a duty call upon Miss Hilda Wrothersley, who was staying with the De Carterets in Harrington Gardens, and Miss Hilda Wrothersley was, I must remind you, a great friend of his sister's, a very stylish-looking lady of some half dozen years older than himself, whom Mrs. Meredith would dearly like to call sister-in-law. Why? Oh! it is hard to say! Women are so oddly moved on that subject—indeed, as far as my experience goes, the majority of women are never satisfied till they get their brothers what they call “settled,” and once their desire is humored, they generally seem to find that the arrangement is not to their liking.

Well, my friend Buttons went off to call upon the lady of his sister's heart, whom to his sorrow he found at home, not only at home but for the moment alone. He was ushered into Mrs. De Carteret's boudoir, a lovely little gem of a room, a harmony in sea-green and gold embroideries, with rose-colored blinds to the

windows, which gave a most becoming tint to the faces of the occupants of the room; then there were flimsy white draperies which prevented the roselight from being too strong—and really Miss Wrothersley, who though of stylish appearance was not a beauty, looked quite passably pretty as she lay back in a low chair among a pile of soft silken cushions waving a quaint eastern fan slowly to and fro.

“Oh! my dear Roger,” she exclaimed when she saw who her visitor was—and by-the-bye, I may say here that she had called him “Roger” from the time when he had been at Eton—“is it really you? I quite thought you were not coming to see me.”

“Did you know I was in town?” he asked, wishing with all his heart that he had never told his sister a word about it, but had gone to an hotel.

“Dear Muriel wrote to me just before she went off to Paris,” Miss Wrothersley explained smoothly. “‘Of course,’ she said, ‘you will see a good deal of Roger as we are not here.’”

Now this put Buttons into somewhat of a dilemma. It is not easy to account for an absence which is a purely voluntary one, without admitting that it was such, that is.

“The fact is,” he said glibly enough, “I have only

a few days' leave—it's always difficult to get at this time of year, you know, and a good many of my friends are in town just now, and really I find it quite difficult to get round and see everybody."

"Yes," answered Miss Wrothersley quietly, "the park takes up such a lot of one's time, doesn't it?"

Buttons began to get flurried—a fatal mistake.

"Yes," he said, "I have looked in there once or twice on my way home."

"I've seen you every day," said Miss Wrothersley with a disagreeable smile. "I must tell dear Muriel how kind you have been to Ethel whilst she is away."

"Oh, of course, as you like," returned Buttons haughtily.

He was flurried no longer; he knew that probably she had watched him each day he had been in the park, and if she could make mischief out of it with Muriel, she evidently meant to do so. He therefore turned the subject as abruptly as he could, and, after ten minutes of the most unsatisfactory chat in the world, he went out of that house in a towering rage, and jumping into a cab at the door he went off to the park, with a feeling that the mischief was sure to come sooner or later, in which case he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

He got out at Albert gate and walked up the north side of the Row ; but the child and Jeanie were not there. Then he went and had a look at the horses and their riders, then sauntered up the Row again, this time not without success, for the child and Jeanie were sitting under the trees demurely watching the people pass by. "Here we are, Buttons," cried Ethel in her shrill child's voice—"I chose this seat because there were three chairs empty together."

Buttons needed no further invitation but sat down between them, and then for the first time he forgot his annoyance and Miss Hilda Wrothersley. "You are very late in the park to-day, little woman," he remarked to his small niece.

"Yes, we are rather, but a lady came to see us and she stayed rather a long time," Ethel replied. "We had to stop because she doesn't come very often, and Movah has a respect for her."

Buttons burst out laughing. "What do you mean? Who was it?" he asked

"Miss Paget," answered Ethel.

"Oh, I know—Miss Sally," he laughed. "A very pious old lady. And what did she say to you?"

"Well, she didn't say much to me, she never does," Ethel replied. "She talked most to Jack,

and I wasn't sorry," Miss Meredith added with old-fashioned dignity.

Buttons laughed in much amusement. "And how did Jack like it?" he asked.

Ethel looked serious. "Well, Miss Paget asked him what he had been doing lately? And Jack told her that he had been playing at keeping a butcher's shop a good deal. Miss Paget was utterly shocked, Buttons; she said it was a perfectly dreadful thing when you realized the natural de—de—what was the word, Jeanie?"

"Depravity," answered Jeanie, smiling.

"Yes, depravity," Ethel went on, "that was it. The natural depravity of children and the inclination they have for low things. She said she supposed it was the constant association with servants. Are servants low things, Buttons?" she asked suddenly. "I don't see how they can be for Nanna is a servant, and she always lives up in the nurseries, so how can she be low? I asked Jones what he thought about it whilst I was waiting in the hall for Jeanie, and Jones said he couldn't explain it anyhow. All the same I think he could have done it if he had liked, for I heard him say to Alice a minute after that Miss Paget had been poisoning Miss Ethel's mind against

'all of us,' and he hadn't got common patience with the horrid old cat."

Buttons burst out laughing. "And how did Jack come off?" he inquired.

"Jack? oh! well, he didn't exactly come off at all," Ethel answered. "Miss Paget asked him if he hadn't been learning anything, or if he'd spent all his time over his butcher's shop? And Jack said 'Yes'—and that he'd been learning some poetry. And then he began to repeat:

'Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
He learned to pipe when he was young,
And all the tune that he could play,
Was "Over the Hills and Far Away."'

And when he had finished that, Buttons, Miss Paget said that his depravity was really dreadful. Does depravity smell, Buttons?"

"Eh?" said Buttons, not understanding.

"Well, you see I don't quite know what depravity is," Ethel explained, "but Miss Paget sniffed so hard I thought perhaps it smelt nasty. Well, then she said in a very severe tone, 'John, my child, can you not say some poetry that is prettier than that?' Jack said he could say 'Hey, diddle diddle' and part of 'Old Mother Hubbard,' and then Miss Paget asked

him if he didn't know any hymns? For a minute or so Jack thought about it and at last he cried—'Why, of course I do, Miss Paget. Father's a him and Buttons is a him too.'

At this Buttons went off into a gay fit of laughter, from which he recovered himself in time to see Mrs. De Carteret and Miss Hilda Wrothersley pass slowly down the Row in a smart victoria which was driven at little more than a walking pace.

"There's Miss Wrothersley," remarked Ethel, whose quick eyes were here, there and everywhere, "there in that victoria, looking straight at you, Buttons—yes—bowing to you now."

Buttons had no choice but to look up and take off his hat, and he saw but too plainly that the look on Miss Wrothersley's face unmistakably meant mischief.

Well, the effect of this was that our friend Buttons became possessed of a kind of "in for a penny in for a pound" feeling which made him, during the few days of leave which still remained to him, see much more of Jeanie Wade than she or he had ever thought of. One day he took them to the Zoo, where they loitered about among the animals, Buttons spending quite a small fortune in nuts and cakes with which to regale certain of the prisoners, and at the same time

keep Miss Ethel's attention from dwelling too closely upon her Jeanie.

Then the next day they took another pilgrimage in almost the same direction, for they went up to Baker Street to see the wax-works. Ethel, mind you, had been to both these places before, but it was new ground to Jeanie Wade, who had had no sight-seeing pleasures since she had lived in Sloane Street, with the exception of often driving or walking in the park with the child, and occasionally with Mrs. Meredith herself.

And then his very last day came, when he must turn his back on the great city and all its attractions and go back to the regular routine of his usual life in Routh Barrack.

He went by an evening train, of course, and when Ethel came down, as was her custom, while he was eating his breakfast, he asked her what she would like to do on this his last day.

Ethel carefully considered the question. "Have you got nothing to do?" she asked.

"I want to run down to the club this morning," he said, "but I shall only be an hour, or less probably. I've got to look in at a couple of shops. Then I can do any mortal thing that you like."

Ethel considered again. "Well, Buttons," she said, "you know my great ambition is to go to the Tower and see everything there, but Movah never has time to go, and she doesn't like Jeanie and me to go there without somebody with us. She offered to let us have Jones, but Jeanie and I thought we'd rather not."

Buttons laughed out aloud. "I should think not—fancy sentimentalizing over Lady Jane Grey under Jones' solemn guidance. Well then, tell your Jeanie to be ready at twelve o'clock and I'll be back to the minute."

Away he went as radiant as the early summer morning, and got through all his business so that he was back at twelve, to the stroke of the clock as a matter of fact. He found Ethel and Jeanie all ready for the expedition, and fortifying themselves with milk and sandwiches.

"I couldn't get her to have a regular meal," Jeanie explained, "and I'm afraid to take her out without something to eat."

"All right, there is plenty of time. By-the-by, little woman," turning to Ethel and dropping a little package into her lap, "here's something to remind you of the jolly time we've had together."

"Oh! Buttons," she said, "it's a present, I know it. How lovely of you."

It was a charming gift for a child, a little gold brooch made like a safety-pin, with a single pearl set towards one end of the little bar of gold, and Ethel was enchanted.

"You are such a dear Buttons," she cried rapturously, and then she put her arm about his neck and hugged him tenderly.

"And I hope," he said in reply, holding her tightly in his arms and looking at Jeanie Wade over her head, "that I shall always be a dear Buttons to you, my sweet little woman."

A few minutes later they set off on their expedition and in due time arrived at the Monument station, and after crossing the wide road turned in at the great gates of the Tower and soon passed under the forbidding portals.

And what a time they had. "It was here on this very spot that Lady Jane Grey suffered," murmured Jeanie in an awed whisper, when they stood on Tower Green and looked down upon the little enclosed plot where so many tragedies have been enacted.

"'Pon my word but these fellows get uncommonly

good quarters here," exclaimed Buttons, looking round at the houses which faced the green.

"But fancy living here, always looking out on that," said Jeanie, pointing to the enclosure.

His reply was careless enough. "Yes—yes—poor little soul, it's very sad, of course," he said. "But you know it's a long time ago, and even if they hadn't taken her head off, she would have died ages and ages ago; and she must have died somewhere or other."

"Yes, but we know that she died just here," said Jeanie with a gesture to the recording tablet on the ground before them.

"Yes, that's so, poor little soul," answered Buttons with careless pity.

But he was serious enough a few minutes later when they found themselves in the armory, and Ethel's attention was wholly taken up by what she saw around her. Then his carelessness all seemed to vanish, and his manner showed plainly enough that one glance from Jeanie Wade, the gentle little nursery-governess, was worth more to him than the memory of all the heroines of romances whose beauty or whose good or bad qualities had carried them to die upon the scaffold by the coarse hand of the public headsmen.

"I want to say something to you," he said, drawing her into a dim recess as soon as he saw that Ethel was safely in conversation with a friendly beef-eater. "You know I'm going away to-day, and possibly I may not be able to get leave again for some months?"

"Yes," said Jeanie in a scarcely audible voice.

"I have brought you a little trifle to wear always until we meet again. You will wear it, Jeanie, won't you?"

"Yes," she said again.

"And while you wear it you will understand why I did not say anything else to you, won't you?" he asked anxiously, thinking of his unspoken faith to Mrs. Meredith.

"I think I do," faltered Jeanie, thinking of something quite different, poor child, thinking that he meant that she was good enough to amuse himself with for a little time but not good enough to become his wife.

"I am not going to say another word to you, Jeanie," said poor Buttons, thinking that he was steering clear between his duty to his sister and his anxiety to let Jeanie know without saying anything else that he meant to come back again, and

never guessing for one moment that he was blundering deeper and deeper into the mire of misunderstanding with each word he spoke—"but I shall always think of you; and I shall like to know that you are wearing my bracelet, and that you are sometimes thinking of me."

As he spoke he opened his hand and showed her a plain gold chain of a size to wear on the wrist with a gold padlock with which to fasten it.

"Here is a little key to open it again," he explained. "May I put it on your wrist, Jeanie?"

"Yes," she said. She had, strangely, little to say; somehow, between the pleasure and the pain that he had given her, she seemed to have lost all power of speech. But she held out her wrist and he slipped the pretty trinket over her hand and shut the padlock with a snap.

"There, now, you are my prisoner," he said, smiling down upon her.

For a moment Jeanie looked up at him with startled eyes, but he looked so honest and so manly and so true, as he stood with the grim figure in armor towering above him; that by a sudden impulse she put back the golden key which he had just given to her into his hand. "You may keep the key, Mr. Page," she said shyly.

"Oh, my darling," he burst out—and then Ethel ran back to them and he remembered the promise he had made to himself on account of his sister, and dropped the hand which he had just caught in his own.

"Buttons—Jeanie—come and look here," the child cried excitedly. "This is the block that poor lady had her head cut off on, and there's the chopper that they did it with. Do come and look. I wonder was it that same poor lady we saw at Madame Tussaud's the other day?"

So their golden moment came to an end and they went back to sight-seeing and the child's quaint company, outwardly the same and yet how different, for upon Jeanie's slender wrist there was a fetter which only Roger Page could unloose, and in Jeanie's heart and his—ah! well, well, those were fetters of which neither cared how soon nor for how long the key was lost beyond recovery.

"Jeanie," said Ethel, suddenly, when they were in the train on their way home, "you've got a new bracelet. Did Buttons give it to you?"

Jeanie looked at Buttons, who answered for her. "Yes, I did, my sweetheart," he said, honestly, "and Jeanie would rather you didn't talk about it to anybody."

"My dear," said Ethel, solemnly, and with a voice and manner which Buttons recognized as Miss Wrothersley's very own, "I give you my word, I won't breathe a syllable to a single soul."

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CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE.

"Thou shalt know by experience how salt the savor is of others' bread."
—*Dante.*

A WEEK had gone by, and Buttons was once more thoroughly occupied by the regular routine of his ordinary soldier's life.

He had found the heartiest of welcomes awaiting him, both from those who had just had leave and were more or less bored since finding themselves in Barracks again, and from those whose leave was yet to come, and who were therefore but too delighted to see the return of the various wanderers, whose coming, by-the-bye, would set them free in their turn.

After town, Buttons found Routh itself both dull and tiresome, and spent a good deal of time in his own quarters, thinking of the little girl he had left behind, and wondering how soon he would be able to see her again. Then he would get up and take a long look at a very indifferent photograph of Jeanie,

which he had begged from Ethel, and which now stood on his narrow chimney shelf in a smart open-work silver frame which had been given to him on the previous Christmas by Mrs. Meredith, and out of which he had ignominiously turned a very beautiful photograph of Miss Hilda Wrothersley, also a present from his sister, that is to say, it had come with the frame, and he had never before troubled himself to disturb it. As a work of art it was a much more presentable affair than the picture of Jeanie, which was about as poor a likeness and as bad a picture as it could very well be; and yet Buttons would get up a dozen times a day and take a long look at it, generally ending with a "Bless you, my little girl, how I do love you."

Well, as I said, a whole week had gone by, a whole week since he and she had gone down to the Tower and had wandered in and out among the great trophies of arms, and he had put a golden fetter on her wrist under the protection of a huge figure in armor; since they had found their way into the jewel house, and had gazed their fill at the state jewels, and had tried to realize that they were worth millions of money. He was thinking of it that pleasant May afternoon, as he stood looking at the

wretched photograph in its silver frame, how she had stood gazing with an awed face at the blazing jewels and then—yes, he could swear that it was so—he had seen her right hand steal towards the golden fetter on her left wrist and touch it tenderly, as if to show that it was of more value to her than all those costly jewels blazing in their splendor on the other side of the iron bars.

Well, it was no use standing there any longer; thinking and thinking and thinking would not bring Jeanie any nearer to him. He had got to go down into the town and a mile or so on the other side, to show himself at an afternoon party which he had been foolish enough to let himself in for. He had been a fool to get let in and he told himself so vigorously enough, but still he had actually promised, so he knew that he would have to go; so with another growl at his own folly and another look at Jeanie, he knocked his pipe out against the chimney shelf and got out of his uniform with tolerable speed.

He found the party very much what he had expected! An afternoon party in London is not always a brilliant affair, but an afternoon party in the country is generally a very dangerous experiment. In this case the show was of the average kind, and by six o'clock

our friend Buttons had had more than enough of it, and in company with a brother officer made his farewells and set off to walk back to the barracks.

Not a word did either of them say until they had gone down the drive and got clear away into the road; then the other man, Vane, looked half back and said drily—"Poor sort of show that, eh, old man?"

"Oh! ghastly," answered Buttons promptly—"can't think why people want to ask us, nor why we are such fools as to go."

Vane laughed, and then they began to talk of other things, and presently were walking through the narrow streets of the town. It was a quaint and rather pretty little place, with a fine old abbeychurch which liked to fancy itself a cathedral, and a winding high street, so narrow that two carriages could scarcely pass each other, in which were situated the best shops of the place. Down this street the two young officers walked, and it was easy to see that Buttons at least was a great favorite with the ladies, young and old, who were promenading up and down.

"Who is that girl?" Vane asked, as a remarkably pretty girl wearing a picture-hat bowed as they passed.

"I haven't an idea, but I took her in to dinner at Ellerby the other night," Buttons answered.

"Uncommonly pretty," said Vane, who was fancy-free and therefore open to fresh impressions in the way of feminine charms.

"Yes, fairly so," Buttons admitted ; he had a vision of silky fair hair framing a sad little face, with a tender mouth and grey dewy eyes always in his mind, and the saucy eyes and laughing lips under the picture-hat might have been the eyes and lips of a crone of ninety for any effect they had upon him.

Just then they met two more ladies, a mother and daughter these, and they without hesitation stopped and spoke to the two young men. The mother was charming and the daughter was pretty, and Vane seemed determined to make the most of his opportunity, leaving Buttons to talk to the elder lady. And whilst he was saying all the civil things he could think of, by some impulse he raised his eyes to the windows of a bonnet shop in front of which they were standing, and saw looking straight at him the face of Jeanie Wade.

He was so thoroughly astonished that he had not even presence of mind to take off his hat before the face had vanished, then he woke up to the fact that the two ladies were going on their way and that Mrs. Arles was holding out her hand to him. The next

moment he and Vane were walking down the street together. But when they got to the end of it, Buttons pulled up short.

"I say, old chap," he asked, "where are you going—back to Barracks?"

"No, I want to look in at the club," Vane answered.

"Then I'll go back again, I saw some one just now that I want to speak to. By-by."

His manner was so abrupt and his face so flushed that Vane instinctively turned to watch him go along the street.

"That chap has got something on his mind," said he to himself, "h'm, queer any way," and then he turned back again and went off in the direction of the club.

Buttons meantime had gone quickly almost the entire length of the street, and just as he reached a house about two doors from the bonnet-shop, he saw the familiar figure come out and without glancing his way go quickly in the opposite direction. Buttons instantly quickened his pace, and catching her up immediately touched her on the shoulder and said, "Jeanie, Jeanie. What are you doing in Routh? Why are you in such a hurry?" and then as she

turned her face towards him, he exclaimed. "Why child, good heavens, what has happened? Is anything the matter? Jeanie, what is it? Tell me."

"Yes, a great deal is the matter, Mr. Page," she said in a low voice; "but I can't tell you here; in fact, I'd rather not tell you at all."

"You would rather not tell me, Jeanie!" he cried. "Why, child, what has happened? What brings you to Routh? Do you know any one here? You've not come here for me—surely nothing has gone wrong with the child, Miss Ethel?"

"Not with Ethel, Mr. Page," she answered. "But I have come home because your sister, Mrs. Meredith, —has—has turned—me—out."

CHAPTER VII.

JEANIE'S STORY.

"In the right place is his heart."

—*Elizabeth.*

As Jeanie Ward uttered the words, "Your sister—has—turned—me—out," they reached the end of a narrow lane which led by a little gate into the Abbey Gardens, and Roger Page drew the girl down this lane with a soothing, "There, there, darling, let us go and sit down in the Abbey Gardens and you shall tell me all about it."

There was not a soul in the gardens when they reached them, and he made her sit down on a seat half hidden by a clump of sweet-smelling lilac bushes and sat down close beside her, holding her hand in his.

"Now, dearest, tell me everything—you have had a row with my sister, but about what?"

"About you," answered Jeanie, looking at him in infinite distress.

"About me," in a tone of surprise. "And why about me?"

"I—I don't like to tell you," she faltered unwillingly.

"No, I dare say not, darling," he said soothingly; "but you'll have to tell me sooner or later, you know, so you may as well tell me at once. What did my sister say about me?"

"Well, she came back from Paris two days after you left, and everything was as happy as could be," Jeanie answered with a miserable sob catching her voice. "And then that Miss Wrothersley came to see her the next day, and—and—I don't know what it was she said, but Mrs. Meredith came up to our room in a great state, and—and she told me all London was talking about my disgraceful behavior, and that I had pushed myself forward in a shameful way, and that it was her own fault for having left me in the house—and—and——"

"Yes, go on," said Buttons briefly.

She looked piteously up at him. "Mr. Page," she said, "don't make me tell you any more; I don't want to make mischief between you and Mrs. Meredith, for she loves you dearly, far more dearly than you perhaps know. And it was natural enough for her to be angry. I am only her servant, you know, and—and—it's not likely that she would wish me to—to——"

"To marry me," put in Buttons, seeing that she hesitated for a word. "No, I dare say not. But, my dear, you cannot make further mischief than Mrs. Meredith has already made by turning you out of her house without hearing what I had to say about it. Now tell me all the rest."

He looked so white and stern and so full of anger that Jeanie obediently went on and told him the whole pitiful story. How Mrs. Meredith had raved at her, had accused her of running after her brother, and of putting ideas into his head which he would never have thought of himself, how she had ordered her to leave that day month, and then had suddenly perceived the handsome fetter upon her wrist, and in an instant put two and two together and asked if it had been his gift.

"I had not spoken, scarcely even to defend myself, until then," Jeanie said wretchedly, "but I would not tell her where I had got it, or whether you had given it to me or not. And then Mrs. Meredith insisted that she knew all about it, and ordered me to take it off instantly and that she would send it back to you——"

"But you did not," he said, catching her hand in his and holding it up that he might see if she was

still wearing it. "Ah! yes, I am glad you did not take it off, that you were not frightened into taking it off."

"Why, Mr. Page," Jeanie cried, "I could not take it off if I had wanted ever so much. You have the key, you know."

"And you did not want to, did you, Jeanie?" he asked. "You would not have taken it off if you had been able."

"No, I should not," she replied.

"That is right. Well, and my sister said, then—Go on, my dear, I want to hear everything."

"Well, then she got more angry than ever, told me to pack up my things and leave the house at once; and whilst I was putting my books together in the school-room, Ethel ran in and saw that I was crying. She ran to me like the dear little angel she is, and—and—Mrs. Meredith wouldn't even let her speak to me. She said she wouldn't have her polluted by such a creature." Jeanie's piteous voice sank lower and lower until Buttons could scarce catch the words; he did just hear them, however, and set his resolute jaw in its most obstinate lines.

"Well?" he said.

Jeanie's tears began to flow instantly. "My dear

little child, she flew into my arms and called out that I was not a creature, and that she loved me dearly, dearly. And then Mrs. Meredith asked her where I had got my new bracelet—and—and Ethel said quite sharply that she never talked about other people's business. And then Mrs. Meredith said that I had taught her to defy her own mother—I—I, who love every hair of the child's head, and that it would come home to me sooner or later; and oh! Mr. Page, I can't tell you any more; I can't tell you all the cruel things she said. She didn't mean them, she couldn't mean them, but she was angry and said more than she would have said if she had been just herself. And then that Miss Wrothersley had poisoned her mind—I know it, though why, I can't think."

Buttons burst into a grim laugh: "I knew when I left London that the woman meant mischief, I knew it."

"And then, when Ethel realized that I was going away she began to cry and said I shouldn't go. And old Nanna came in to see what she was crying about, and Mrs. Meredith burst out with the whole story to her," Jeanie went on, "and Nanna just heard it all and shut up her lips tight, and at last she said, 'Well, Miss Muriel, ma'am,'—she always calls her

'Miss Muriel' when she is angry—' You are the mistress of the house and must do as you judge best about things. But I've known Master Roger ever since he was a babe of less than an hour old, and I never see aught that was crooked about him yet, and I fancy he's got over far to begin going crooked now,' and then she turned round to me and she said, 'My dear, the mistress has got hold of a wrong story and it's your duty to set it right. Now tell the mistress did Master Roger ever say a single word to you that you'd have been ashamed for the mistress or anyone else to hear?'

"Not a single word, Nanna," I answered.

"'Then,' said she, 'did Master Roger ever—ever—'" But there Jeanie stopped short and turned her burning face away.

"Yes?" said Buttons, enquiringly, "go on!"

"I can't!" she whispered.

"Oh, yes, you can," smiling tenderly at her. "My dear old Nanna asked if I had ever kissed you? Was that it? Well, I never did, so you were quite safe on that score."

"I said, of course, that you never had; and then Nanna turned round to Mrs. Meredith and said triumphantly, 'There, Miss Muriel, where is the harm that's done?'

“‘The bracelet,’ Mrs. Meredith cried.

“‘Oh, the bracelet,’ repeated Nanna. ‘Why Master Roger meant no harm to come out of that I’m sure. For he bought Miss Ethel a brooch and me a new gown; and as for the bracelet, he told me he had bought a little present for Miss Ethel’s young lady, and that I was to explain it to you if you wanted to know about it.’

“And then Mrs. Meredith went on about our being in the park with you, and how you had not been near Miss Wrothersley except once for ten minutes, and Nanna just laughed at that.

“‘Why, my dear Miss Muriel,’ she said—‘it’s that young lady that is at the bottom of all this business. It’s easy enough to see her meaning,’ she added, ‘but mark old Nanna’s words, Miss Muriel, one man can take a horse to the water, but twenty cannot make him drink, and it’s queer to me, ma’am, if wild horses ’ll make my blessed lamb think other o’ Miss Wrothersley than he does at present—and that’s not marrying, ma’am, mark my words.’”

Buttons had laughed heartily during the whole time she was telling him about Nanna, and he laughed yet more at his old nurse’s concluding words. “Bravo, Nanna,” he cried. “She’s a fine old soul, and I

owe her one more good turn for that, and I'll not forget to pay it either. Well, what happened then?"

"Oh, Mrs. Meredith was more angry than ever, and rated Nanna soundly for always taking everybody's part against her. 'I believe,' she said, 'that you think more of Roger's little finger than you do of my whole body, Nanna.'

"'Not at all, ma'am,' said Nanna quietly. 'I but express an opinion. It seems to me it's ill work trying to punish other folk because Master Roger has got eyes in his head and doesn't think Miss Wrothersley the prettiest woman to be found in all the world. I, for one, agree with him, ma'am, and I doubt me the master does the same,' and then she went off out of the room and shut the door behind her.

"Mrs. Meredith burst out crying then, so I thought it was time for me to go; but as I went up the stairs to my own room I saw her rush out and run down the other flight to the drawing-room. Mr. Meredith happened to be coming up, and of course wanted to know what she was crying for, and she burst out with it all to him. But he was very cool about it, and I heard him say: 'Well, my darling, you really can't blame poor old Buttons for not falling in with your plans about

Hilda Wrothersley—you couldn't expect him to marry such a bunch of bones as that,' and then I went into my bedroom and packed up my things, and Mrs. Meredith sent me my money, and I came away."

"And you never saw the child again?"

"No. Mrs. Meredith took her out in the carriage with her, and I left before they got back. And when I opened the note with the money I found Mrs. Meredith had sent me a whole year's salary, so I just took the money up to that day out of it, and put the rest in an envelope and sent it back to her again."

"Quite right, perfectly right, my poor little girl. I am so glad that you did that, it was quite the right thing to do. But tell me, dearest, what brought you to Routh? Did you come because I was here?"

The girl blushed painfully and hesitated a little. "No, it was nothing to do with that," she said shyly, "but the fact is, I have said so little to you, Mr. Page, that you don't know who I am or even where I come from."

"Because I don't care. I love you, Jeanie, and that is the main point. All the rest is but detail."

"Ah! but I am not so sure of that. I don't know—you may think differently when you hear why I came home to Routh."

"But you are not a Routh girl surely?" he exclaimed.

"No, I was never in Routh in all my life before, but my father is—is quartered here now, and——"

"Your father is quartered here," he echoed. "Your father! why Jeanie—your father—why surely you cannot be Sergeant Wade's daughter? It's impossible!"

"No," said Jeanie, "it is not impossible, for it is true."

"But how is it that I have never seen you before?" he exclaimed.

"Because until a few months ago I have always had my home with my aunt. My mother was a lady, you know, and ran away from school with my father when he was only a private in the Twenty-first. Her own people never took any notice of her afterwards, excepting one sister who had married very well and was left a widow soon after my mother was married. I was the only child my parents had, and my aunt, from the time I was a little toddling thing of four or five, kept me always with her and had a governess to educate me, and afterwards I went to school and was finished off as if I had been—well, as my mother was at my age. Well, last

August my aunt died and her money all went back to her husband's people, so that it was necessary that I should do something for myself. My aunt left me a little money, all that she had been able to save out of her income, and it bring me in about seventy pounds a year. So you see I am not actually penniless. But my father would not hear of my coming to them for good, because—well, because they are living in quarters, you know, and——”

“Yes. I understand exactly. Your father is perfectly right. So you went to look after Ethel, and you met me. You're not sorry you met me, are you Jeanie?”

“No,” said she honestly. “How could I be?”

She looked up at him with her soft shy eyes as she spoke, and Buttons in a burst of love caught her to his breast and kissed her again and again. “My own darling—my dear little love,” he cried. “No one shall ever slight you again while I live. I know my sister—well. And I promise you she shall make amends for every unkind word she has spoken to you, every unkind word she has pained you with. As for that woman—and his face darkened and his lips grew set once more—I will soon show her how much good she has done by her meddling and her

mischief-making. Why, my dearest," he exclaimed, "you are shivering. I have kept you too long in the cold. Let me take you home. I must not let my darling get chilled."

Jeanie rose to her feet and would have turned towards the gate, but Roger Page drew her back. "There is only one thing for you to say—you have forgotten it," he said fondly; "just to kiss me and say, 'Roger, I love you.'"

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CHAPTER VIII.

BUTTONS TAKES THE BULL BY THE HORNS.

"Love is of all stimulants the most powerful."—*A. B. Edwards.*

"I SHALL not see you till to-morrow evening or possibly the next day, Jeanie," said Buttons, when he had seen her safely to the door of her father's quarters, "because I am going up to town to-night, if I can get leave, that is."

Jeanie looked scared. "You are going to see Mrs. Meredith—to—to—"

"To have it out with her?" he ended. "Yes, that is just it. I am going to have it out with Muriel."

Jeanie caught at his arm imploringly, "Oh! Mr. Page, Roger, don't do it! I shall never forgive myself if you quarrel with Mrs. Meredith about me. Oh! please, please, don't do it."

"My dear little girl," he answered, "I am not at all likely to quarrel with Mrs. Meredith about it. But it is impossible for me to allow an injustice to be

done on my account and take no notice but just let things slide and right themselves. It is no use asking me not to go, child, because I should only have to refuse you, and I don't want to refuse you anything—ever."

"But——," she began.

"I have never been a coward, my child," he said.

"So pray don't say any more about it. Good night, my darling, don't worry yourself about it any more, don't worry yourself about anything."

Well, after leaving her he went off straight to the colonel's quarters and thumped upon the door. "Come in," cried a voice from within.

So Buttons went in and found his colonel seated at the table with his pipe in his mouth and a pile of papers before him.

"Oh! is that you, Page?" he remarked. "Do you want anything?"

"Yes, sir," Buttons answered. "I have come to ask a tremendous favor. Can I have one day's leave, sir? I want to run up to London on very important business."

"Very important business, a ball to-night, I suppose," said the colonel with a laugh.

"No, sir, nothing of that kind," answered Buttons earnestly. "It is real business, sir, I assure you."

The commanding officer was touched by the desperate earnestness of the young man's tone, and grew grave at once. "Oh! to be sure, Page," he said kindly. "I hope you are not in trouble of any sort."

"Not exactly, colonel," Buttons answered, "but I very easily might have been, and I want to prevent the possibility of trouble being made out of mischief."

"Very well, you can have two days' leave," said the colonel hastily scribbling the order.

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Buttons, "but I really only want the one day."

However, the colonel had already written the order, and Buttons went out with it in his hand and went quickly off to his own quarters, where he found his servant just laying his things out for mess.

"I shan't want those, put me up some things in a bag, enough for to-night," he said, "and look alive, I must catch the 7.20 train to town."

By dint of great good luck and not a little exertion to himself he managed to catch the 7.20 train to London, and just as Mr. and Mrs. Meredith had finished dinner, and Mrs. Meredith was resting herself for half an hour preparatory to going off to a party, he walked into the house in Sloane street and asked for her,

Mrs. Meredith jumped up when she saw who her visitor was. "Oh, my dear Roger," she exclaimed breathlessly, "who ever expected to see you to-night? You have not dined, of course,"

"No, I have not dined, Muriel, and I don't want to kiss you," was Buttons' unexpected reply. "I have come up from Routh on purpose to see you and to have it out with you."

Mrs. Meredith, who had been feeling not a little uneasy ever since Jeanie Wade's departure, and who knew in a moment by past experience that she was in for a desperate quarrel with her brother, sat down on her sofa again and took refuge in a very special kind of stilted dignity which she always called into use on such occasions. That kind of dignity did not suit her, and she began the fray in thorough discomfort, which Buttons, also from past experience, saw, and manlike took full advantage of.

"Really, Roger," she remarked, "you are speaking in a very extraordinary manner to me. I confess I don't understand you."

"Oh! yes, Muriel, excuse me, you understand me perfectly," he replied quietly. "I have come up to town on purpose to find out from you what you mean by the way you have called my conduct, while I have been in your house, in question."

"I have done nothing of the kind," she burst out.

"Then, why did you dismiss Miss Wade at a moment's notice?" he demanded.

"Because I chose to do so. I thought fit to do so. I have not your leave to ask when I dismiss my servants," Mrs. Meredith cried; "upon my word, Roger, you try to carry matters with too high a hand."

"I don't think so. Besides Miss Wade was not a servant, she was your child's governess. She is going to be my wife."

"You are not going to marry that girl!" his sister cried incredulously.

"Yes, I am going to marry that girl, as you call her," he answered deliberately. "It is true that as yet I have not asked her to marry me, but I shall do so as soon as I go back again, and I don't believe that she will refuse. I came up at once because I wanted to set everything right with you before I asked her. And first of all I will tell you that until this afternoon, not four hours ago, I had never said one word of love to her at all. If you had been at home when I came up here I should have proposed to her within a week of meeting her, probably even sooner than that. But although I knew I was utterly done for the same night that I came up here, I forced my-

self not to take advantage of your absence, as I might easily have done, and I resolutely kept my mouth shut, nor did I utter one word to her which might not have been shouted aloud from the house-tops."

"You gave her a bracelet," Mrs. Meredith burst out.

"Certainly, I did. I have always given the people in the house little presents when I stayed with you. I gave Ethel a bangle and a brooch and Nanna a gown. I gave Jones a couple of sovereigns for looking after me, and I gave Jeanie a bracelet. Why should I not? I am going to give her myself to-morrow."

"Then it is all right, there is no reason for me to know or to say anything more about it," cried Mrs. Meredith bitterly.

"There is every reason for you to say a great deal more about it," returned Buttons coldly. "Miss Wade is my future wife, and you have to answer to me for turning her out of your house at a moment's notice, for casting a slur upon her fair name for which you had no justification, to say nothing of your cruelty in turning a young girl adrift upon the world without even a hearing, absolutely in the face of evidence that was distinctly in her favor?"

"What evidence?"

"What did Nanna say about her behavior and mine?" he asked.

"How do you know anything about what Nanna said?" Mrs. Meredith cried.

"I know everything—Jeanie tried to keep everything back from me, but I made her tell me every cruel word you said. I know everything that there is to know," he replied.

For a moment his sister was silent, then she lifted up her eyes and looked at him. "And where did you see her?" she asked.

"I saw her in Routh this afternoon."

"In Routh—what! Did she follow you there?" she said scornfully.

"No, she did not follow me there, Mrs. Meredith," answered Roger sternly. "She is at home with her father and mother, and that their home happens to be in Routh is not to be twisted into an accusation against her, if you please. But all this is not material to the question, what I am here for is to put your mind right about my conduct in your house during your absence."

"My dear Roger," cried Mrs. Meredith fretfully, "I have never questioned your conduct in any way whatever."

"You turned Jeanie out, did you not?" Roger demanded stolidly.

"Yes, I did. I was very angry with her. I heard such tales of how she had flaunted about——"

"You turned her out for not behaving herself properly, and because that worthless woman told you she had seen her flaunting about day after day in the park with me," he broke in—"then how could she misbehave herself with me and I be no party to it? You talk arrant nonsense, Muriel; you accuse a girl distinctly of not behaving as she ought to have done towards me, and you turn her out without a hearing on the evidence of a jealous hag like Hilda Wrothersley, and yet you pretend that I, whose fault, if fault there was at all, must have been greater than hers, am perfectly blameless. And then all you can bring against the poor child is that I give a bracelet, a pretty trifle of no greater value than I could give to the child, Ethel, and that I sat in the park with them! I did sit in the park with them—I have sat in the park with Ethel and her nursemaid before now. And if I did do you suppose I did not please myself about it? Do you suppose that Jeanie Wade asked me to go and sit in the park with her, or that I should have gone if she had? Do you suppose that if she had behaved

to me with the bare-faced shameless effrontery that your friend Miss Wrothersley invariably does that I should be going back to Routh to-morrow morning to ask her to become my wife? No, I tell you, Muriel, a thousand times, no."

By the time that Roger Page had got thus far, Mrs. Meredith had in her own mind abjectly given in and had begun to cry piteously. She always did the same thing when she was beaten, and usually her tears were the signal for the other side to feel they had been a little hard upon her, and proceed forthwith to pet her and make much of her, so that in spite of her having given in, she should feel that she was very sweet and gracious to kiss and make friends again.

But on this occasion she found she had to deal with more than an ordinary "other side," and Roger was as unmoved by the tears as if she had been somebody he had never seen in all his life before, and was moreover richly deserving of greater shame and grief than she was then enduring.

"It's all very well to cry about it, that won't do any good," he said, icily; "it won't take away the slur you have cast upon the poor child's character, nor make her ever think you anything but an unjust termagant as long as ever she lives."

"Roger!" cried Mrs. Meredith miserably. "What is it you want me to do? I'm very sorry, I didn't know that you were hard hit, and if you want to go and marry a girl like that, why of course you can; I can't help it. If there is anything I can do to please you, you know that I will do it. Shall I write to her and ask her to come back again?"

At this Buttons burst out laughing, but it was not quite his own laugh, though he had got his own way.

"No, I don't want you to go quite so far as that," he answered. "I don't suppose she could come back, and if she would I would not let her. But you might write her a line and say that you had been a little hasty or something of that kind; it would please me very much if you would."

Mrs. Meredith got off her sofa and dried her eyes, looking at herself carefully in the glass to see if her tears had had much effect on her nose. "Then, my dear Roger, I will write you a pretty letter in the morning, and I'm sure I hope that you will never say such dreadful things as you have said to-night to me as long as ever you live."

"I hope I never shall, Muriel," said he, gravely.

"I must go," said Mrs. Meredith lightly, "because it's most necessary that we should be seen at this

party, and Tom would be very vexed if I stayed away. Good night, my dear Roger. Shall Jones get you some dinner or do you go to your club ? ”

“ I’ll go to the club,” said Buttons ; “ many thanks,” and then Mrs. Meredith walked away quite at peace with herself and him.

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CHAPTER IX.

REJECTED.

"Must we in all things look for the how and the why and the wherefore!"
—*Evangeline.*

THE next day Roger Page went back to Routh carrying with him a very gracious letter to Jeanie from Mrs. Meredith, crying "Peccavi!" as completely as any lover could expect his sister to do under the circumstances. He had stayed only a couple of hours longer than he actually need have done, and during that time he had taken the child out with him and had gone to Streeter's to buy a ring with which he might seal his engagement with Jeanie.

Ethel was highly satisfied at the general condition of affairs. "If you are going to be married to Jeanie, Buttons," she remarked as they drove back along Piccadilly, "you will have a house, I suppose."

"Yes, we shall live somewhere," Buttons answered complacently.

"Then I shall come to stay with you, I shall like

that," Miss Ethel observed. "I am never the least bother to Jeanie, you know."

"No, I don't think you ever will be, old woman," answered Buttons in quite a glow of delightful anticipation.

Well, he dropped Ethel at her own house and drove straight off to catch his train to Routh, and by five o'clock in the afternoon was back in his own quarters and thinking about his forthcoming interview with Jeanie and afterwards with her father. He opened the little case containing the ring, and looked at it for the twentieth time, then polished it up with his silk handkerchief, and thought how pretty it was, and how the deep blue of the stones—it was a sapphire and diamond ring—would set off his dear little love's soft and slender hand. Then he thought he would like to have a pipe just to settle his nerves a bit, after which he would dress himself so as to get rid of the dust of his journey, and go down to Sergeant Wade's quarters.

He lit up his pipe, therefore, but the rest of his programme was never carried out, for before he had come to an end of it, there was a knock at the door, and, not a little to his surprise, in answer to his shout of "come in," it opened, and Sergeant Wade, of whom he had just been thinking, stood in the doorway.

Buttons jumped up. "Oh! is that you, Sergeant Wade?" he said. "You are the very man I want to see—in fact, I was just coming over to your quarters."

"I wanted to speak to you, sir," said the sergeant quietly.

"All right. Come in and shut the door. What is it?"

Although he was Jeanie's father, it did not occur to the officer to ask the sergeant to sit down, but he sat down again himself and put his pipe back into his mouth, looking at his visitor more keenly than he had ever done before, and thinking that he was handsome enough to make it but little wonder that a lady had been willing to run away with him for love and give up everything that before had constituted life to her.

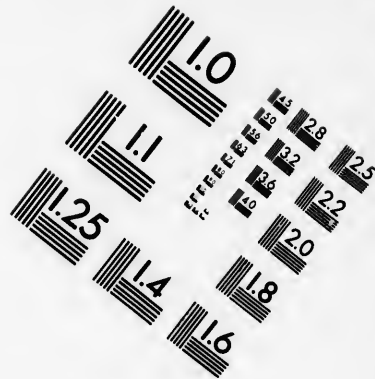
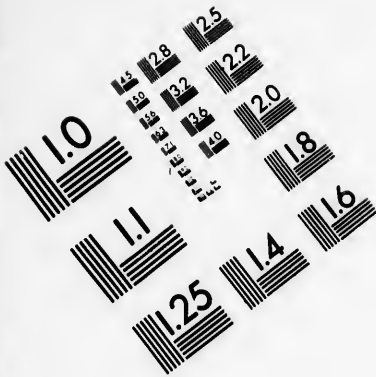
"Well?" said Buttons, inquiringly.

"Well, sir," said the sergeant straightening himself and looking very proud and stern—"you met my daughter in the town last night."

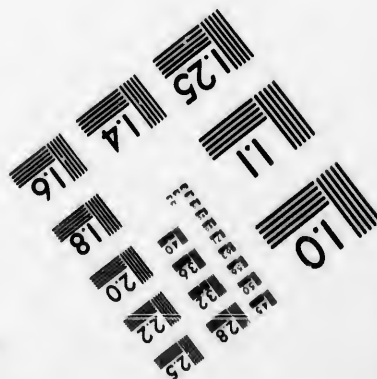
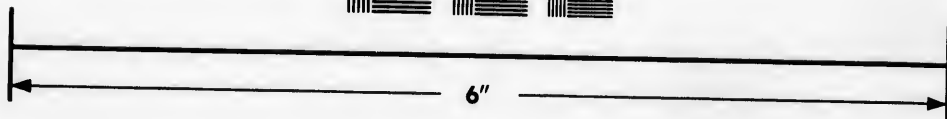
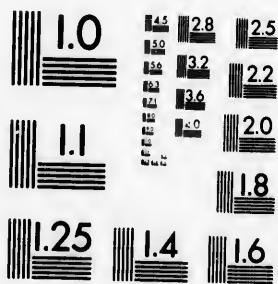
"Yesterday afternoon," corrected Buttons. "Yes, I did, and what of that?"

"And you walked home with her to the very door of my quarters, sir," Sergeant Wade went on.





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Buttons laughed a little. "Of course I did, you wouldn't have had me leave her at the corner, would you?" he asked, half amused and half indignant.

"Well, sir, I don't like it, and it must not occur again," the sergeant said sturdily. "I've only one daughter, only one child in fact, and ever since I've been in the service I've kept myself to myself, and I don't want to have a scandal set on foot now. So if you please, sir, as it's always the best to speak quite plainly and honestly what's in one's mind, I have come to tell you quite respectfully that it must not go on. I hope you'll excuse me for saying so, sir."

The laughter all died out of Roger Page's steady eyes, and he put his pipe down and got out of his big chair. "Sergeant Wade," he said, "if you had an idea that I was only playing the fool with your daughter you are perfectly right to come and tell me you don't mean to have it. But fortunately for me and for her too, I hope, I haven't got the smallest wish to be playing the fool at all. If you hadn't come this afternoon, now in fact, I should have been over at your quarters in less than an hour on purpose to ask Jeanie to become my wife."

For a moment Sergeant Wade was too thoroughly astounded to speak, he simply stood and stared at

the young officer as if he could not believe the evidence of his own senses ; then he gasped out—"You want to marry my daughter, do you mean it, sir?"

At this Buttons could not help laughing again. "Do I mean it?" Why of course I mean it. Why shouldn't I mean it? What does this look like?" and he took the little ring-case off the table and showed the sergeant the beautiful gleaming jewel within.

He looked very proud and triumphant, just the kind of man to make any woman happy, but Sergeant Wade looked at him with unmitigated horror in his handsome eyes.

"It can't be, sir," he gasped. "Pray put it out of your mind as if such a thought had never come into it. There never was any good come of an unequal marriage yet, and never will be as long as the world lasts. Put it right out of your mind, sir," he repeated earnestly.

"Put it out of my mind, sergeant," echoed Buttons blankly ; "why man, you might as well ask me to put a bullet into my brain. As well! Why, I should find that easy enough to do, but the other—why, you must be dreaming or you couldn't suggest anything so ridiculous."

"I'm not dreaming, sir," said the sergeant sadly, "if I was it would be easy enough. As it is there's no help for it but to do as I say—to put it out of your head altogether."

"But why?" Buttons cried impatiently.

"Because your stations in life are altogether different, sir," answered the sergeant firmly. "My girl has come home suddenly and she has never been at home with us before. Up to now perhaps you know she has made her home with an aunt, and her mother has gone there to see her, and I when I could get leave; and when she's wanted a change my wife has taken lodgings a mile or two away. I've always had a horror of my girl being brought up in barracks, for her mother is a lady and—and—well, she's not quite the same as the general run of soldiers' children."

"I quite understand and appreciate all this, sergeant," said Buttons still puzzled; "but so far from all this telling against me as a husband for her, it ought to tell in my favor."

"Not at all, sir. If you were to marry Jeanie you couldn't remain in the regiment with your wife's father a non-commissioned officer. The other ladies wouldn't visit her, and she would be neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring as they say. It's easy for you to

say now that they might do the other thing, and that you wouldn't care a button, and all the rest of it, but when it came to the touch you would feel very queer when your wife was shut out of everything because of her father. And then you would begin to think about it and to ask yourself if it was worth it, and then Jeanie would get anxious and sensitive and perhaps fretful—one never knows how women will take things. And after that it wouldn't be very long before you would realize that you had practically shut yourself out of everything, and by that time what do you think my girl would feel like? I tell you, sir, I've been through it all, and there isn't a hell more bitter to be found on earth than to feel that you have dragged down one that you love, and taken advantage of their fondness for you. I've been through it, Mr. Page, and I'm not going to let my girl taste that bitterness if I can help it."

For a moment Roger Page did not speak, then he seemed to shake himself together again. "There's a great deal in what you say," he said gravely. "And though I had not thought of it in that light, in fact I had not thought about other people at all, I see that it would hardly do for me to remain in the regiment. But it is easy enough to leave it."

"No, sir. Believe me, it cannot be," Sergeant Wade cried earnestly. "You've not known her long, so there can't be so much mischief done to either of you, but even if there is I can't have it said that I encouraged my girl to fly her cap at one of my own officers; it won't work right anyhow, look at it which way you will."

"Then you absolutely refuse me your daughter," cried poor Buttons, feeling that the sergeant's determination was getting too strong for him.

"Yes, sir, I do," returned the sergeant firmly.

"You don't care whether you break her heart—I'll leave mine out of the question," he urged.

"I believe I am doing the fairest by her," answered the sergeant. "I believe she will thank me for it one of these days, and that I am doing the kindest thing I can for her."

"It is not kind," cried Buttons indignantly.

"It is not meant otherwise, sir," replied the sergeant earnestly.

"Look here, Sergeant Wade," exclaimed Buttons eagerly, "it's not a bit of good your saying 'No.' I'm going to marry your daughter, sooner or later, so you may as well be reasonable and let it be sooner. I'm quite willing to do anything—except to give her

up—which I shall never do, that you think desirable for her future happiness. I'll exchange into another regiment—I might possibly be able to get into the Guards, and then my sister would be able to put her into the way of good society—or I'll leave the service altogether and take her to live in town, or I'll take a place in the country, or I'll take her abroad for a year or two. I'll do anything you like except give her up, any mortal thing you like. But give her up I won't, so there's an end of it."

"No, sir, I can't see any way to it," returned the sergeant, who was just as obstinate as he was high, and had got this idea about unequal marriages firmly fixed in his mind and was therefore not to be moved by argument one way or the other.

"But who's to know anything about her birth?" Buttons exclaimed. "She has never lived with you, my sister has not the smallest idea of it, and who is to know unless we tell them? You have never, by your own showing, been used to having her with you, and you can come and spend your leave with her wherever we may happen to be."

"I don't quite understand, Mr. Page," said the sergeant in a puzzled kind of any. "How should your sister know anything about my girl?"

"Why, Mrs. Meredith is my sister," answered Buttons; "has not Jeanie told you all about that?"

"Jeanie has told me nothing," Wade answered. "All she would say last night when I was down on her for letting you walk home with her was that you were off to London for a few hours, and that you would be back to-morrow, when she was perfectly certain you would explain everything——"

"Sensible child," murmured Buttons approvingly. "Then she did not tell you why she left my sister in such a hurry?"

"Well, she did and she didn't. I gathered that there had been a disagreement, and that Jeanie had left the house at once. To tell you the truth, sir, I did not ask too closely, I've always been able to trust my girl, and I never do things by halves."

"By Jove, sergeant, that's true, I wish you would do things a little less thoroughly sometimes. Well, to be candid, my sister has a friend who made a good deal of mischief about Jeanie, and the disagreement they had was about me; if you could call it a disagreement, that is when all the row was one side. And the reason I went up to see my sister was that I might set her mind right before I asked Jeanie to marry me."

The sergeant was, however, no better convinced than he had been before. "It is very open and straightforward of you, sir," he said, "and I thank you in my girl's name for the honor you have done her. But a marriage between you is out of the question, and, sir, I'll trust to your honor as a gentleman that you don't take advantage of me and persuade her to disobey me."

"I shall do that, sergeant, you may be sure," returned Buttons, with a shade more of the officer about his tone and manner than he had shown during the entire interview. "But I should like to be satisfied on one point," seeing that the sergeant was preparing to go, "and that is this. Have you any personal objection to me, or are you against the marriage simply for class reasons?"

"Solely and simply, sir," the sergeant answered earnestly. "If you had been a sergeant like myself instead of an officer, with a prospect of getting your commission in a couple of years, I shouldn't have had a word to say against it."

"We should have a hard fight socially in that case," said Buttons, thinking of the way he had seen the ladies of the regimental staff snubbed by the others.

"Yes, but you would be fighting together," said Sergeant Wade, significantly, "you would be standing on the same ground as husband and wife always should do."

"Then if I were a promising young private," Buttons began, "you would say 'yes'?"

"I should, sir," returned the sergeant; and then he saluted and left the room.

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CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE RESOLUTION.

"Boldness is ever blind because it seeth not dangers and inconveniences."

—*Bacon.*

THE next morning, as soon as "stables" were over, Roger Page seized the opportunity of a spare quarter of an hour to go over to Sergeant Wade's quarters. He knocked at the door with the handle of the whip, and after a moment's delay the door was opened and Mrs. Wade made her appearance. Buttons saluted her. "Is your husband at home, Mrs. Wade?" he asked, speaking in a different tone and with other words than he would have done under different circumstances.

"No, sir; he has gone into the town," Mrs. Wade replied. "In fact he has gone to take my daughter to the railway station."

Buttons fairly staggered against the lintel. "You don't mean to say he has taken her away! Why it's cruel, it's positively brutal."

Mrs. Wade snatched her handkerchief out of her pocket and began to dry her eyes fiercely, and then Buttons saw that she had evidently been crying most of the morning.

"I suppose you have heard all about it," he said vexedly.

"Oh! yes, everything, but won't you come in," she answered.

So Buttons followed her into the room, a very different one to any other in the sergeants' quarters, for it was very tastefully arranged, and there were many evidences that its occupant was a lady. Mrs. Wade sat down at once herself and made a slight gesture towards a comfortable chair near to hers, and the very action, slight as it was, made Roger Page feel differently towards her to what he would have felt towards any other sergeant's wife in the barracks.

"Mrs. Wade, are you too against me?" poor Buttons asked miserably. "Have you too got this absurd idea about unequal——"

"I," she echoed. "Mr. Page, believe me, that idea has been the very curse of my married life. I dare-say Jeanie or my husband has told you my story, that I was not quite born to this," with a wave of her hand towards the room. "Yes, I see you know about

it," as she gave a nod of assent. "Well, I was a foolish slip of a girl, but eighteen years old, when I picked up the acquaintance of the smart young soldier whom my parents would never have let me know at all if they had the least idea of it. I was a pretty enough girl, and he was the handsomest man I had ever seen, and I loved a touch of romance dearly, and it seemed to me ever such a fine thing to give up everything for love's sake. If I had been older, or had known what I was doing, I don't suppose I should have done what I did, though I'm sure I should have kept true to him and waited till he got his commission, which he would have done if I hadn't put myself like a clog about his neck. But you see, sir, I knew nothing then, very little of life and nothing of soldiering, and I ran away from home and we were married. Well, after a few weeks I realized what it was that I had done; my own people turned their backs upon me, and I knew them well enough to be sure that, with the exception of my married sister, I had done with them all. Still I did not in the least regret what I had done, though I know now it would have been far better to have waited a year or two. I made up my mind to make the best of my new life. I loved my hus-

band and my husband simply worshipped me, and but for one thing I should have been perfectly happy. That was the idea which you just now called absurd. It is more than absurd, Mr. Page, it has been the ruin of our lives, and it bids fair to be the ruin of our child's happiness."

"No, no, we shall talk Wade over," said Buttons, soothingly. At that moment he was more sorry for her than for himself. Her tears were streaming fast, and her grief distressed him beyond what words can express. "We will talk him over after a while."

"Mr. Page," said the sergeant's wife, solemnly, "we shall never talk him over. I have been trying for more than twenty years to talk him out of his idea that he has wronged me by persuading me to marry him, but he believes it more firmly now than he did twenty years ago."

"Then, Mrs. Wade," said Buttons, quietly, "I must stand up to him on his own ground. There is nothing else for me to do."

"I don't understand you," she said timidly. For a moment she fancied the young officer meant that he must call her husband out to fight him. He, however, soon explained himself.

"Your husband told me yesterday that if I had

been a sergeant, or even a promising young private, he would have said 'yes' to me without hesitation—that he had no personal objection to me whatever."

"Yes, he said the same thing to me," she said eagerly.

"Well, now, you have done your best for me, haven't you, Mrs. Wade?" he asked.

"Oh, sir, I have begged, and prayed, and implored, and argued," she answered "but I might as well have prayed to a stone for all the good I did."

"And Jeanie, I suppose she said a good word for me too," he said, with a tender smile at the mention of his little girl.

Mrs. Wade began to sob again pitifully. "Oh! Mr. Page, it would have broken your heart to hear her," she cried.

"Then, Mrs. Wade," said Buttons, with a roguish look, "I think we may take it for granted that if I were the promising young private Sergeant Wade has in his mind's eye I should be just as acceptable to Jeanie—hey?"

"I don't follow you yet," said Mrs. Wade blankly.

"Don't you? Well then, I think I had better not explain myself any further," he said smiling. "But

when you next write to Jeanie, will you tell her that I came to see you, that I can't write or try to see her, because I promised her father I would not; or, stay, I didn't quite do that either, but I allowed him to think that I wouldn't, and it amounts to the same thing in the end. But tell her that I am always thinking of her, and that I have a plan in my head by which I shall be able to win her father's consent, and that it may be a few months before she hears anything of me, but that she must not mind that or think anything about it. I shall always be thinking about her all the time."

"I will tell her," said Mrs. Wade, as he rose. "And I had not better tell my husband that you came."

"I think you had better mention it. I have been in here some little time, and it is possible he may hear of it. Yes, you had better tell him, and tell him that I was horribly cut up to find Jeanie actually gone, and, in fact, draw as harrowing a picture of my feelings as you can."

He took her hands in his and held them fast for a moment while he looked at her.

"You are so like my little girl," he said at last. "I don't wonder he wanted to run away with you," and then he pressed her hands again and the next moment was gone.

The sergeant's wife watched him go, watched him until he turned the corner and was lost to sight, then she turned back into her room, and getting out her desk sat down there and wrote a letter, a very long letter, which began, "My darling child," and which set forth in detail an account of the visitor who had just left her, of how brave and bright he looked, and that he had a great project in his mind for winning her father's consent.

She felt better and more at rest when the letter was written and addressed, the envelope stamped and put carefully away in her pocket ready for the post when the post corporal should come past to the sergeants' mess, and then she sat down to think it over, to go over every word that he had said, to wonder what the great project could be.

What he said was, "If I were the promising young private that Sergeant Wade has in his mind's eye, I should be just as acceptable to Jeanie—hey?" Yes, that was exactly what he said. What could he mean by it? If he were a promising young private—why, good Heavens, could it be possible that he had some thought of leaving the 21st, of resigning his commission and then of enlisting in some other regiment? Never, it was preposterous; and yet—yet she believed

that was just what he had in his mind. She must go and see him. She must ask him plainly if that was what he was thinking of, and if it was she must stop it. Jeanie would never forgive her, she told herself, if she found out that her mother had known he was on the eve of making such a sacrifice, and had not at least tried to stop it.

And yet how was she to see him? Well, so far as she could see there was no way but that of going round to his quarters, taking the chance of his being there. She glanced nervously at the clock above the chimney-shelf; her husband would be back in twenty minutes or thereabouts! Well, if she hurried on her bonnet and things and was quick, it was a question which wouldn't take her long to ask nor him long to answer, and if she could only get out before Frank—Sergeant Wade's name was Frank—came back, she could evade any questions he might ask about her having been out. Oh, yes, he would be sure to ask a question about it if he returned to find her out, for he disliked her going in and out among the barrack buildings any more than was absolutely necessary; he never forgot, though she, poor woman, often wished that he would, that she had not been born of a class which thinks no more harm of trotting in and out of

the barracks than it does trotting in and out of—of—a church yard.

She ran to the glass and glanced at herself—yes, she was quite tidy and presentable—then she seized her bonnet and tied it on anyhow, hurried on her pretty black silk dolman, for Mrs. Wade dressed well for a sergeant's wife; her husband insisted on it; her sister had always been ready and willing to provide her with good clothes, and now Jeanie was never satisfied unless she was buying her something or other. So she was quickly ready in spite of the fact that her fingers seemed all thumbs, and that, in her anxiety not to lose a moment, she pulled a couple of buttons off her gloves with her nervous, trembling attempts to get them on. At last she took them in her hand, however, and went out into the yard, hurrying off towards the officers' quarters, and getting within sight of them just in time to see Mr. Page pass along the front and go with another subaltern into the officers' mess.

It was no use going on then, and in deep disappointment she turned back and went home again, and just as she reached her own door, Sergeant Wade came around a corner and saw her.

"Where have you been, Amy?" he asked, not

unkind, or as if he were spying upon her movements, but from a sort of instinct of guardianship.

"I wanted a breath of air, Frank," she said, feeling very guilty. "My head aches this morning."

"Come and lie down then," he said, tenderly, going to the sofa and shaking up the cushions.

After this it was not easy to get out again, and yet she felt that she must contrive by hook or by crook to have a word with Mr. Page. So at half-past four, when she knew that her husband was safely out of the way for a little time, she slipped on her things again and ran rather than walked off to the officers' quarters, where she, by great good luck, found Roger Page.

"Oh! Mr. Page," she exclaimed breathlessly, "I have come to ask you one question. You are not meaning to throw up your commission and enlist? That was not what you meant by 'a promising young private?'"

"Yes, you have hit it, Mrs. Wade," he answered. "I sent in my papers this morning."

CHAPTER XI.

WIFELY INFLUENCE.

"Full of hope and yet of heart-break."

—*Hirwatha.*

IN vain did the sergeant's wife implore Roger Page to change his mind, and protest that such a thing could not be—that Jeanie would never, never forgive her if she knew that her mother had known he was about to do anything so derogatory to his position, so harmful to his career. Roger Page simply would not listen to a word.

"Now, Mrs. Wade, I came to you and I trusted you," he said severely, "and you are in my confidence. If you betray me—oh! well, it's no use my saying anything about that, because I know very well that you won't betray me. Why, my dear lady, what are you crying about? Bless me, it won't do me any harm, it will be mere child's play compared with what an ordinary recruit, who knows nothing whatever of soldiering, has to go through. There

there, don't cry. Why, you ought to feel quite proud that I think Jeanie is worth taking such a lot of trouble for."

"So I do feel proud, Mr. Page," Mrs. Wade cried, struggling between tears and smiles, "so I do. But I can't help thinking that it's all so useless and so unnecessary. If only my husband had not got this—this craze in his mind, there is no reason why you and Jeanie should not have been married pleasantly and happily, and not a single word have been said about it except of real thankfulness that the child had married so well."

"Well, but you see," said Buttons, "he happens to have got this craze, as you very rightly call it, so there's no more to be said or done except to get round him as best we can. If only Sergeant Wade had told me he didn't trust me, I'd have run away with Jeanie before this—at least, I'd have had a hard try for it. But you see he did trust me to do nothing of that kind, and he told me so, so I was regularly cornered."

"It's the same with Jeanie," sighed Mrs. Wade vexedly. "She has promised her father, and she'll stick to her promise. For my part," the poor soul went on, "I have come not to believe much in duty

to parents—or rather not to believe in parents interfering with their children's marriages. If children marry and it turns out badly, why, it is the children who suffer for it, not the parents. And as for parents trying to decide whether a marriage is going to turn out badly or not, why, it is more than folly ever to think of such a thing. You may marry as suitably or as unsuitably as ever you like, and only time can decide whether the marriage shall turn out well or not."

"Our marriage will turn out well enough, take my word for it, Mrs. Wade," said Buttons with a genial laugh. "Meantime, have you written to Jeanie?"

"Yes, I sat down and wrote at once."

"And you told her everything that I asked you to say?"

"Everything."

"And nothing more?" laughing a little.

"Mr. Page," said Jeanie's mother earnestly, "I hope you will never let Jeanie know that I had the least suspicion of what your plan really was. I am perfectly sure she would never forgive me as long as she lived—never."

"Mrs. Wade," said Buttons solemnly, "I give you my sacred word of honor that I will never breathe a

single word on that subject to Jeanie, not one single word. You keep faith with me and I'll keep faith with you. There, is that a bargain?"

He held out his hand as he spoke, and Jeanie's mother laid hers within it. And then they parted, and the young officer showed the sergeant's wife the way out, going down the stairs and to the door with her as if she had been a queen.

Once in the open air, Mrs. Wade hurried back to her own quarters, feeling as if she had overstayed her time, and full of fear lest her husband should be back before her, and therefore question her about her absence.

There are at times certain inconveniences attending the circumstances of great affection between husbands and wives. It is very dreadful, of course, when men and women who have married to be help-meets to one another, fall so far apart that neither cares which way the other goes, nor what is the manner of his or her going. But, at the same time, there are occasions in life when it is a little, or more than a little, awkward that a husband or wife has to account in detail for every moment of the day. And it is also exceedingly awkward when a wife—as in Mrs. Wade's case—wants to pay a visit without talking it over

afterwards, and has to fly home as if she had been stealing something, simply because her husband will be sure to want to know exactly why she had been out, what she went for, and whom she saw on her way.

Mrs. Wade, happily, and to her great relief, however, found her quarters still empty, the sergeant had not been in during her absence. And she was able to take off her bonnet and cloak, pass a comb through her hair, stir the fire and put on the kettle for tea before he appeared.

For some minutes he did not speak. He sat down at the table and waited till his wife had poured out a cup of tea for him. Then he thanked her in a very gentle voice and looked at her hesitatingly.

"Amy," he said, almost humbly. "I've heard a piece of news this afternoon."

"Have you, Frank?" she replied, her heart going pit-a-pat in a moment, for she thought somebody might have told him about her visit to Mr. Page's quarters.

He nodded. "Yes! I heard just now that Mr. Page had sent in his papers."

There was a moment's silence, then Mrs. Wade said in a rather faint voice, "I think it is not at all unlikely."

"I don't believe a word of it," said the sergeant curtly. "Why should he send in his papers? There isn't an officer in the regiment so keen on soldiering as he is. If it had been an exchange I could have understood it, but to cut the service altogether, well, it's incredible."

"Who told you?" Mrs. Wade asked.

"Nobody told me at all. I heard two of the officers talking about it in the orderly room. They seemed completely staggered about it, and well they might."

"I didn't expect he would remain in the regiment, Frank," said Mrs. Wade sadly.

"But why not?"

"Well, it wasn't likely that he would," she persisted.

"But who knew a word about it?" the sergeant demanded.

"That is not it. You know and I know, that is enough for him, enough to make the poor boy hate the sight of both of us."

"I don't see why he should hate the sight of you, Amy," said the sergeant, who was beginning to awake to a consciousness that he had been rather a fool than otherwise—"Oh! no, no, he didn't put it in that

way. Is it likely? But he began to feel that he had been a little hard on the young people, and that, after all, their case was not a parallel one to his own.

"No, if he only believes what I told him this morning, that all my sympathies are with them, Frank," said Mrs. Wade, taking what seemed a good opportunity to speak of Mr. Page's visit.

The sergeant looked up. "And when did you see Mr. Page?" he said in a tone of surprise.

"He came here this morning," she answered.

"He came here? Mr. Page came here?" the sergeant repeated, tapping his fingers on the table as if to emphasize the place.

"Yes, poor boy. He came in the hope that you'd have changed your mind during the night."

"You never told me," he said, half reproachfully.

"No—it is no use telling you anything. I have told you my opinion, Frank, and it has had no more effect upon you than if I'd been the worst wife in the world to you——"

"Oh; don't say that, Amy," he cried with a pained look.

Mrs. Wade moved her head to and fro wearily—
"No, don't say it; don't say anything that is painful,

however true it is. Some people always keep the sick in ignorance that they're dying, though they're anxious and pining to know exactly the truth. That is what I have done to you, Frank, all these twenty years that we have lived together, and now when we come to a crisis, and my opinion ought to go for something and to carry some weight with it, I have no more say than if I were a dummy in a tailor's window. I have done wrong all these twenty years, but it's hard that the child should be the one to suffer because I was too great a coward to take my proper place at first."

I am bound to say that by the time Mrs. Wade reached this point, her husband was almost crushed with shame. In all her married life she had never set her will against his. She had given all her mind and thought to trying to make him feel that he was in no wise her inferior. And now to have her suddenly rise up and, metaphorically speaking, flay him alive—well, it was a new experience for Sergeant Wade, and one too thoroughly astonishing for him to know just then whether the taste of it was bitter or not. "So I didn't tell you he had been," she said quietly—"it is no good telling you anything."

"Amy," cried the sergeant in an agony, "don't

say that this business is going to make a bar between us two."

"I don't know, very likely it will. I shall find it hard to forgive you, Frank, if you break my only child's heart."

"Amy!" he exclaimed.

His wife looked at him with the eyes that were so like the exiled child's. "If her heart is broken, Frank," she said gravely, "it will be no less of a trouble to me because you broke it."

"Amy," he cried, "don't say that."

"And why should I not?" she asked; "it is what I think."

"I did what I thought was for the best," he groaned.

"Yes, but who made you the best judge, Frank?"

"If he is worth his salt he will stick to her in spite of it," he returned, evading the question.

"Oh, he will stick to her—he will marry her," answered his wife promptly and injudiciously, for the husband caught the words up in a moment.

"Oh, he will marry her, will he? Well, we shall see about that," and then he got up from the table and went out in the nearest approach to a rage with his wife that he had ever shown during all the years they had been married.

As for Mrs. Wade, she was so angry with herself for having let slip that one injudicious sentence, and so lost all the ground she had gained, that she burst out crying as soon as her husband had closed the door behind him. The result of the burst of tears coming as a finish to a highly exciting and trying day was to give her a racking headache, and when he returned presently he found her simply prostrate. He was as grieved, and as tender as man could be—made her strong tea, bathed her head with rose-water, of which he always made her keep a supply; for she suffered a good deal from nervous headache, and finally persuaded her to go to bed.

But he never said a word more about Jeanie and Mr. Page.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE MONTHS AFTERWARDS.

"Man's usual fate—he was lost upon the coral reefs."

—D. Ferrol.

THREE months had gone by. The Twenty-first was still lying in Routh Barracks, and Sergeant Wade and his wife still occupied the quarters in which the tragedy of Roger Page's life had taken place.

Outwardly everything was much the same. The orderly officer of the day still got up at abnormally early hours in the morning and went through his usual round—early stables, breakfasts, office, morning stables, hospital, and all the rest of the ordinary routine, and if now and then one officer expressed a regret to another that "Poor old Buttons" was no longer there, and wondered in a good-natured casual kind of way why the poor old chap had cleared out of the service and what had become of him, well, that was about the extent of the hole that his departure had made in the officers' mess. There had been gazetted to the regiment in his stead the wildest

young limb of evil that the Twenty-first had had the pleasure of numbering among their officers for many a year, and this young gentleman contrived to keep the whole mess so thoroughly alive with his escapades that the memory of Roger Page had, by comparison, paled into insignificance and actual tameness.

Mrs. Wade probably thought more often about him than did any other person in the regiment wherein he had been so universally popular—but then it is always so in a regiment; every day you have a vivid illustration of the cry, “The king is dead; long live the king.”

It was a blazing afternoon even for August, and Mrs. Wade felt hot and faint as she sat in her quarters writing to Jeanie, who, poor child, in a pension at Brussels was eating her heart out, and, though she tried hard to be patient and brave until Roger Page’s grand plan had had time to work and bear fruit, succeeding very badly. If she had consulted her own inclinations, Mrs. Wade would have laid quietly down on the sofa and simply have rested herself until it was time for the sergeant’s tea, but the knowledge and certainty that Jeanie would be anxiously looking for a letter the following evening, kept her chained to her desk until the usual number

of pages were covered. By the time she had finished her task the little clock on the chimney-shelf warned her that it was time to think about tea, and she closed her desk with a sigh of relief that her letter was ready.

She was not accustomed to do any rough work about their quarters, for a woman came in each day to do all that, and went off in the afternoon, leaving all ready to her hands for the rest of the day, the coal-pan filled with coals, the kettle with water, and so on, so that Mrs. Wade had scarcely to soil her hands with what was left to do and which, in fact, consisted chiefly of setting the tea, and later a slight cold supper upon the table. It was easy to do the first, and when the sergeant came in for his meal it was ready and looked tempting enough for any one.

A pretty little cloth with fringed edges was set cornerwise upon the table, and a smart red tray with the tea things stood upon it; there was a plate of bread and butter, some honey in a glass dish and a few water cresses in another, while half a dozen little fish-bowls, each with a flower or two, were set about and made the whole look dainty and inviting.

"It's frightfully hot to-day, Amy," said the sergeant when he came in, "and I'm as thirsty as a dog

that has had a ten mile trot ;” then he seated himself at the table and asked a question. “What have you been doing all the afternoon? You look tired.”

“I am a little tired,” said his wife, as she handed his cup. “I’ve been writing to Jeanie.”

“Ah!” The sergeant had nothing to say to this apparently, and he stirred his tea round and round with a solemn face.

“I couldn’t miss the post, you know, Frank,” his wife went on, “though I was so tired I was just pining to lie down all the time. But I know she would be disappointed if there was no letter to-morrow, poor child.”

“H’m,” muttered the sergeant, paying quite unusual attention to the condition of a sprig of water cress.

“I am sure she might come back now, Frank,” Mrs. Wade went on, “she suffers so from the heat, and she’s pining to be at home again. It isn’t as if the child had done anything wrong, Frank.”

“No, that is true,” the sergeant admitted.

“And it will be very much worse if she is attracted by some foreigner, who makes up to her because she has a little money,” Mrs. Wade went on in a dreamy tone.

The sergeant was all alert in a moment. "Some foreigner make up to her? Why, what do you mean, Amy?"

"Just what I say, dear," answered Mrs. Wade, mildly. "You know Jeanie says in her last letter that she has flowers sent almost every day."

"The schoolmistress ought not to allow it," he blustered.

"Well, but Jeanie isn't at school, Frank," his wife reminded him. "A pension where a girl can live while she takes lessons outside is one thing, and a school is quite another."

"Then she had better come home—yes, she had better come home," said the sergeant gruffly. "You can tell her to arrange it all as soon as she can."

"All right, Frank," answered his wife, joyfully. She had no longer any desire to lie down on the sofa and rest herself; she let the tea things stand on the table long after the sergeant had gone out again, and she flew to her desk and wrote off the joyful tidings to Jeanie, scribbling her letter as if hurrying for dear life, and then putting her bonnet on anyhow that she might run off to catch the first train to London.

Well, within a week from that day, Jeanie Wade was back again at her father's quarters, and never in

this world did any little nun live such a life of seclusion as she did. There was a little side door near to their quarters, of which Sergeant Wade was able to command a key, and through this Mrs. Wade and Jeanie used to go out in the morning and take their walks, or go into the town and see after their marketings, and then perhaps in the hot summer evenings they would go through the little gate again and take a turn towards the country in the gloaming.

In spite of that, however, more than one pair of eyes watched the sweet little pale face and tried to meet the direct gaze of the grey soft eyes, and more than one handsome young soldier in the Twenty-first found all at once that the long flight of steps which led towards the veranda, on which Sergeant Wade's quarters were situated, was a much nearer way to the other side of the barrack-yard than he had known before. Ah! dear, dear, for all the impression these and other such attentions made on Jeanie, these fine young fellows might have spared themselves the trouble that they were taking for her sake. For Jeanie had only one thought, and that thought took the name of Roger Page.

A few more weeks went by—they had no news of Mr. Page or how his wonderful plan was working,

and many and many a time, when Jeanie was wondering and wondering how he was, and where he was, and what he was doing, her mother felt fit to burst with her secret, and positively ached to tell the poor child all that she suspected and everything that she knew.

"I can't think why he should have left the service," was Jeanie's puzzled remark one afternoon when she was busy setting the table for tea and her mother was lying on the sofa watching her.

"We shall hear in good time," answered Mrs. Wade evasively.

"Oh, yes; but still I can't help wondering. And he was so fond of soldiering," Jeanie returned, "that somehow or other I cannot ever think of him as anything but a soldier."

Mrs. Wade got up off her sofa and walked to the window, repressing the words which came rushing to her lips with an effort. "Once a soldier, always a soldier," she said at last. "And here is your father."

The sergeant came in, he was hot and tired, but he kissed his wife and spoke gently and tenderly to Jeanie. He seemed, poor man, as if he was always trying to make amends to the girl for the trouble he had put upon her, and in return Jeanie never paraded

her disappointment, never sulked or gave herself airs, but tried with all her might to live and act as if no such incident as her love affair with Mr. Page had ever taken place.

They sat down to tea, and Jeanie, as was her custom when at home, began to pour it out. "Somebody has driven up," she said. "Is it somebody going away, I wonder?"

"No, someone is coming up the steps," her mother answered. She was more familiar with the sounds of the place than her daughter was.

Almost as she spoke a tall figure went past the window, but it was a figure in uniform, and of late the occupants of Sergeant Wade's quarters had grown accustomed to seeing soldiers pass and repass their window a dozen times a day, so that it never occurred to them to connect this particular one with the cab they had heard draw up a moment or two ago. Then there was a sharp, imperative summons at the door.

"I'll go," said the sergeant, who was peculiarly sensitive about his women-folk answering the door.

The next minute he walked to the door and opened it, but when he saw who his visitor was, he uttered a cry of surprise and finally staggered back into the room.

"Mr. Page," he exclaimed.

"May I come in?" asked the well-known voice, which set poor Jeanie trembling like a leaf.

Then the sergeant pulled himself together and made way for their visitor, and immediately Roger Page, wearing the full-dress tunic and forage-cap of a lancer regiment and of the rank of a private, walked in and saluted the ladies, that is to say he saluted Mrs. Wade, and then made one stride across the room to Jeanie and caught her in his arms.

"My love—my love," he murmured, then held her away at arm's length, the better to look at her. "You have been ill, my darling," he cried. "You are as pale as death, and trembling, shaking in every limb. What does it all mean?"

"What does this mean?" asked Jeanie, laying her trembling little hand on the worsted lace of his tunic.

"Yes, what does it mean?" cried the sergeant, finding his voice at last.

Roger Page turned around to face him. "You have an uncommonly short memory, Sergeant," he said, in just the old officer's tone. "You ought to know better than anybody what it means. It is not quite five months ago since you refused your consent to my marriage with your daughter and told me if I

were a sergeant like yourself, or even a promising young private, you would give her to me. Well, here I am, a promising young private, and I therefore claim your promise."

"Mr. Page," said the sergeant, "you have got the best of me. I see that I was a fool, an utter fool, to think that I could keep love back where love had made up its mind to go. I'll make a clean breast of it, sir, I'll tell you exactly what is in my mind—I was wrong—I made a mistake, but all the same my girl ought to thank me for being the means of proving you for her."

"I am sure she will," cried Buttons, heartily. "Then you will give her to me?"

"Certainly I will, and my blessing with her," cried Sergeant Wade, heartily too.

"Stay," put in Jeanie, disengaging herself from Roger Page's arms. "You both leave one important factor out of the question. I am not going to marry a private soldier at any price, don't think it for a moment."

She drew herself up, looking very stiff and firm for a moment, but then the mischievous dimples began to sparkle about her mouth, and Buttons burst out laughing.

"No more you shall, my darling," he cried gaily. "I've done four months of it, but it's the most awful grind I ever put in in all my life. I'll go back and buy myself off to-morrow."

* * * * *

Three months afterward, an officer of the Twenty-first met Roger Page in St. James street. "Hollo, Buttons, old chap," he said, "I heard the oddest thing about you the other day. Desmond swore he saw you at Routh station wearing a private's uniform of the One Hundred and Sixtieth."

"By Jove, you don't say so," answered Roger Page with a laugh. "What queer stories get started about one. Are you busy? What are you doing? Got half an hour to spare, then come into Long's and be introduced to my wife. We've taken a flat and are staying at Long's till it is ready for us. That's a good old chap—private's uniform—By Jove!"

THE END.

